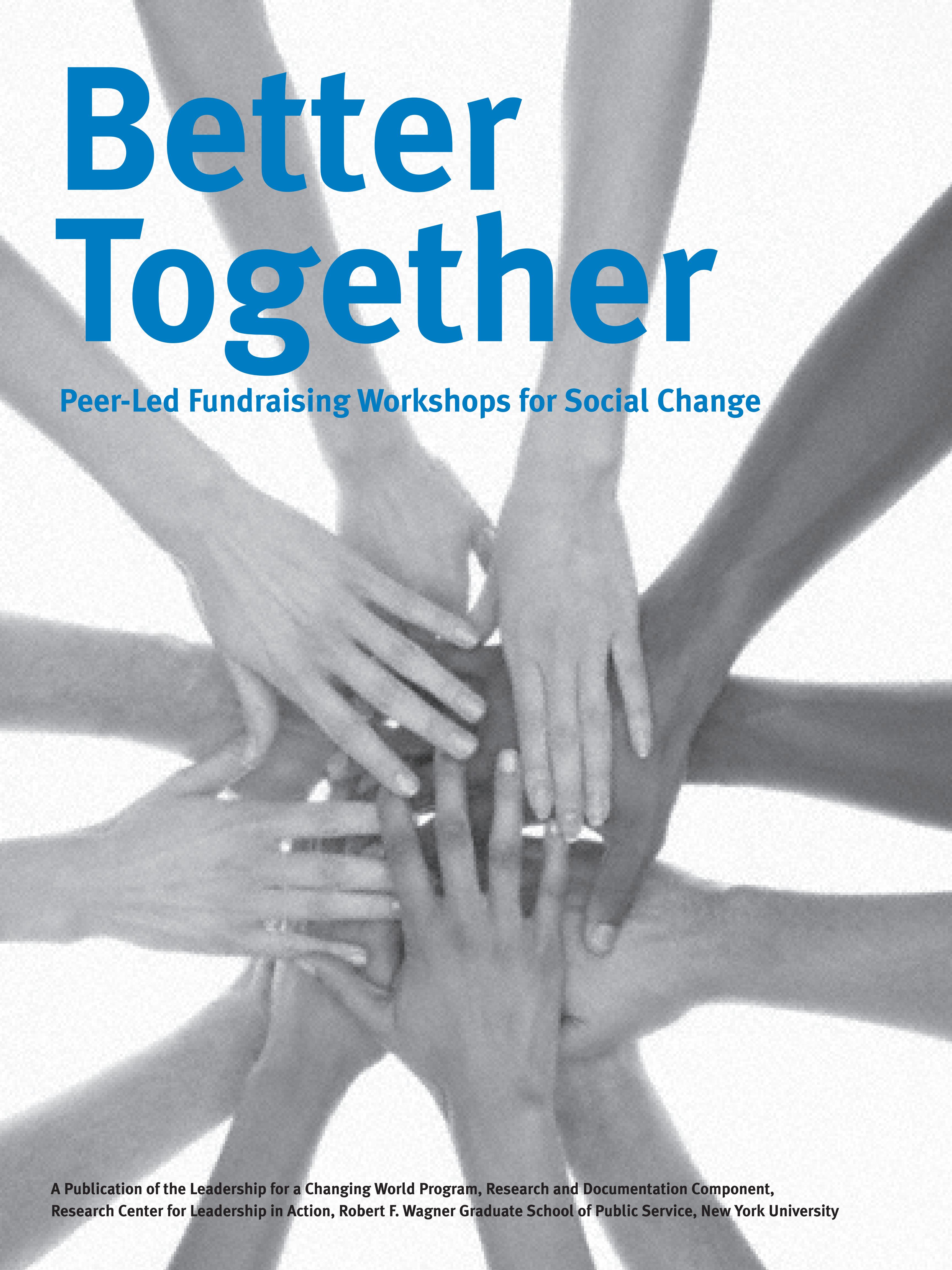

Better Together

Peer-Led Fundraising Workshops for Social Change

A Publication of the Leadership for a Changing World Program, Research and Documentation Component,
Research Center for Leadership in Action, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University

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"How do we raise money to develop sustainable social change organizations?"

