

#BlackWorkersMatter

Excerpt



Working While Black: The State of Black Worker Organizing in the U.S.
by Sean Thomas-Breitfeld

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Introduction

Black people in America have repeatedly been on the losing end of economic structures and policies. Many laws that helped establish the American middle class are noteworthy for excluding black communities¹ and recent public policy has contributed to significant gaps in the employment and economic opportunities available to black workers. This has been accomplished most notably through the following mechanisms: attacks on labor unions since the 1970s, beginning at the point when black workers became more likely than whites to be enrolled in unions; the criminalization of black people, due largely to the failed war on drugs and the militarization of community policing; and also the disinvestment from public education, driven in part by suburbanization fueled by a GI bill that excluded black veterans.

As a result of these structural shifts and policy decisions, black workers have experienced dramatically high levels of unemployment for decades, along with serious underemployment and overrepresentation in low-wage jobs without benefits. Although the current black unemployment rate has been touted for being at its lowest levels since Barack Obama's historic election as our nation's first black president² during the 2008 recession, it is still more than twice the white unemployment rate.³

In the face of this economic and employment landscape, community organizing has attracted renewed interest as a key strategy for addressing the black jobs crisis. Since the crisis has many roots—including entrenched economic structures, specific public policies, and implicit racial biases—more funders are looking for multifaceted strategies to address these issues, and they are recognizing that organizing has for too long been a missing element. While legal advocacy and direct services are necessary for change, organizing to build power for immediate and long-term change is still needed. This section of the *#BlackWorkersMatter* report delves into the range of organizing taking place in black communities to address the jobs crisis and the many intersecting issues that contribute to disparities in employment, wages, and job quality. The examples of on-the-ground work and recommendations for funders are drawn from an analysis of twenty-nine interviews conducted with community organizers, national experts, and foundation staff (see Appendix 1 for interview list).

The growing interest in adding community organizing to the mix of strategies for dealing with the black jobs crisis comes at the same time that there is a growing appreciation for the task of building the political, institutional, and economic power of black people. The title of this report alludes to the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement that has renewed a spirit of black activism

and amplified grassroots response to events in Ferguson, New York City, Cleveland, Madison, and other cases across the country where black people have been killed by police officers.

In addition to inspiring thousands of people of all races to take to the streets, the #BlackLivesMatter banner has sparked a discussion about the need to focus on the “specific kind of racial vulnerability that black people experience on a daily basis.”⁴ For many progressive leaders, recognizing the particularities of anti-black racism is not just necessary to address the disparities and inequities faced by black people, but also part of the larger project of building a strong progressive movement. As Rinku Sen noted in *The Nation*, “There is no contradiction between the desire to build a multiracial movement and the desire to organize black folk specifically.”⁵

In addition, the AFL-CIO recently launched a Labor Commission on Racial and Economic Justice with a strongly worded statement that both acknowledged the labor movement’s own history of divisions along lines of race and color, and also asserted that building a better economy requires “power that can only come from unity, and unity has to begin with having all our voices be heard, on all sides of those color lines.”⁶ The examples highlighted in this report of organizing specifically focused on black workers are part of this broader landscape of racial and economic justice work. To build a better society and economy for black people and all communities, the emerging field of black worker organizing needs support and investment.

Black Worker Organizing: A Varied Landscape

In 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom drew attention to the fact that too little progress has been made in addressing the black jobs crisis. Despite the myth of decades of racial progress, discrimination and segregation on the job, and disproportionately low wages, are all still part of the unique reality of black life in America. A growing body of research has provided dramatic evidence that race remains a serious obstacle in the job market for African Americans.

Research exploring the racial biases of employers and hiring managers has shown that when responding to identical resumes, an applicant’s race, skin color,⁷ and even the racial terms used can make a difference in his or her chances of being hired. For instance, one study found that, when given otherwise identical resumes, employers offered jobs to African American applicants with no criminal record at a rate as low as white applicants with criminal records.⁸ Similarly, research has shown that the seemingly innocuous detail of whether a resume uses the term “black” or “African American,” can trigger the biases of job recruiters; “black” people are viewed more negatively than “African Americans” because of a perceived difference in socioeconomic status.⁹

These widespread racial biases are compounded by policies and economic structures that disadvantage black workers. For instance, despite research that has long concluded that holding a legitimate job diminishes criminal conduct, people with criminal convictions face both biases and *de jure* discrimination that excludes them from employment opportunities.¹⁰ In addition, research by the Restaurant Opportunities Center United has shown that the immense and growing restaurant industry has a system of *de facto* segregation that limits black workers to the lowest paid jobs in the industry, and that the system of tipped wages makes black women particularly vulnerable to both low-wages and sexual harassment.¹¹ Across the board, wage disparities are severe and in some states average incomes for black workers are less than half that of white workers.¹² Given the concentration of black workers in service sector jobs and the large numbers of black men who have been incarcerated at some point in their lives, many communities face very bleak employment prospects.

All this evidence—as well as the detailed economic analyses of the other authors for this report—points to the need for new strategies to address the challenges faced by black workers. Yet very little funding is directed specifically at race-conscious efforts to organize black workers. Indeed many organizations fear that being explicit about using a racial justice lens will negatively impact their chances of receiving grant dollars. Despite these barriers, there are many innovative models of black worker organizing that are having real impact for black workers in communities across the country.

As a field, black worker organizing is a fairly new phenomenon. The majority of organizations interviewed for this report were founded in the last ten years. In fact, out of thirteen state and local organizations doing on-the-ground work, only three were founded before 2005. Of the remaining ten groups, half were founded between 2005 and 2009, and the rest were established in only the last five years. While all these groups would have likely organized black workers as a function of the demographics of their surrounding communities, naming a specific focus on black workers is a recent innovation that has benefitted from the support and leadership from the Discount Foundation and other funders.

When Susan Wefald became the Executive Director of the Discount Foundation, it already had a funding portfolio called “structural unemployment” through which most of the grants went to organizing groups focused on unemployment and underemployment in the black community. Susan recounted the decision to shift the framing of that portfolio to “Be explicit and call it ‘black worker organizing’ to signal to the field and philanthropy that it was important to be conscious and deliberate about focusing on black workers.”

In addition to the Discount Foundation, several other foundations had been investing in community organizing in black communities. For instance, the Moriah Fund and Hill-Snowdon Foundation have long supported a range of community organizing groups in the Nation’s capital and the South. For Nat Chioke Williams, President of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, Discount’s “nomenclature shift” was important because it is “key to name ‘black’ in this day and age.”

This sentiment about the centrality of the term “black” was repeated by many interviewees. While some tended to use the term “African American” or use both terms interchangeably, a number of interviewees talked about consciously using “black” as a more inclusive term, with the potential to unite “African Americans” with African immigrants and all people of African descent from across the diaspora. Others preferred “black” because of the term’s identification with the movements of the 1960s and with the working class. Speaking to the political salience of using the term “black,” Alicia Garza, one of the founders of #BlackLivesMatter and Special Projects Director at the National Domestic Workers Alliance, said “Black identity is so complex in this world and very unique in the U.S., because in America, the scale of how far you advance has often depended on how far you get away from blackness.” The decision to affirmatively organize workers under the banner of “black” seems to have been an important signifier for groups that put the particular barriers of black workers at the center of organizing agendas.

Building on the investments in individual organizing groups and growing embrace of the term “black” in organizing strategies, several foundations collaborated to sponsor a pre-conference session at the “State of the Black Worker in America” conference in the fall of 2013, where nearly fifty people—representing state/local worker organizing groups, national progressive research and media organizations, and foundations—gathered for a day-long discussion on black worker organizing.¹³ According to Jennifer Epps-Addison, Executive Director of Wisconsin Jobs Now (WJN), “black worker organizing” had not been elevated as an expressed ideal by the organization. But a few months after being brought on as the organization’s ED, she attended the black worker conference, which, she said “opened up my thinking... coming back from that [conference] I wanted to create a culture where we were identifying this as a specific agenda and lifting up the need to name race.”

Similar to Wisconsin Jobs Now, many of the thirteen state and local organizations interviewed for this report grappled with how to “name race” specifically. This focus has led groups to launch organizing campaigns on a variety of issues, from reducing barriers in access to jobs, to fighting for better wages, to local hiring for urban

development and infrastructure projects. As an emerging field, the groups are also diverse in their organizational structures, organizing strategies, and analyses of how to make change for the black community.

Wins and Impact for Black Communities

When analyzing the impact of community organizing, it is often tempting to focus on policy campaigns, and the organizations leading the new wave of black worker organizing have certainly won concrete policy changes. However, many of the people interviewed suggested that the field of vision for recognizing organizing wins must be expanded to reflect a deeper analysis of the need to build power in black communities.¹⁴ For this set of young organizations, successes in building power at the grassroots are as important as the policy changes that come from publicly demonstrating that power through campaigns.