This is the question our group of six leaders and two facilitators from social justice organizations across the United States identified as part of our participation in the Leadership for a Changing World program (see page 11). We worked to find an answer throughout six meetings, which took place over a span of 18 months, by way of cooperative inquiry (see sidebar).

Throughout the inquiry, our group learned valuable lessons about fundraising for social justice organizations. One of our most important discoveries was that the very process of collectively researching our question and learning from one another was perhaps the best answer to the question.

Collaborative learning and working with other social justice leaders is an extremely helpful and powerful instrument for sharpening skills and developing successful fundraising plans and actions.

It is important to note that our group focused on fundraising as a crucial part of building sustainable social justice organizations. We believe that including fundraising as an integral part of an organization's whole mission, as opposed to separating it out as an isolated department or piece of work, made our fundraising research unique. For instance, the group agreed that, independent of whether the locus of accountability resided in one or another person, all of us in the CI group would aspire to build a collective approach to fundraising in our organizations. It became clear to us that a one person or one department approach does not support the goal of organizational sustainability, nor would it help create sustainable fundraising practices over the years.

Furthermore, our CI noted that training sessions and workshops many of us had attended often failed to address our unique needs as social change organizers. We agreed that these workshops stopped short of addressing a collective approach to fundraising, as well as grassroots fundraising and the role of boards in fundraising. Furthermore, even when manuals and workshops offered suggestions about the role of the Board of Directors in fundraising, they did not always pertain to our type of organization. The opportunity the CI provided to brainstorm with organizations having similar boards was extremely helpful.

The model we propose in this booklet suggests particular methods that you can use for training and supporting fundraisers, first and foremost by approaching the training collectively. It seems that if the answer to our challenges and goals lies in doing the work collectively in our communities, then the workshops that help us learn how to do the work should be done collectively as well. If we learned more from our colleagues, practical strategies about their boards than from board development workshops, then we could continue to gain knowledge with similar peer gatherings. The very issues that make our organizations unique may be where the answers to our challenges lie. The model in this booklet emerges from the unique strengths and perspectives of social justice organizations.

WHAT IS COOPERATIVE INQUIRY?

Cooperative inquiry (CI) is a participatory research technique in which a small group of participants use their own experience to generate insights around an issue that is of burning concern to all of them. In this type of inquiry, participants formulate a question, agree upon a course of action, individually engage in action through their work, and then collectively make meaning from the data generated by their actions. This cycle of reflection-action-reflection is repeated several times until the group feels it has successfully addressed its concerns. On occasion, facilitators support the group to ensure that its members use the process to its full advantage. CI contributes to creating new knowledge grounded in practice, deepens the participants' leadership potential, and strengthens relationships among group members.

Envisioning A Peer-led Fundraising Workshop And How It Works

Imagine a pleasant retreat-like setting. You and the other participants are away from your workplaces. The meeting space has all you need to work hard on learning and planning: flip charts, markers, a big workspace for working collectively, smaller spaces for working privately or in small groups, and refreshments. It is quiet, with no distractions. There are no phones, no e-mails, and no normal workday pressures. It is a time set outside of time, a rare commodity in your work life, but hard work will occur here. All of your focus will be on the important goal of creating a sustainable fundraising plan for your social change organization.

The other participants, like you, are dedicated, hard-working people from diverse types of professional environments. Some are from organizations that are close in age to your own, while others' organizations are much older or younger. Some are service organizations, others are membership coalitions. A few participants are the sole fundraisers at their organization and do only that. Many others do fundraising work and carry numerous other responsibilities as well. All want to create long-term, reasonable, and sustainable fundraising plans, and they all need help.

In the early workshop meetings, you get to know the other participants and their organizations very well. The atmosphere and process of the workshops is such that trust and collaboration are priorities. Good facilitators have helped to set this tone and build consensus among the participants to create the workshop's agendas. You work hard. These are intense and focused sessions, and your own knowledge is called upon. However, you learn equally from your fellow participants and the guest specialists whom you and the others decide are necessary to meeting your workshop goals.

By the end of six sessions, you have learned many new techniques, ideas, and methods. You and the other participants have built either full or partial fundraising plans. You have built your plan with hands-on help and have had the opportunity to present it to an interested and critical audience. When the workshop is over, you have a group of personal consultants who can help you with your fundraising challenges and goals for years to come. And you have many new friends.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT:

This document is one of three that together compose the full report, titled Better Together, on this group's CI. The other two documents are included in this publication's front and back cover pockets. "The Story of How Arriving at a Question Became the Answer" tells the story of the inquiry itself, its process, and how the group came to create this model. "Linking Fundraising to Sustainability for Social Change Organizations" shares an in-depth look at the concepts the group developed regarding the specific nature and differences of fundraising for social justice organizations. Although each document may be read and studied on its own, reading all three will provide a greater, in-depth understanding of this CI, its resulting concepts, and proposed strategies.

Principles Of Conducting Peer-led Fundraising Workshops For Social Change Organizations

During the course of our CI, we found that some general principles helped guide our progress. Application of these same principles may be helpful in conducting your workshops as well.

Step One

CONVENING THE WORKSHOP:

Who should convene and organize the workshops?

Any interested organization or individuals may convene workshops. Below are some suggestions as to how to go about it:

- Any person with fundraising responsibility in an organization can present the idea to his/her colleagues who have similar jobs in their community, and together they can plan the workshops and present their idea to potential funders. A single organization could also convene workshops.
- Foundations may choose to convene a series of workshops as a beneficial program for their current or future grantees.
- Participants' registration fees and/or grants may cover the cost of the workshops.
- The budget for the workshops will vary depending on the participants' travel costs (if they come from out-of-town), the cost of the facilitator, and the number of visits by and cost of outside consultants, which is decided upon by the participants. Registration fees should cover the cost of at least one facilitator and one outside consultant.
- Other budget items for the workshops should include: meeting space for the whole series; supplies; resources for participants such as books, etc.; lunches for each workshop day; and cost of other meals if participants are from out of town.

Step Two

PARTICIPANTS:

Who should attend the workshops?

These workshops are for social change or social justice not-for-profit organizations. To ensure realizing the greatest benefit from them, attendees should meet certain qualifications. Here is a suggested list:

- The workshops are for any person from these organizations whose partial or main responsibility is fundraising for the organization. This can include staff members, board members, and/or volunteers. However, the person should have both the responsibility and the authority to build a fundraising plan for the organization.
- The person attending should have some basic understanding of fundraising.
- Participants should represent a diversity of roles or job descriptions (i.e., an executive director who also has the fundraising responsibility, an organizer

who also fundraises, a development director, a board member who leads the fundraising, etc.)
- Participants should represent a variety of types of organizations (i.e., direct service, membership organizations, grassroots social change organizations, etc.)
- Participants should represent organizations that are diverse in age or life cycle (i.e., 5–10 years old, 10–15 years old, 15–20 years old, and more than 20 years old).

LOGISTICS:

Step Three

How are the workshops organized?

CI, like any process, requires organization and planning ahead to be successful. Here is a logistics checklist that will help you plan yours:

- There can be between four and seven workshops.
- If possible, participants should commit to the entire series of workshops.
- Each meeting normally lasts about two days, adjusted shorter or longer as necessary.
- There can be a period of one to three months between meetings.
- The duration of the entire series should be between seven months and one-and-a-half years.
- There should be a minimum of six and maximum of ten participants, and one or two facilitators.
- The meeting space should be a pleasant, comfortable, retreat-like setting that is away from each participant's place of work.
- Participants can participate in some shared meals during each workshop session.
- The workshops will be primarily funded through grants that the workshop convener raises, plus a small registration fee from participants, if necessary. Scholarships or sliding scales might be made available, depending on the need to cover the fee.