Three of the organizations that were founded in the last five years—Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower & Rebuild (POWER), the Los Angeles Black Worker Center, and Wisconsin Jobs Now—show what building power looks like on the ground. Bishop Dwayne Royster, the executive director of POWER—a faith-based community organizing group, formed in 2011, and a member of the PICO national network—said that what he considers success is something that cannot be measured quantitatively: “I find that people are having more courage and are willing to begin standing up for themselves. Folks who had never set foot in Philadelphia’s city hall are now testifying before the City Council and going to the Mayor demanding justice. I think that’s powerful.” Bishop Royster added that the organization’s recent victory in passing an amendment to the city charter raising the minimum wage for employees of municipal subcontractors (particularly airport workers) to twelve dollars¹⁵ has also given people “a sense of their own power, that they can make changes, and that they can make sure the people they elect to office are responsible to their communities.”

Building the black community’s electoral power was an important accomplishment of WJN. Jennifer Epps-Addison explained that, in the 2014 election, “Milwaukee was one of the few communities where black voter turnout exceeded expectations; we actually reached the highest levels of midterm voter turnout in sixty

years.” WJN had this victory in turnout even though the organization received only one-third of the resources for their voter work compared to the 2012 election when Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker was facing a recall campaign, largely due to opposition to his limiting of collective bargaining rights for state employees. She attributed WJN’s success building the electoral power of black voters to the fact that “we have run an electoral program for multiple years and we do issue development that continues to mobilize and engage our base year round.”

For the Los Angeles Black Worker Center (LA BWC), building power meant growing a strong base of leaders. In 2011 LA BWC opened its office in the heart of South L.A.—the same neighborhood that was the site of civil unrest in 1992 following the acquittal of police officers on trial for the videotaped beating of Rodney King. Lola Smallwood Cuevas, LA BWC’s director, recalled how the center started with a base of twelve people, but, during the first year, “we held workshops, a worker’s rights hearing, began to build partnerships with community-based organizations, and we touched over three hundred people in some way.” In the three full years since the LA BWC opened its doors, they have racked up significant wins; including winning—with a large coalition of unions and community-based organizations—passage of a historic labor agreement between unions, contractors, and city agencies with not only strong local hiring provisions but also a disadvantaged worker hiring clause with the potential to direct more of the construction jobs associated with public infrastructure projects to black workers. But, just as important as the policy victory, the organization has grown ten-fold. They now have a list of three thousand supporters, and engage more than six hundred people a year through a variety of training, organizing, and advocacy activities.

In the traditional metrics of policy change, the wins achieved by black worker organizing groups covered a range of issues:

- The LA Black Worker Center’s victory opening construction jobs up to residents—notably boosting black representation on construction of the city’s Crenshaw/LAX light-rail line to 20 percent of the workforce in less than two years¹⁶—was also reflected in the wins of at least three other organizations

that were interviewed. Neighborhoods Organizing for Change in Minnesota, ONE DC in the nation's capital, and the Ohio Organizing Collaborative all won campaigns for local hiring and/or community benefit agreements to ensure that new development projects led to new jobs for residents.

- Four of the thirteen organizations—Boston Workers Alliance (BWA), Ohio Organizing Collaborative, Sunflower Community Action, and the Workers Center for Racial Justice in Chicago—had each won local “ban the box” campaigns to open up job opportunities for people with past convictions. Rev. Paul Ford, the director of BWA, explained that even though the policy changed in 2012, there is still more work for the organization to do to ensure that people with criminal convictions do not face discrimination when seeking employment: “We’re now focused on what I call ‘victory implementation,’ in terms of making sure our constituency is aware of the opportunities they now have to seal records, and to know their rights in terms of what employers can and cannot ask.”
- Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower and Rebuild was also not the only organization that helped win a higher minimum wage in their city. The Action Now Institute (ANI) was heavily involved in the coalition that led the 2014 campaign to raise Chicago’s minimum wage. Katelyn Johnson, ANI’s executive director, recalled the campaign as being complicated by the Mayor’s initial position that the minimum wage should increase by less than a dollar to nine dollars an hour. But thanks to ANI’s deep organizing base, their members were able to flood public meetings with community residents calling for a fifteen-dollar minimum wage. Ultimately the wage was set at thirteen dollars and included domestic workers, which is a unique feature of the city’s minimum wage ordinance. Ms. Johnson reflected on this win saying “Even though we didn’t get the fifteen dollars we wanted, thirteen dollars for all workers including domestic workers is a huge jump from the nine dollars the Mayor was talking about at the beginning.” Similarly, Neighborhoods Organizing for Change is part of the 2015 grassroots campaign for a fifteen-dollar minimum wage at the Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport. These local minimum wage campaigns echo the demand of the “15 Now”

campaign that won a fifteen-dollar minimum wage for airport workers in Seattle, and the “Fight for \$15” campaigns around the country where fast food workers are coming together with community groups and labor unions to fight for a wage of fifteen dollars an hour and the right to form a union without retaliation.

Connections across Organizational Types and Organizing Traditions

Black worker organizing groups recognize that a variety of organizations are seeking to improve economic conditions for black communities. Like traditional civil rights organizations, black worker organizing groups are explicit about racial justice, but rather than focus on top-down advocacy and litigation, organizing groups prioritize building a black grassroots political base. Similarly, many organizations in black communities provide direct services, but organizing groups move their constituencies to take public political action. These various distinctions between organizational types have led to rigid siloes in the past, but black worker organizing groups draw on the strengths of traditional community organizing—the model most notably developed by Saul Alinsky—and also go beyond this model by building partnerships with a broad spectrum of partners and allies.

Several state and local organizations described efforts to organize non-union employees in partnerships with labor unions. For instance, Derrick Johnson, the CEO of One Voice and President of the Mississippi NAACP, built a coalition with community organizations, religious leaders, and the United Auto Workers union called the Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan. One Voice is now exploring opportunities to partner with other unions in organizing hospital workers, teachers, and workers in poultry plants. Mr. Johnson explained the need to shift the organizing paradigm of some union partners to more effectively organize black workers in the South. He said: “International unions were often not familiar with Southern culture, so their approach was having diminishing returns. We had to shift things and put the work in a cultural context where African Americans would embrace and understand that worker rights are civil rights.”

Warehouse Workers for Justice—an independent workers center founded by the United Electrical Workers union—they saw the worst conditions at Walmart distribution

centers in the Chicago region, and so focused on organizing workers in Walmart warehouses and helping them take strategic actions, whether through class action lawsuits, beefed up government enforcement, or strikes. The Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) also has strong relationships with the state's unions; in fact, labor unions are included among the collaborative's member organizations. The OOC has also focused on Walmart and helps lead the state's OUR Walmart campaign as part of a national effort that unites Walmart employees, organizing groups, and the United Food and Commercial Workers union. According to Kirk Noden, OOC's executive director, at least half of the Walmart employees OOC organizes are black, even though less than thirteen percent of the state's population is African American, which reflects the fact that black workers are largely limited to low-wage jobs without benefits.

Several groups also described organizing efforts focused on particular employers, but they did not always involve a demand for union representation and collective bargaining. For instance, the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) United has led the field in winning more than a dozen campaigns targeting specific employers in the restaurant industry to rectify both legal issues—such as wage theft, tip issues, and discrimination—and also demand broader workplace changes to convince employers to become what ROC calls “high road” employers.

Similar to ROC's long record of organizing restaurant workers, ONE DC—originally founded in the mid-1990s as a community development corporation—led a nine-year campaign¹⁷ for the Washington Marriott Marquis Jobs Training Program, which would give DC residents first consideration for positions at the new hotel, which was built with significant funding from public subsidies. They quickly realized however that training was not enough. As ONE DC organizer Jennifer Bryant explained, the organization did outreach to more than three thousand people to take part in the training program. Of the 719 who completed the program, 187 were initially hired, “so now we're doing an accountability campaign around the first source law,” in order to ensure full compliance and enforcement of the city's thirty-year-old first source employment program that is supposed to ensure that DC residents are given priority for new

jobs created by municipal financing and development programs.

ONE DC's campaign revealed that access to training is a necessary but insufficient intervention in hiring systems that often relegate black job seekers' applications and resumes to the trash bin. This recognition of the larger systemic and structural barriers was often balanced by the immediate and dramatic need that organizers saw among the black workers they organized. The interest in fighting economic and racial inequity on both fronts—the social/political and the individual levels—led interviewees to develop a nuanced view of the value and importance of direct services, and to seek new structures for supporting black workers that integrated service delivery with advocacy and organizing. For instance, both ONE DC and Boston Workers Alliance integrated services by creating employment agencies to directly help place residents in jobs.

Another organization, Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM), has managed the continuum between providing services to organizing for systems change, structural change, and economic justice for nearly forty-five years. GBM's executive director, Scott Douglas, described the organization's recent efforts to partner with the National Day Laborer Organizing Network to establish worker centers in both Birmingham's Latino immigrant and African American communities. Mr. Douglas said that GBM and its partners established an immigrant worker center in 2013, but, due to residential segregation, it wasn't a natural location for organizing African American workers. So they are now working to establish a separate black worker center, and, once both centers have developed their capacity, GBM plans to “organize both constituencies for mutual support and solidarity work.”

A decade ago, worker centers were still an “emergent institution,” helping low-wage workers—particularly undocumented immigrants—through a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing.¹⁸ Dr. Steven Pitts, the Associate Chair of the Center for Labor Research and Education at UC Berkeley, saw that worker centers had generated incredible energy in the immigrant rights movement, and he became interested in the potential for the worker center model to build power in black communities as well. Six years ago, with initial funding

from the Open Society Foundations' Campaign for Black Male Achievement, Dr. Pitts began providing technical assistance to new worker centers focused on organizing black workers. Beyond successful campaigns by the LA Black Worker Center, the Worker Center for Racial Justice in Chicago, and other black worker centers around the country, Dr. Pitts frames the black worker center model as part of a broader "political initiative to build the power necessary to achieve freedom" for black communities.¹⁹

Black Leaders, Black Roots, Black Analysis

Just as the state and local organizations profiled here represent a wide range of policy change campaigns, organizing strategies, and organizational partnerships, the range of organizers interviewed also had a range of views about what ties this emerging field together. Two points that seemed central to defining black worker organizing for those doing the work on the ground were the leadership and analyses of groups.

Of the thirteen state/local organizations interviewed for this report, ten were led by black EDs, but there was still a diversity of opinions about how crucial the race of an organizational director is to a black worker organizing group. DeAngelo Bester, the director of the Worker Center for Racial Justice in Chicago, was emphatic about the importance of black executive leaders; he said "You could point to a majority of the board is black folks and that might sell to funders, but I've been doing this work a long time and I know that in the majority of cases, the ED is running the show."

Another Chicagoan, Katelyn Johnson from the Action Now Institute, agreed that "Organizations that have leadership from the community they represent are important and critical to being authentic, but moreover people from the communities we claim to represent must have real decision-making power and reach in every level of the organization." She explained that being black doesn't automatically mean that someone will be a great organizer in black communities and acknowledged that her predecessor was white and had been an incredible organizer. Ms. Johnson said it was more important that "the organizational structure had deep and intentional leadership from the community," adding that "if we are in this work to fight oppression, we must support and reflect the dismantlement of the oppressive system at all levels of our organizational structures."

Kirk Noden, executive director of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, was one of two white organizers interviewed. He explained that the OOC supports a "black leadership organizing" committee started by black staff and leadership, and said "Having strong, robust black-led infrastructure does not compete with or undermine the OOC; in fact it creates opportunities for the collaborative to be stronger." This diversity of views on leadership is less a disagreement and more a spectrum of strategies for investing in black organizational leaders and also supporting a broad definition of leadership and what it means for an organization to have black roots.

For groups considering how to build strong black grassroots leadership, the leaders end up shaping—and sometimes shifting—the organization's analysis. Alicia Garza explained how the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) is building a new project called "We Dream in Black" to organize black domestic workers and build alliances between African American domestic workers and the immigrant workers—many of them from across the African diaspora—who traditionally made up the organization's base. As part of NDWA's efforts to create space for black women workers, they are being intentionally open to the possibility that the new grassroots leaders might "change the vision, strategy, and policy priorities" of NDWA's multiracial alliance.

For Wisconsin Jobs Now, leveraging the commitment and creativity of grassroots leaders also shapes the organization's strategies and analysis. Jennifer Epps-Addison explained how WJN's efforts to organize black workers most directly affected by structural unemployment and racial discrimination means that "they have the most to lose and gain, so they are very audacious." Several organizers explained how the harsh economic realities faced by their grassroots members lead their organizations to embrace an economic framework of "raising the floor," in contrast to a model of expanding economic opportunity at the top. For instance, DeAngelo Bester from WCRJ explained that his organization's focus is on the most marginalized black workers (particularly formerly incarcerated people) because "our philosophy is not that a rising tide lifts all boats, but that pushing the floor from the bottom will help everyone." Similarly, Lauren Jacobs from ROC United said "the bottom is what sets where we're going, not the top."

Shawn Dove—who leads the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, a national membership network that works to strengthen the impact of cross-sector leaders and organizations—pointed to the work of ROC United, with its commitment to organizing workers in the restaurant industry, as an example of how the field of black worker organizing is strategically focusing on industries where employment opportunities are growing.

But some other interviewees suggested that black worker organizing groups should expand or shift their strategy beyond the current focus on improving wages and access to jobs in particular sectors. For instance, some interviewees expressed skepticism about the long-term viability of construction jobs for black workers, noting that evaluations of “green jobs” initiatives during President Obama’s first term had pointed to the need to transform the construction industry to really connect infrastructure spending to new jobs on the ground.²⁰ In addition, Shawn Escoffery from the Surdna Foundation was interested in organizing and advocacy led by people of color, but said “a lot of our approaches to jobs and economic mobility are [concentrated] in very low-wage sectors, or sectors where people of color have difficulty traversing the ladders for a host of reasons.” He explained that the sectors that have been the focus of organizers and community developers for the last two decades are ones that, for the most part, produce the working poor. He suggested that organizations need to look toward industry sectors with better jobs from the start.

These points of difference between organizers focused on raising the floor and national experts interested in moving people up job ladders seemed to have more to

do with the challenge of balancing short- and long-term goals. This tension is constant in all kinds of community organizing, but for black worker organizing groups, the short-term demands to deliver access to jobs for people impacted by structural unemployment and systemic racism are very pressing. For instance, Dominic Moulden from ONE DC explained that the struggles of “working while black” take a toll on the organization’s base, especially since some grassroots leaders have gone through multiple training programs and earned as many as fifteen certificates from workforce development and direct service programs, but are still finding their job prospects blocked.

Similarly, in a conversation with staff and grassroots leaders from Sunflower Community Action in Wichita, Kansas, one person described how “When you talk about good jobs or a jobs campaign, people aren’t hearing that it’s going to take us sharing our stories and building power in our communities. They’re asking ‘you got a job for me now, or you got money for me now?’” For SCA and the other black worker organizing groups, delivering short-term wins on access to jobs is a critical first step to building the community power to make long-term demands about creating more good jobs. Dr. Steven Pitts explained how “The reality is that on-ramps to good jobs just don’t exist across the board,” which is why the growing network of black worker centers he supports—as well as black worker organizing groups in general—may seem focused on the immediate need for access to employment, but over the long-term these groups are building a powerful “new black political force focused on jobs: gaining access to good jobs AND transforming low-wage jobs into good jobs.”

Considerations for the Future of Black Worker Organizing

The successes of black worker organizing groups in winning policy change and building community power have been impressive. Taken together, the groups interviewed combine strategic research, service delivery, policy advocacy, and, most important, organizing to advance their collective goals of improving both access to employment and the quality of jobs that are available to black workers. In today's economic and political environment, black worker organizing groups face significant challenges and have many factors to consider as they look to the future.

Weighing Different Narrative Options

Across various interviews, people repeatedly discussed the strategic choices they face regarding how to discuss race and racism as part of the narrative and economic analyses of organizations. There were multiple paths that seemed viable for organizations to choose from, depending on context. What worked for the community did not necessarily work for campaigns or funders. Furthermore, the considerations about narrative also included questions of how to integrate the intersections of race and gender.

Organizations utilized a range of narrative strategies to appeal to the black community. For some groups, it was important to explicitly focus on blackness and the impact on anti-black racism in the economy; but it wasn't seen as necessary for other groups. One organizer explained that his organization continually grapples with whether to "lead with 'this is about black workers' or lead with the issue and then have a positive impact on black workers." Given that the current national conversation about the persistence of racial inequality has been sparked by cases of police brutality, it's not surprising that questions of how to talk about race were especially complicated for groups where much of their organizing connected to issues of criminalization.

For instance, Rev. Paul Ford, the director of Boston Workers Alliance, said "There's always the challenge of adopting and embracing language that both honors the complexity of your mission, but also resonates with [a range of] people who are listening," and he explained that BWA often settles on a more universal narrative

focused on "good jobs for all, regardless of background and regardless of criminal record." The Ohio Organizing Collaborative has also done a lot of work focused on the disenfranchisement of black workers with criminal records. Kirk Noden said that the organization often talks about its work with both a structural racism and a criminalization lens. He acknowledged that "any time you talk about structural racism, there's some risk because there's not a ton of white working-class people who speak that language."

Another narrative challenge explored in the interviews was how groups use an intersectional analysis to speak to both race and gender. Some organizations—particularly national groups like the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Black Youth Project 100, and ROC United—described a particular focus on black women's economic and employment challenges. Some of the local organizing—such as ONE DC's work with hotel workers and commitment to center their leadership development on black women, and One Voice's new organizing with the state's teachers union—had the potential to lift up gender. However, even the groups with this intention reported struggles in crafting a narrative about the intersection of gender, race, and work.

In the case of POWER's fight to raise the minimum wage for Philadelphia's airport workers, Bishop Royster said that the organization recognized that 70 percent of the workers who would benefit were women, but they still struggled. He said "we haven't done a good job of articulating a gender view." To address the challenges that grassroots members face in talking about racism and the way it intersects with other forms of oppression, POWER brought together more than 250 clergy and lay leaders for a three-day "race training" to prepare them to hold house meetings across the city of Philadelphia. Bishop Royster explained that these meetings will be opportunities for people to have very explicit conversations about race and racism, in which people discuss their own experiences with and understanding of race, in order to "make race no longer be a tool that's used against us, but something that can bring us together to create a better and different Philadelphia."