RESOURCES:

Step Four

What assets are necessary for the workshops?

In evaluating the resources that you'll need to perform a CI, keep four areas in mind: facilitation, materials, record keeping and documentation, and external consultants.

FACILITATION:

- An outside facilitator with excellent facilitation skills is necessary to keep the sessions on task and moving toward the meeting's goal, which the group has set. More than one facilitator may be used.
- Ideally, the facilitator would have experience in either CI or group consensus-building facilitation. The ideal facilitator is prepared for the group to move into leadership roles throughout the series of meetings, and if the groups desires, to allow for group participants to share or rotate facilitation at some points.

- The facilitator needs to be skilled in helping build consensus and create equity in the group.
- The facilitator serves as the communication hub between meetings, as well as the logistics planner for the meeting's time, place, and arrangements, and for the hiring of outside consultants.
- The facilitator is not a contributor to the actual work of the participants.

MATERIALS:
- There should be funds included in the budget for the materials, books, and copies of documents that the group decides to use during the workshops.

RECORD KEEPING AND DOCUMENTATION:
- Accurate record keeping of what occurs during the workshops is necessary. These notes, minutes, and/or decisions can be shared after each meeting with all participants (and consultants, as appropriate).
- The facilitator (or if the budget permits, another person contracted for this purpose) can handle record keeping/documentation .

EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS:
- The group decides on the number of consultants and the required specialties. This decision is based on the group's specific targeted needs (e.g., consultants specializing in grant-writing, membership drives, grassroots fundraising, special events, etc.).
- During the series of meetings at least one fundraising consultant will come to work with the group, and perhaps more, if required to meet the participants' goals.
- The consultant should be prepared to work with the group in ways that support the group's peer-learning and peer-mentoring practices and strategies.
- The consultant's work during the session should facilitate the building of the participants' fundraising plans (or portions of them).
- The consultant(s) can offer skills-building strategies, practical and hands-on exercises that are specific to the group's needs. (For example, if the consultant is attending a grant-writing workshop, then the participants work on writing their grants and share their writings with fellow participants and the consultant.)
- The consultant(s) could be asked to offer open, fish-bowl style, individual consultations with the participants so that the group can continue learning from each other's challenges.

FOR HELP IN FINDING A FACILITATOR FOR YOUR COOPERATIVE INQUIRY, CONTACT:

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Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
New York University
295 Lafayette St., 3rd Floor
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www.nyu.edu/wagner/leadership

Step Five

ACTIVITIES, PROCESSES, AND ORGANIZATION:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ALL SESSIONS

Although any collaborative workshop will have its own individual characteristics, the following general principles can help guide it to reach its full potential:

- Each meeting encourages full participation by all members.
- Peer dialogue, mentoring, and consulting are utilized in each meeting, and

buddy systems are set up and used when appropriate for in-between meetings.

- Multiple and diverse activities are utilized in all meetings, i.e., full group dialogue, story circles, small group breakouts, one-on-one peer consulting, two-on-one peer consulting, presentations by a participant to full group followed by response and dialogue by full group, short information presentations by external consultants, and fish-bowl sessions wherein the full group observes either peer or external consulting sessions.
- Actions or homework take place between each session. The participants decide on these actions.
- The group should encourage the practice of sharing and dialogue, followed by action, followed by reflection, followed by action, both during sessions and between sessions.
- Participants set the agendas and direction for the meetings by reaching consensus about the group's goals for the sessions.

Example Of A Multi-Session Workshop

There is great flexibility in designing the content of each session. No series of workshops will be identical, as each group will have different needs. There are certain activities and a certain order in which these occur in the series, as the chart suggests. There should ideally be more time between the second-to-last and last session, so that participants have time to begin implementing the fundraising plan, or at least some part of it.