Groups that have built the will among their members to lead with narratives that are explicit in their critique of the role of racism in maintaining systems of inequality

still face tradeoffs between their principles and what it takes to win campaigns in the current political environment. DeAngelo Bester, director of the Workers Center for Racial Justice, described how the organization confronted tradeoffs during their “ban the box” campaign in Chicago. WCRJ originally intended to use the campaign as a starting point for shifting the views of the general public about the exclusion of black workers from the labor force and the discriminatory practices embedded in the criminal justice system. But WCRJ recognized that shifting people’s deeply held beliefs is a long-term project. To win in the short term, they cut back the discussion with voters about racism, and instead focused their messaging on frames that already had public support, such as the need for second chances and the benefits of reduced recidivism when people have access to jobs. As Mr. Bester said, “We made that strategic decision in order to win the campaign, partly because we needed a victory and passage of the policy was low-hanging fruit. But the cost of that decision was that in our new campaign about decriminalization of marijuana, we still need to have the conversation about racialization in the labor market and the criminal justice system.”

The other consideration that organizations noted regarding the role of race in their narratives was the funding landscape. Even beyond the state and local organizations, interviewees who were themselves funders described pressures to minimize black-specific messaging. Marjona Jones, a program officer at the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock (which provides grants to many community organizing groups around the country), explained that some black-led organizing groups feel a need to “back away from being seen as ‘too black’ because some foundations aren’t comfortable with that; so they couch their work as ‘people of color’ or ‘low-wage’ so that it’s not seen as identity politics.”

For Denise Perry, who has trained and built a network of black organizers through Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity (BOLD), this gravitational pull toward using “people of color” is not wrong, but she said it is important to acknowledge that “people have struggled with saying ‘black’ because there’s a history of being challenged.” She also pointed out that organizing focused on other constituencies—such as Asian and Latino communities—

doesn’t face the same challenge to water down its messaging about the particular barriers faced by those specific identity groups.

Fundraising Barriers Faced by Black Leaders

As noted above, state and local groups emphasized the importance of investing in a range of levels and forms of black leadership. Some interviewees emphasized the leadership development work that is a core component of community organizing, and their efforts to create black roots by building a powerful base of grassroots volunteer leaders. But the leadership concern that interviewees lifted up again and again was the lack of support—financial and otherwise—available to black-led organizations.

There have been long-standing concerns that black EDs in the nonprofit sector face distinct challenges securing foundation funding on par with other organizations.²¹ A decade ago, several reports critical of the distribution of foundation dollars to communities of color²² raised compelling questions about shortfalls in grantmaking to racial/ethnic minorities, and particularly the lack of investment in organizations led by people of color. In California, state legislators focused even more attention on the underinvestment in minority-led organizations by introducing a bill calling for mandatory racial/ethnic reporting on foundation grants. Although the legislation was not enacted due to a deal struck between foundation leaders and state legislators in 2008 after almost two years of debate,²³ the issues raised about the lack of funding directed to communities of color still resonate deeply today.

Recently, the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity released a collection of articles that raised key challenges and opportunities for funders to consider regarding “mobilizing community power to address structural racism.” Several articles pointed to an underlying concern that many, if not most, community organizing groups and networks are both white-led and rooted in a populist, economic justice analysis, rather than a comprehensive analysis of structural racism and the particular role that anti-black racism plays in maintaining systems of inequity.²⁴ One might read that analysis of the broader organizational landscape to mean that foundations have limited opportunities to invest in black-led organizing groups, but many of the interviews pointed to a possibly

more fitting alternative explanation—that foundations are more comfortable with white-led groups and a populist economic analysis so those are the groups that dominate in fundraising.

Across several interviews, black organizers described negative experiences with funders who seemed more willing to give grants to white-led organizations or to economic justice groups that avoided specifically focusing on the particular barriers faced by black workers. Whether the comments were “foundations need to be comfortable with black people leading” or that “funders need to begin to take a close look at themselves and any biases they have towards black folks,” the concerns about the lack of foundation investment in black-led organizations was deeply felt.

For those interviewees working in philanthropy, the comments were in many cases more nuanced as to whether the funding barriers were due to discomfort with race or with a lack of familiarity with organizing as a strategy for change. For instance, Susan Taylor Batten, the president and CEO of ABFE, described the general barriers to getting foundations on board with organizing, saying “Supporting building the power of communities to drive their own agenda is not often what mainstream philanthropy is comfortable with or expert at.” Several other foundation staff talked about the need to elevate both organizing and racial justice as priorities for peer foundations. As Marjona Jones from the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock put it: “We have to make the foundation world okay with organizations being explicit about doing work with black communities.”

For the Discount Foundation, supporting black leaders was an added benefit of its shift in 2012 from funding on “structural unemployment” to establishing black worker organizing as one of four priority funding areas. In the 2013 grant cycle, seven of fourteen grants were made to groups engaging black workers in organizing campaigns. The following year, however, twelve of twenty grants approved by the board had a focus on black worker organizing, with seven of those groups led by African American executive directors. Perhaps if other foundations become more focused on supporting efforts to organize black workers, greater investment in black-led organizations will follow.

Investing across the Field

As players in an emerging field, black worker organizing groups connect with each other in ways both formal and informal. For instance, Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity (BOLD) is emerging as a key capacity builder and convener of black organizers—both people leading groups and working in senior positions in organizations led by whites and other people of color. Denise Perry, who directs the BOLD project, has interviewed more than seventy black leaders in the organizing field to learn about their work and what other organizers they connect with. The black worker center model is also spreading across the country; at a conference in the fall of 2014, fifty-five people from nine cities learned about how to build black worker centers.²⁵ Many possibilities exist for investing in a more robust and dynamic organizational infrastructure supporting black worker organizing across the country. Foundations only need to have the will to make the investment to build the networks between leaders and create opportunities for networking.

Anthony Newby, executive director of Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC)—a community organizing group in Minneapolis, MN—provided an example of an investment in building a black network of organizations. NOC partners with the other major economic justice organizations in the Twin Cities area but is the only black-led organization at the table. Given that organizational landscape, Mr. Newby said, “it’s easy to be tokenized, marginalized, or exceptionalized because there isn’t much infrastructure outside of us.” To address the infrastructure gaps, NOC is building out a table of other organizations led by people of color, thanks to funding from the Ford and Surdna foundations. The overall goal of this network-building process is to build the infrastructure and relationships between aligned organizations—particularly those rooted in the black community, including social service agencies working with the area’s large African immigrant community—so that NOC won’t be perceived or treated as the sole black-led power-building organization in the city.

The funders interviewed provided a unique vantage point on the challenge of coordinating funding and developing grantmaking strategies to build a larger, better connected, and more sustainable network of black worker organizing groups. For instance, ABFE has always been committed to directing more resources to black-led organizations,

but recently began to focus more intentionally on making the case to black leaders in philanthropy to support black-led community organizing groups. Similarly, Kevin Ryan from the New York Foundation is compiling a comprehensive list of black-led organizing groups around the country in order to increase their visibility and make the case to foundations that there are black-led organizing groups to invest in.

Rubie Coles, Deputy Director of the Moriah Fund, emphasized that infrastructure and capacity is already in place on the ground, but that many black worker organizing groups are “in a vicious cycle, in that they aren’t as big and their budgets aren’t as large, so funders are not as likely to give them a big grant; which means they can’t grow their budgets to then get big grants.” Ms. Coles and other funders suggested one way foundations could support the field of black worker organizing was by coordinating investments to build the infrastructure of multiple groups over the long haul. Two examples of this kind of coordinated funding strategy over the past decade include the Groundswell Fund’s investments to help women-of-color-led reproductive justice organizations build their capacity,²⁶ as well as the funding collaboratives that have helped build the organizational infrastructure of the immigrant rights movement.

Several interviewees were not sure that the immigrant rights movement was an appropriate point of comparison for black worker organizing, given that the fight for immigrant rights has had a galvanizing policy demand, whereas black worker organizing has not. For many interviewees, however, the comparison to the movement

for immigration reform held promise for envisioning the possibilities for the field, were black worker organizing to be funded at the levels of grant dollars devoted to immigrant organizing groups. Data from the Foundation Center’s online database²⁷ provides an initial sense of the scale of philanthropic investment for both immigration reform and black employment issues. Between 2003 and 2012, total grantmaking sector-wide ranged from \$20 to \$25 billion; foundation support for immigration advocacy is estimated at roughly \$116 million, while grants focused on African Americans and employment issues (either alliance/advocacy work or grants focused on equal rights) came to nearly \$11 million.

Interviewees also acknowledged that funding alone is not enough to build a black worker movement. Part of the reason some funders may find it difficult to support black worker organizing is a mismatch between the model of the immigrant rights movement and the reality of the field of black worker organizations on the ground. Many large foundations are accustomed to working with national organizing networks and other national formations that can regrant to smaller local organizations, like the majority of the black worker organizing groups interviewed. One funder noted that, compared to the immigrant rights movement, the black worker organizing field doesn’t yet have the same infrastructure of national organizations, campaigns, or coalitions. But, just as Ms. Coles noted about the vicious cycle of small organizations being locked into receiving small grants, a similar cycle could be preventing a field-wide coalition of black worker organizing groups from emerging.

Recommendations for Supporting the Growth of Black Worker Organizing

The field of black worker organizing is emerging at the same time that some foundations that had traditionally been funding sources are now shifting their focus or closing down entirely. Therefore, each of the interviewees was asked both how the foundation investment in black worker organizing could be increased and what advice could be given to funders interested in increasing their grantmaking to black worker organizing groups. Many people suggested that funders apply a race analysis to funding priorities, provide general support grants, invest for the long term, and be flexible in evaluating impact. Since all those suggestions have parallels in both the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy's "Encouraging Good Grantmaking Practices" program and ABFE's "Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities" framework,²⁸ the recommendations below point to particular areas for funders to connect, explore, and think big about new possibilities for black worker organizing.

Strengthen Intersections between Funders Focused on Race, Economic Justice, and Organizing

Several interviewees provided an analysis of the funding landscape indicating that funding siloes are one barrier to growing funder investments in black worker organizing. One national expert explained the funding world's approach to blackness and organizing, saying "there's the people who get organizing but don't see the need for blackness, and there are people who get blackness but don't see the need for organizing." Other interviews clarified that there are three funding siloes that could provide support to black worker organizing groups—racial justice, economic justice, and community organizing funders. While the work of the state and local groups interviewed could appeal to each of these three sets of funder groupings, falling at the intersections means that black worker organizing groups are falling through the gaps instead.

Groups like the Neighborhood Funders Group are pushing conversations about the need to focus on racial justice *and* economic justice, but the spaces

where funders can integrate those themes are still too few. As funders from various perspectives begin to come together to share analyses of issues, examples of grantee successes, and visions for future growth of the field, some specific points of difference may emerge. For instance, a few organizing groups worried that some foundations otherwise committed to advocacy for racial and economic justice were uncomfortable with the resurgence of black grassroots activism and the public protests spearheaded by the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Whatever the specific fault lines may be, the fact that funders are having discussions about organizing, race, and the economy will be powerful. As Laine Romero-Alston from the Ford Foundation explained, "Where funders focus reflects where fields develop." So it will be important for a wider set of funders (beyond the group of funder interviewees) to lead the way in sparking discussion about the importance of investing in black worker organizing.

Learn from Immigrant Rights Funders

As noted above, the comparison to the movement for immigration reform held promise for several of the interviewees. Beyond the scale of the funding investment in immigrant organizations, the immigrant rights movement has built enough momentum over the past decade to offer significant lessons to emerging movements. The recent issue of *Responsive Philanthropy* delved into stories from philanthropy and the immigration reform movement, including specific recommendations to funders based on lessons from the movement that included: build trust first, facilitate alignment of goals and strategies, invest in campaigns that build unity, build grassroots power, and support movement leadership.²⁹

These five recommendations from the immigrant rights experience seem relevant for black worker organizing groups who need funders to be patient and allow time for diverse organizations to build trusting relationships that can lead to a shared policy agenda, and also need financial support to create collaborative movement leadership gatherings that help groups partner across organizational lines and build long-term alliances. As immigrant rights funders and movement leaders reflect on the lessons learned from the successes of winning executive action and develop strategies to address the struggle to ensure freedom for the many immigrants left

out of the new deferred action programs, their insights can help other economic and racial justice funders envision achieving similar impacts in black worker organizing over the next decade.

Consider the Scale of Investment Needed

When asked what scale of investment in black worker organizing would be needed to support existing organizations and build additional infrastructure, many interviewees found it difficult to respond. A few offered estimates of what additional funding could mean for their own organizing. For instance, one interviewee suggested that building “an NDLO (National Day Laborers Organizing Network) for black workers” would require a \$5 million investment. Another interviewee thought it would take roughly \$25 million to build up and expand the black worker center model to ten new cities across the country. A third organizer estimated that a minimum of \$50 million was needed to “beef up black organizing in this country; it’s not a small amount.”

The current underinvestment in black worker organizing means that any new funding will be impactful, but several organizers focused on the scale of the black jobs crisis require an investment that goes beyond money. For instance, one organizer said the scale of investment

“would have to be something that can’t be translated into money,” and another said “it’s hard to put in dollar amounts, it’d have to be significantly more than it is now; but more than dollars, it has to be a long-term commitment.”

Beyond grants directly to groups on the ground, many of the funders focused on the need for investments across organizations as a field. When asked about the scale of investment, one funder said that it wasn’t possible to “even fathom how much the money would have to be” and instead focused on the need for funders to expand access to capacity building organizations like BOLD that invest in the personal and professional development of black organizers. Another funder emphasized the need to support convenings that would give space for black worker organizing groups from different organizing traditions—worker centers, faith-based, focused on particular employment sectors, etc.—to coalesce and engage in collective visioning and strategic planning. A third funder offered a critique of funding siloes, suggesting that philanthropy should develop a more “comprehensive intersectional approach” in order to invest in black worker organizing, explaining that the “tendency in philanthropy to divide people’s lives into discrete pockets is not that helpful.”

Conclusion

The variety of people interviewed—community organizers, national experts, and funders—demonstrates the growing interest in organizing black workers to address the ongoing economic crisis impacting black communities. The successes of the organizing groups highlighted in this report also show that organizing is a key strategy for building the power of black communities, in order to change policies and address implicit biases operating in the nation's economy. But organizing with a focus on building black roots—whether or not that is articulated explicitly in an organization's narrative—faces challenges in a political and funding environment where race-neutral approaches to the problem of structural employment are the default. Nonetheless, tackling the thorny issue of race, and particularly anti-black racism, is crucial to addressing the ways in which black communities are disproportionately impacted by the problems of inequality and unemployment.

Black worker organizing groups—especially black-led organizations—need funding and other support to realize the potential of the current moment. In addition to the leadership of black communities and the organizers who work with people struggling in the midst of an ongoing jobs crisis, it will be incumbent on funders to take the lead in pushing a conversation about the importance of focusing on organizing and race in grantmaking to address the economy. Foundations can make coordinated investments to build the field of black worker organizing, but there is also a basic need to dramatically ramp up direct funding to groups on the ground.

Organizing black workers is not just a strategy for addressing the black jobs crisis; it is crucial to building a strong progressive movement. Black worker organizing offers the opportunity to impact the economic, racial, and political systems in this country because the struggles of black workers lie at the intersection of all those forces. A spirit of black activism has been sparked by #BlackLivesMatter, and the organizing of black workers has the potential to amplify and sustain that energy across the nation.

Endnotes

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- 14 In a recent article titled “Making Black Lives Matter”, Nat Chioke Williams, President of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, wrote that “the black community needs to build enough political and institutional power to significantly change both policy and public perception and to directly challenge and dismantle the structural racism that defines perpetual black social, political, economic inequity.” <http://hillsnowdon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Making-Black-Lives-Matter.pdf>.
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Appendix 1: List of Interviews

In February and March of 2015, twenty-nine in-depth interviews were conducted by phone with a range of organizational leaders and staff directly involved in organizing black workers, as well as national allies and funders with knowledge about black worker organizing specifically, or the broader issues related to economic and racial justice. The primary purpose of the interviews was to explore how organizing efforts to address the racial jobs gap are situated in

a broader organizational and funding landscape aimed at supporting black workers, families, and communities. “Working while Black: The State of Black Worker Organizing in the U.S.” by Sean Thomas-Breitfeld includes many quotes from the interviewees. Quotes are attributed to people where appropriate and with their permission.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld thanks all the interviewees for being willing to share their candid reflections on black worker organizing.

| | NAME | ORGANIZATION | POSITION | LOCATION |
|---------|---------------------|---|---|----------------|
| FUNDERS | Susan Taylor Batten | ABFE (Association of Black Foundation Executives) | President & CEO | New York, NY |
| | Rubie Coles | Moriah Fund | Deputy Director | Washington, DC |
| | Shawn Escoffery | Surdna Foundation | Program Director, Strong Local Economies | New York, NY |
| | Marjona Jones | Veatch Program at Shelter Rock | Senior Program Officer | Manhasset, NY |
| | Laine Romero-Alston | Ford Foundation | Program Officer | New York, NY |
| | Kevin Ryan | New York Foundation | Program Director | New York, NY |
| | Susan Wefald | Discount Foundation | Executive Director | Brooklyn, NY |
| | Nat Chioke Williams | Hill-Snowdon Foundation | Executive Director | Washington, DC |

| | NAME | ORGANIZATION | POSITION | LOCATION |
|---------------------|---------------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| NATIONAL INFORMANTS | Charlene Carruthers | Black Youth Project 100 | National Coordinator | Chicago, IL |
| | Shawn Dove | Campaign for Black Male Achievement | CEO | New York, NY |
| | Alicia Garza | National Domestic Workers Alliance | Special Projects Director | New York, NY; Oakland, CA |
| | Lauren Jacobs | Restaurant Opportunities Center | National Organizing Director | New York, NY |
| | Denise Perry | Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity | Executive Director | |
| | Steven Pitts | National Black Worker Center Project | Associate Chair | Berkeley, CA |
| | Eric Walker | Erie County Department of Public Works; PUSH Buffalo | Director of Energy Development and Management; Co-Founder and Former Lead Organizer | Buffalo, NY |