The following chart is an example of possible goals and activities for each session in a six-session workshop:

Session 1

- Build trust between group members and establish equity in the group. Use of the story circle method, in which participants sit in a circle and relate their stories to the group.
- Sharing information, including fundraising and budgetary information, about each organization and each participant's role in his/her organization.
- Filling out a "profile" about their organization and budgets and fundraising strategies prior to first meeting.
- Participants setting goals for the full workshop (i.e., what type of consultant(s) will be necessary to meet specific goals, what materials will be needed).
- Participants setting the action for the time between sessions 1 and 2, and planning and designing the agenda for the second meeting.
- Resource and idea sharing and brainstorming occur between all participants in each session.

Sessions 2/3

- Further presentations about strengths and challenges of fundraising from each participant.
- Participants' presentations by of results of actions between meetings.
- External consultants' or by peers' presentations of methods of building fundraising plans.
- Beginning work on building fundraising plans, (i.e., discovery of information, participants' interviews with their staffs and board members to build deeper understanding of roles in fundraising, gathering of materials, goal setting) both in the sessions and between the sessions.
- Peer consulting during the sessions to help with building the fundraising plan.
- External consultants' workshops given on topics that meet the specific needs of participants (i.e., grant writing and grassroots fundraising workshops, membership drives, special events). All consultants' workshops will be "hands-on" and participatory. Possible individual consultations to address specific needs of the participants done in "fish-bowl" style so that the full group learns from the consultation.

Sessions 4/5

- Additional (or first) session(s) with external consultants.
- Continued work on constructing each participant's fundraising plan or in some cases, a portion of the fund-raising plan (i.e., grant-writing plan or membership drive; however, most will construct the entire plan).
- Between the sessions, participants implement parts of their fundraising plan and/or discuss the results with their staff or boards, discovering more strengths and challenges for the plan.
- Fundraising plans address who implements the various parts of the plan. This will require communication with staff and board members. Dialogue at the sessions about this will help clarify the roles of the organization's various fundraisers and help build strategies for these challenges.
- In session 5, the participants present the final fundraising plan to the whole group as a "practice" for presenting it to their organizations. Full-group dialogue, questions-and-answers, and more one-on-one work can follow.

Session 6

- Group presentations about the outcomes, successes, and problems they have experienced with their plan.
- Evaluation of the full workshop.
- Decisions about what to do with the workshop's documentation.
- Wrap up and closure.

About the Cooperative Inquiry Facilitators and Participants

The following were participants and facilitators in this cooperative inquiry. The Research Center for Leadership in Action, a program of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University, led the research component of the inquiry.

Participants:

John Arvizu
Development Director, National Day Laborer Organizing Network, Los Angeles, CA

Suzanne Bring
Development Director, Jewish Community Action, St. Paul, MN

Michele Nicole Johnson
Formerly Executive Director, Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society, Sapelo Island, GA. Currently Library Manager & Trustee, Hog Hammock Public Library, Sapelo Island, GA

Alice Kim
Formerly National Organizer, Campaign to End the Death Penalty, Chicago, IL
Currently Director, Public Square at the Illinois Humanities Council, Chicago, IL

Kevin Lind
Director, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Sheridan, WY

Beatrice Shelby
Executive Director, Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center, Marvell, AR

Facilitators:

Theresa Holden
Director, Artist and Community Connection and Junebug Productions, Inc., Austin, TX

Sonia Ospina
Faculty Director, Research Center for Leadership in Action, and Research Director, Leadership for a Changing World, New York University, New York, NY

Acknowledgements
The members of the Leadership for a Changing World Research and Documentation team at the Research Center for Leadership in Action would like to acknowledge the many contributions of co-researchers, partners, and other social change leaders in LCW who have been active participants in shaping our learning. We want to particularly thank the Ford Foundation for its generous support of the LCW program and the Research and Documentation effort.

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program
Leadership for a Changing World is a program of the Ford Foundation that recognizes and supports community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it seeks to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees receive $115,000 and participate in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research and a strategic communications effort. LCW is a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and RCLA, NYU Wagner.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University
The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) promotes practice-grounded, social-science based, interdisciplinary research that will help strengthen both the theory and the practice of leadership in public service. The Center for Leadership in Action is based at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. It was launched in August 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation.