| | NAME | ORGANIZATION | POSITION | LOCATION |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| STATE AND LOCAL ORGANIZERS | DeAngelo Bester | Workers Center for Racial Justice | Co-Executive Director | Chicago, IL |
| | Lola Smallwood Cuevas | Los Angeles Black Worker Center | Director | Los Angeles, CA |
| | Jennifer Bryant; Dominic Moulden | ONE DC | Right to Income Organizer; Resource Organizer | Washington, DC |
| | Scott Douglas | Greater Birmingham Ministries | Executive Director | Birmingham, AL |
| | Rev. Reuben Eckels; Djuan Wash; Durell Gilmore | Sunflower Community Action | Deputy Director; Director of Communications; Grassroots Leader | Wichita, KS |
| | Jennifer Epps-Addison | Wisconsin Jobs Now | Executive Director | Milwaukee, WI |
| | Rev. Paul Ford; Hakim Cunningham | Boston Workers Alliance | Executive Director; Former Deputy Director | Boston, MA |
| | Derrick Johnson | One Voice | President & CEO | Louisiana and Mississippi |
| | Katelyn Johnson | Action Now Institute | Executive Director | Chicago, IL |
| | Mark Meinster | Warehouse Workers for Justice | Executive Director | Chicago, IL |
| | Anthony Newby | Neighborhoods Organizing for Change | Executive Director | Minneapolis, MN |
| | Kirk Noden | Ohio Organizing Collaborative | Executive Director | Columbus, OH |
| Bishop Dwayne Royster | Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower & Rebuild (POWER) | Executive Director | Philadelphia, PA | |

Appendix 2: List of Organizations

This list includes black worker organizing groups who were interviewed for “Working While Black: The State of Black Worker Organizing in the U.S.” by Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and other organizations mentioned by interviewees. Future research is needed to develop a more comprehensive list of all groups around the country doing this important work.

| ORGANIZATION | WEBSITE | DESCRIPTION | LOCATION |
|--|---|--|--|
| 9to5 National Association of Working Women | http://9to5.org | 9to5 organizes women to fight for economic justice by improving conditions in the workplace: low-wage jobs, the erosion of a social safety net, difficulties in balancing work and family needs, inequities in part-time and temp work, unemployment, and workplace discrimination. | California Colorado Georgia Wisconsin |
| A New Way of Life | www.anewwayoflife.org/ | A New Way of Life Reentry Project provides housing and support services to formerly incarcerated women in South Central Los Angeles, facilitating a successful transition back to community life. As a community advocate, A New Way Of Life works to restore the civil rights of people with criminal records to housing, employment, public benefits, and the right to vote. | Los Angeles, CA |
| Action Now Institute (IL) | http://actionnowinstitute.org/ | We have extensive experience in community organizing, a solid network of allies and an experienced staff of organizers, researchers, and trainers. Our primary campaigns include quality education for low-income, minority students in Chicago, foreclosure prevention in Cook County, and raising the minimum wage in Illinois. Key campaigns and victories include: Success in winning a Chicago minimum wage through public meetings and forums to get the wage from \$8.25 to \$13, fighting cuts from the governor, and fighting for an elected school board in Chicago. | Chicago, IL |
| Action United | http://actionunited.org/ | Action United is a membership organization of low and moderate income Pennsylvanians working to build power through organizing communities to win changes on the issues that are important to them. | Philadelphia, PA |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|
| African Immigrant Services | www.aisfotl.org/ | African Immigrant Services works to increase civic engagement within communities of color, to build assets and eliminate disparities, and to overcome systemic and cultural barriers. Established by African immigrants to build social capital and community power, AIS also helps to creatively increase access to economic opportunities for historically disadvantaged people and communities of color. As a proven leader in community engagement and organizing, AIS tirelessly seeks to shift the roles of people of color from the sidelines to the heart of community-driven solutions, co-creating new realities on issues that affect them, including structural problems and policies that perpetuate disparities. AIS believes that when we expand the space for engagement and increase opportunities for leadership, those most affected by a wide range of problems will discover their own solutions and make change. AIS envisions healthy, inclusive, and prosperous communities where opportunities are shared equitably. | Brooklyn Park, MN |
| All of Us or None | www.prisonerswithchildren.org/our-projects/allorus-or-none/ | All of Us or None is a grassroots civil and human rights organization fighting for the rights of formerly and currently incarcerated people and our families. We are fighting against the discrimination that people face every day because of arrest or conviction history. The goal of All of Us or None is to strengthen the voices of people most affected by mass incarceration and the growth of the prison-industrial complex. Through our grassroots organizing, we are building a powerful political movement to win full restoration of our human and civil rights. | San Francisco, CA |
| ACCE Institute | http://acceinstitute.org | ACCE Institute is dedicated to improving conditions in low-income communities and communities of color throughout California. We accomplish this by providing education, trainings, and research on effective, community-based methods for changing conditions that lead to problems at the worksite and in housing, healthcare, and other systemic issues that impact low-income communities and communities of color. | California |
| Ban the Box | http://bantheboxcampaign.org/ | The Ban the Box campaign was started by All of Us or None, a national civil rights movement of formerly incarcerated people and our families. We started the campaign in 2004, after a series of Peace and Justice Community Summits identified job and housing discrimination as huge barriers to our successfully returning to our communities after jail or prison. The campaign challenges the stereotypes of people with conviction histories by asking employers to choose their best candidates based on job skills and qualifications, not past convictions. Since 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. has a conviction history, the impact of this discrimination is widespread and affects other aspects of life in addition to employment opportunity. | |
| Bay Area Black Workers Center | www.facebook.com/BayAreaBWC/ | The Bay Area Black Worker Center is dedicated to improving the quality of life in the black community by organizing around the workplace and non-workplace issues facing black workers. | Bay Area, CA |

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| Beloved Community | www.cityyear.org/beloved-community | Among Dr. King's most compelling visions is that of a Beloved Community—a community in which people of different backgrounds recognize that we are all interconnected and that our individual well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of others. Dr. King knew that the goal of social change is not tolerance alone, or even the recognition or enforcement of human or civil rights, or an improved economic condition. These are necessary but not sufficient steps in the path to human progress. We cannot rest until we have bridged the divides of prejudice and mistrust that lie within the human head and heart. Invariably, these final, resilient divisions are social and personal. Dr. King reminds us that reconciliation is both a process and a final destination. The road to the Beloved Community is the difficult road of reconciliation among people who have been in conflict and negotiation. The Beloved Community is reconciliation achieved—a profound human connectedness, a transcendent harmony, and love among all people. | |
| Black Alliance for Just Immigration | www.blackalliance.org/ | BAJI is an education and advocacy group comprised of African Americans and black immigrants from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. It was founded in April 2006 in response to the massive outpouring of opposition of immigrants and their supporters to the repressive immigration bills then under consideration by the U.S. Congress. | Brooklyn, NY |
| Black Organizing Project Oakland | http://blackorganizingproject.org/ | The Black Organizing Project is a black member-led community organization working for racial, social, and economic justice through grassroots organizing and community-building in Oakland, California. | Oakland, CA |
| Black Women's Roundtable | http://ncbcp.org/programs/bwr/ | The Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) is an intergenerational civic engagement network of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation. At the forefront of championing just and equitable public policy on behalf of black women, BWR promotes their health and wellness, economic security, education, and global empowerment as key elements for success. | Washington, DC |
| Black Workers for Justice NC | http://blackworkersforjustice.org/ | The BWFJ is an organization of black workers formed in 1981 out of a struggle led by black women workers at a Kmart store in Rocky Mount, North Carolina against race and gender discrimination. After organizing a boycott of the local Kmart store and reaching out to workers at other workplaces and communities, black workers and community activists from ten counties met at the First Missionary Baptist Church in Fremont, NC in June 1982 to form BWFJ as a statewide organization. | North Carolina |
| BOLD | http://boldorganizing.org/ | BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity) is a national training program developed through collaboration between the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) and Social Justice Leadership. The program is designed to help rebuild black (African-American, Caribbean, African, Afro-Latino) social justice infrastructure in order to organize black communities more effectively and re-center black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement. | |

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| Boston Workers Alliance | http://bostonworkersalliance.org/ | Boston Workers Alliance (BWA) is a community organization led by unemployed and underemployed workers fighting for employment rights. We have united to end CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) discrimination and the crisis of joblessness in the community. We fight for social and economic justice by creating and demanding decent jobs for all people who want to work. The ability to live productively and raise our families in peace is a right. As we walk towards our freedom, we build strength and hope through cooperation, political awareness, and collective action. We organize to overcome the oppressive forces that oppose our full potential to live. Key campaigns include: job opportunities for people of color, Ban the Box in 2012, and Criminal Record Information (CORI) reforms in 2010. | Boston/ Dorchester, MA |
| Business Alliance for Local Living Economy | https://bealocalist.org/ | BALLE (pronounced bolly) was founded in 2001 to nurture and curate the emergence of a new economy—one that will gradually displace our destructive and failing economy with a system that supports the health, prosperity, and happiness for all people and regenerates the vital ecosystems upon which our economy depends. With a focus on real change within a generation, BALLE works to identify and connect pioneering leaders, spread solutions, and attract investment toward local economies. BALLE provides a national forum for visionary local economy leaders and funders to connect, build their capacity, and innovate. Among the transformative communities of practice that BALLE hosts are a Local Economy Investment Circle, the Community Foundation Circle, and the nation's only Fellowship program dedicated to cultivating the emergence of a new economy. | Oakland, CA |
| Center for Community Change | www.communitychange.org/ | The Center's mission is to build the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low-income people of color, to change their communities and public policies for the better. Our focus areas include jobs and wages, immigration, retirement security, affordable housing, racial justice, and barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated individuals. | Washington, DC |
| Center for Popular Democracy | http://populardemocracy.org/ | The Center for Popular Democracy works to create equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with high-impact base-building organizations, organizing alliances, and progressive unions. CPD strengthens our collective capacity to envision and win an innovative pro-worker, pro-immigrant, racial and economic justice agenda. | Washington, DC |
| Center for Third World Organizing | http://ctwo.org/ | Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO, pronounced "C-2") is a racial justice organization dedicated to building a social justice movement led by people of color. | Oakland, CA and Brooklyn, NY |

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| Chicago Workers' Collaborative | www.chicagoworkerscollaborative.org/ | Chicago Workers' Collaborative is an Illinois non-profit organization founded in 2000 that promotes full employment and equality for the lowest wage-earners, primarily temp-staffing workers, in the Chicago region through leadership and skills training, critical assistance and services, advocacy and collaborative action. CWC has assisted thousands of economically disadvantaged immigrants, day laborers, and others employed in the contingent underground workforce to move into the mainstream. We educate about workplace rights, provide critical services to our members, and mobilize to gain full access to employment for all workers, especially immigrants and African Americans. | Chicago, IL |
| Coalition of Black Trade Unionists | www.cbtu.org/ | The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists consists of members from seventy-seven international and national unions with forty-two chapters across the country. CBTU seeks to fulfill the dream of those black trade unionists, both living and deceased, who throughout this century have courageously and unremittingly struggled to build a national movement that would bring all our strengths and varied talents to bear in the unending effort to achieve economic, political, and social justice for every American. | Washington, DC |
| Color of Change | http://colorofchange.org/ | ColorOfChange.org exists to strengthen Black America's political voice. Our goal is to empower our members—Black Americans and our allies—to make government more responsive to the concerns of Black Americans and to bring about positive political and social change for everyone. | |
| Community Voices Heard | www.cvhaction.org/ | Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a member-led multiracial organization, principally women of color and low-income families, in New York State that builds power to secure social, economic, and racial justice for all. We accomplish this through grassroots organizing, leadership development, policy changes, and creating new models of direct democracy. | New York, NY |
| Detroit Urban Garden and Farm Council | www.miufi.org/ | The Michigan Urban Farming Initiative seeks to engage members of the Michigan community in sustainable agriculture. We believe that challenges unique to the Michigan community (e.g., vacant land, poor diet, nutritional illiteracy, and food insecurity) present a unique opportunity for community-supported agriculture. Using agriculture as a platform to promote education, sustainability, and community—while simultaneously reducing socioeconomic disparity—we hope to empower urban communities. | Detroit, MI |
| Empower DC | www.empowerdc.org/ | The mission of Empower DC is to enhance, improve, and promote the self-advocacy of low and moderate income DC residents in order to bring about sustained improvements in their quality of life. We accomplish our mission through grassroots organizing and trainings, leadership development, and community education. | Washington, DC |

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| Fight for a Fair Economy | http://fightforafaireconomy.org/ | The Fight for a Fair Economy (Ohio) is a collaboration of efforts between SEIU, labor allies, community partners, and grassroots supporters to fight back against attacks on working people and their families all across Ohio. While anti-worker politicians and special interest groups have begun to tear apart the fabric of social and economic justice, the power remains in the voices of our fellow citizens. | Ohio |
| Full Harvest Urban Farm | www.facebook.com/Fullharvesturbanfarm | Grow Love; Harvest Liberation....We are an urban farm located in East Oakland. We are excited to share our journey as we further develop our farm! | Oakland, CA |
| Georgia Stand Up | www.georgiastandup.org/ | Georgia STAND-UP, a Think & Act Tank for Working Communities, is an alliance of leaders representing community, faith, academic, and labor organizations which organizes and educates communities about issues related to economic development. Our mission is to provide information and resources to help create healthy, livable neighborhoods while respecting the right of existing residents to benefit from the progress and developments taking place within their communities. With the goal of alleviating poverty and encouraging regional equity through the empowerment of leaders and the inclusion of community benefits, Georgia STAND-UP empowers residents to ensure economic development meets the needs of their neighborhoods and uses community benefits agreements and policies to assist communities, developers, and redevelopment agencies in working together to create successful development projects. | Atlanta, GA |
| Greater Birmingham Ministries | http://gbm.org/ | Greater Birmingham Ministries strives to serve God's purpose of justice and peace by healing the wounds of the community and struggling in community to realize more just systems and more faithful relationships. Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM) was founded in 1969 in response to urgent human and justice needs in the greater Birmingham area. GBM is a multi-faith, multi-racial organization that provides emergency services for people in need and engages the poor and the non-poor in systemic change efforts to build a strong, supportive, engaged community and pursue a more just society for all people. Key campaigns include working to increase funding for public transportation. | Birmingham, AL |
| Growing Power | www.growingpower.org/ | Growing Power is a national nonprofit organization and land-trust supporting people from diverse backgrounds and the environments in which they live, by helping to provide equal access to healthy, high-quality, safe, and affordable food for people in all communities. Growing Power implements this mission by providing hands-on training, on-the-ground demonstration, outreach, and technical assistance through the development of Community Food Systems that help people grow, process, market, and distribute food in a sustainable manner. | Milwaukee, WI |

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| It Takes a Village | www.ittakesavillage.org/ | The nonprofit sector is in great need of inexpensive software training. This training should facilitate effective use of modern software tools. It Takes A Village is helping to build that future. Through our programs, membership, and web design programs, we have the tools to help nonprofit organizations make a shift in how they think about incorporating software tools into their day-to-day activities. | |
| Jobs With Justice | http://www.jwj.org/ | At Jobs With Justice, we are leading the fight for workers' rights and an economy that benefits everyone. We are the only nonprofit of our kind leading strategic campaigns and shaping the public discourse on every front to build power for working people. Jobs With Justice is committed to working nationally and locally, on the ground and online. We win real change for workers by combining innovative communications strategies and solid research and policy advocacy with grassroots action and mobilization. | Washington, DC |
| LA Black Workers Center | http://lablackworkercenter.org/ | The Los Angeles Black Worker Center develops organized power and authentic grassroots leadership among black workers (unionized, non-union, immigrant, formerly incarcerated, and the unemployed) and the extended community to reverse the disproportionate levels of unemployment and underemployment in the Los Angeles Black community. The center's key strategies are: leadership development of workers, research, and building strategic alliances between the Los Angeles labor movement and the black community for action in collective campaigns. Key campaigns include community engagement of people of color and grassroots organizing for economic justice. | Los Angeles, CA |
| Miami Workers Center | www.miamiworkerscenter.org/ | The Miami Workers Center (MWC) is Miami's leading social change nonprofit organization that fights for social, racial, economic, and gender justice in Miami, Florida. We work to unite and grow the power of low-income Latinos and African-Americans from some of the most vulnerable neighborhoods of Miami, such as Liberty City, Wynwood, Appalatah, and Little Havana. We fight for good paying jobs, affordable housing, immigrant rights, the protection of domestic workers and victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. | Miami, FL |

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| Mississippi Worker Center for Human Rights | http://www.msworkers.org/ | <p>The Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights, founded in December 1996, provides organizing support and training for low-wage, non-union workers in Mississippi. Through direct action campaigns, organizing drives and trainings, we work in coalition with workers to fight for human rights in workplaces and communities. The Center works with the state's most vulnerable workers to develop strategies to combat racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression in the workplace. Through local, national, and international networking and coalition building, we build bridges between workers in the southern region of the U.S., other parts of the country, and the world. We fight worker mistreatment through community education and outreach and, most important, through organizing and the development of indigenous worker leadership. Our worker-members develop strategies for, and participate in, every battle, every initiative and every project. In this way, the Center prepares workers who are currently isolated and abused, for leadership roles in the labor movement. The Center also works with trade unions and other labor organizations to support their efforts to intensify union organizing in the state of Mississippi and across the southern region. Under the Center's leadership, unions and other workers' rights organizations work in coalition to address critical issues affecting the working poor in the state of Mississippi. With its grassroots partners, the Center convenes several major initiatives that provide organizing and strategy development opportunities for low-wage workers.</p> | Greenville, MS |
| MOSES | http://mosesmi.org/ | <p>The Mission of MOSES is to organize communities, develop faith-based leaders, and build relationships to advocate for social justice through a group of diverse congregations. MOSES accomplishes this through training leaders in churches, synagogues, and mosques, teaching participants how to articulate their shared values and work with their constituents to take collective action in the public arena.</p> | Detroit, MI |
| National Black Worker Project | http://blackworkerproject.com/ | <p>The black community faces a two-dimensional job crisis: the crisis of unemployment and the crisis of low-wage work. We can't rely just on job training to solve the crisis; we also must find strategies that combine strategic research, service delivery, policy advocacy, and organizing to improve the quality of jobs that are available in the economy.</p> | |
| National Domestic Workers Alliance | http://www.domesticworkers.org/ | <p>The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) is the nation's leading voice for dignity and fairness for the millions of domestic workers in the United States, most of whom are women. Founded in 2007, NDWA works for the respect, recognition, and inclusion in labor protections for domestic workers. The national alliance is powered by 42 affiliate organizations—plus our first local chapter in Atlanta—of over 10,000 nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers for the elderly in 26 cities and 18 states.</p> | New York, NY and Oakland, CA |

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| National Guest Workers Alliance | http://www.guestworkeralliance.org/ | The National Guestworker Alliance (NGA) is a membership organization of guest workers. Our members organize in labor camps across the United States to win collective dignity at work. We are building national power to win fairness in the terms of migration. We also partner with local workers—employed and unemployed—to strengthen U.S. social movements for racial and economic justice. | New Orleans, LA |
| Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (MN) | http://www.mnnoc.org/ | Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC) is a grassroots, member-led organization building power in under-resourced communities and communities of color across the Twin Cities. Together, NOC members fight for racial and economic justice. We're building powerful, active campaigns for better public transit, workers' rights, expanded voting rights, and police accountability. Key campaigns include education reform, housing policy, workers' rights, and environmental justice. | Minneapolis, MN |
| New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice | http://nowcrj.org/ | In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, African American workers were locked out of the reconstruction, while immigrant workers were locked in. Poor and working class African Americans faced racial exclusion, while immigrant workers experienced brutal exploitation. Many years later, in the context of a global economic crisis, jobs and immigration continue to be sharply divisive wedge issues. The political economy of race has made displacement, statelessness, and indentured servitude a permanent reality for poor and working class communities of color in the Gulf Coast. The New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice is dedicated to organizing workers across race and industry to build the power and participation of workers and communities. We organize day laborers, guest workers, and homeless residents to build movement for dignity and rights in the post-Katrina landscape. | New Orleans, LA |
| New York Communities for Change | http://nycommunities.org/ | By using direct action, legislative advocacy, and community organizing, NY Communities' members work to impact the political and economic policies that directly affect us. | New York, NY |
| Ohio Organizing Collaborative | http://www.ohorganizing.org/ | OOC is an innovative statewide organization that unites community organizing groups, labor unions, faith organizations, and policy institutes across Ohio. Key campaigns include Walmart worker organizing in Ohio. | Columbus, OH |
| ONE DC | http://www.onedconline.org/ | At ONE DC, our mission is to exercise political strength to create and preserve racial and economic equity in Shaw and the District. We seek to create a community in DC that is equitable for all. Key campaigns include Marriott job training program, employment of black people, and conversion of low-income buildings into co-ops. | Washington, DC |
| One Voice | http://uniteonevoice.org/ | One Voice is a nonprofit organization helping families living at poverty level within our community. Key campaigns include working with communities to fight for workers' rights and create spaces outside of unions and workplaces for workers to receive support and information. | Louisiana; Mississippi |

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| Organization for Black Struggle | http://obs-stl.org/ | <p>THE ORGANIZATION FOR BLACK STRUGGLE was founded in 1980 by activists, students, union organizers, and other community members in order to fill a vacuum left by the assaults on the Black Power Movement.</p> <p>OUR VISION: To contribute to the creation of a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression.</p> <p>OUR MISSION: To build a movement that fights for political empowerment, economic justice, and the cultural dignity of the African American community, especially the black working class.</p> | St. Louis, MO |
| OUR DC | http://thisisourdc.org/ | OurDC is a not-for-profit organization that works relentlessly to connect people, communities, and organizations to Bring Good Jobs to the District of Columbia. We are dedicated to ensuring that the voices of unemployed and underemployed city residents are heard and listened to in local and national dialogues on jobs and job creation. | Washington, DC |
| People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) Buffalo | http://pushbuffalo.org/ | PUSH Buffalo was established to: Create strong neighborhoods with quality affordable housing; decrease the rate of housing abandonment by reclaiming empty houses from neglectful public and private owners and redeveloping them for occupancy by low-income residents; and develop neighborhood leaders capable of gaining community control over the development process, and planning for the future of the neighborhood. Key campaigns include energy efficiency, green job pipelines, energy policy creation and reform, and economic development opportunities for people of color. | Buffalo, NY |
| Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower & Rebuild | http://www.powerphiladelphia.org/ | POWER is committed to the work of bringing about justice here and now, in our city and our region. Key campaigns include economic dignity and justice for low-wage workers (airport workers), raising the minimum wage to \$10 with benefits via referendum, and civic engagement in communities of color. | Philadelphia, PA |
| PICO Louisiana Interfaith Together | http://www.picolouisiana.org/ | We work to provide families and grassroots leaders with a voice in the decisions that shape their lives and communities. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| Race Forward | https://www.raceforward.org/ | Race Forward's mission is to build awareness, solutions, and leadership for racial justice by generating transformative ideas, information, and experiences. | |
| Rise Up GA | http://riseupga.org | Rise Up's mission is to bring social change to communities throughout the state of Georgia through bold action to demand political, economic, and social equality regardless of race, class, gender, ability, and citizenship status. | Atlanta, GA |
| ROC United | http://rocunited.org/ | We work to improve wages of restaurant workers. | New York, NY |
| Save Ourselves Movement for Justice and Democracy | http://sosmovement.net/ | We work to restore and maintain voting rights. | |

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| SCOPE | http://scopela.org/ | We seek to build grassroots power to create social and economic justice for low-income, female, immigrant, black, and brown communities. | Los Angeles, CA |
| Southern Echo | http://southernecho.org/s/ | We are currently working to develop effective accountable grassroots leadership in the African-American communities. | Jackson, MS |
| Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation | http://www.soulinchicago.org/ | We're working to build a movement to create change, starting on the South Side and South Suburbs. | Chicago, IL |
| Street Vendor Project | http://streetvendor.org/ | We are a group comprised of 1300 active vendor members who are working together to create a vendors' movement for permanent change. | New York, NY |
| Sunflower Community Action | http://sunfloweract.org/ | SCA does work for fair lending, justice for immigrants, civic engagement, worker justice, better public education, and more livable neighborhoods. Key campaigns include the Ban the Box campaign in 2013, police accountability through specialized trainings, and community engagement. | Wichita, KS |
| Take Action MN | http://www.takeactionminnesota.org/ | We are working to realize racial and economic equity across Minnesota. | Saint-Paul, MN |
| The Coalition to End Sheriff Violence | http://nationinside.org/campaign/dignity/ | To secure dignity and power for all incarcerated people in Los Angeles County. | Los Angeles, CA |
| The United Workers | http://unitedworkers.org/ | The United Workers is a human rights organization led by low-wage workers. We are leading the fight for fair development, which respects human rights, maximizes public benefits, and is sustainable. | Baltimore, MD |
| The Wildfire Project | www.wildfireproject.org/ | The Wildfire Project (Wildfire) trains, supports, and networks grassroots groups to help build a broad and powerful movement for social, political, economic, and ecological justice. Using democratic, experiential methods, the Wildfire Project fuses political education, skills training, group development, and direct organizing support in a curriculum tailored to specific needs of groups in action. Wildfire develops leadership in and of front line groups, maintains long-term partnerships with the communities with which it works, and creates frameworks for work between groups and across issue lines to form a strong base of organizers ready to stand up to crisis collectively and win the world we all deserve. | |

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| UNITE Here | http://unitehere.org | We are working people, coming together to win dignity and higher standards in the hospitality industry and beyond. | New York, NY |
| VOTE | www.vote-nola.org/ | We seek to create a space and a voice for people impacted by the criminal justice system in the United States. | New Orleans, LA |
| Warehouse Workers for Justice (IL) | www.warehouseworker.org/ | We provide workshops so warehouse workers can educate themselves about workplace rights, unite warehouse workers to defend their rights on the job, build community support for the struggles of warehouse workers, and fight for policy changes to improve the lives of warehouse workers and members of our communities. Key campaigns include fair wages and employment practices, organizing and educating Walmart workers, and the elimination of temps in Walmart's import distribution network in Joliet. | Chicago, IL |
| Western New York Worker Center | www.wnycosh.org/wny-worker-center/ | The Worker Center provides outreach to refugee, immigrant, young, and low-wage work communities and provides networking with other agencies and organizations. Bringing workers together across communities, the Worker Center provides education and training regarding worker rights, laws that protect workers, and health and safety. Through hotline referrals, the Worker Center provides support to workers, advocates for rights enforcement, and serves as a liaison for site-based negotiations. | Buffalo, NY |
| Wisconsin Jobs Now | http://wisconsinjobsnow.org/ | We are a non-profit organization committed to fighting income inequality from the bottom up and building stronger communities throughout Wisconsin. Key campaigns include living wage ordinance petition and engagement of non-professional black leaders. | Milwaukee, WI |
| Workers Center for Racial Justice | www.center4racialjustice.org | WCRJ works to increase access to quality jobs and strengthen working conditions and job security for black workers through increasing civic participation and organizing and advocacy campaigns with the unemployed, low-wage, and formerly incarcerated. Key campaigns include living wages, Ban the Box campaign, and direct voter engagement. | Chicago, IL |