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Credits:
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Strategic Communications & Planning provided editorial support.
Steve Kulp provided design and production services.

Published 2007

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Better Together:

The Story of How Arriving at a Question Became the Answer

Written by: Michele Johnson
With co-authors: John Arvizu, Suzanne Bring, Theresa Holden, Alice Kim, Kevin Lind, Sonia Ospina, Beatrice Shelby

As a group of awardees and colleagues from Leadership for a Changing World, Group 4, we were asked to volunteer to participate in a Cooperative Inquiry. Few of us were familiar with the Cooperative Inquiry process, but we were willing to participate if it meant we would make our organizations stronger. The topic we were asked to explore was "fundraising toward sustainability in social change organizations."

The goal was first to arrive at a question that would guide our inquiry for the following year. Our question would become:

How do we raise money to develop sustainable social change organizations?

The question went through several transformations before we finalized it, but it was the answer that surprised us. This was where our real journey began, and along the way we discovered that raising money has just as much to do with sustaining and supporting people as it does with sustaining an organization. After several group discussions, one-on-one exercises, and actions followed by reflection, we began to see a direct correlation between sustaining an organization and sustaining the individuals responsible for fundraising. We also realized that implementing a model of peer support and cultivating a culture of collaboration were successful ways to sustain people who fundraise for social change organizations.

WHAT IS COOPERATIVE INQUIRY?

Cooperative inquiry (CI) is a participatory research technique in which a small group of participants use their own experience to generate insights around an issue that is of burning concern to all of them. In this type of inquiry, participants formulate a question, agree upon a course of action, individually engage in action through their work, and then collectively make meaning from the data generated by their actions. This cycle of reflection-action-reflection is repeated several times until the group feels it has successfully addressed its concerns. On occasion, facilitators support the group to ensure that its members use the process to its full advantage. CI contributes to creating new knowledge grounded in practice, deepens the participants' leadership potential, and strengthens relationships among group members.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT:

This document is one of three that together compose the full report, titled Better Together, on this group's CI. The other two documents are included in this publication. "Peer-Led, Collaborative Fundraising Workshops for Social Change Organizations" is the actual model our group created and is the center section. "Linking Fundraising to Sustainability for Social Change Organizations" shares an in-depth look at the concepts the group developed regarding the specific nature and differences of fundraising for social justice organizations. This paper is inside the back pocket. We propose that the model best fits organizations driven by a commitment to social change and a vision of a better world. Although each document may be read and studied on its own, reading all three will provide a greater in-depth understanding of this CI, its resulting concepts, and proposed strategies.

We also acknowledged that there are as many fundraising approaches as there are nonprofits. Just as individuals are unique, so are nonprofit organizations. Developmental activities should be tailored to fit an organization's needs and culture. This is especially true of grassroots organizations driven by social justice values. Fundraising within this context is very different from fundraising in other nonprofit organizations such as large charities, hospitals, and museums.

Powder River Basin Resource Council members speaking out together.

As fundraising guru Kim Klein explains in her book Fundraising for Social Change, grassroots organizations must look at alternative approaches to fundraising models because of:

- **Unfamiliarity** — Their organizations are not household names.
- **Unconventionality** — The issues they address often challenge people's beliefs.
- **Idealism** — Sympathizers may think their causes are too idealistic.
- **Financial Constraints** — They have little money to get started and have to work harder to reach the point where they can do mass mail or phone campaigns and high-tech marketing.

First, we acknowledge our differences

Our CI comprised six participants and two facilitators. Very pragmatic reasons motivated us to take part in the CI: The work each of us did was, in one way or another, directly associated with ensuring sufficient resources for our organization's viability.

While all of us were working for social change within grassroots organizations, we had to acknowledge up front that there were several factors that made us dramatically different from each other. Those factors included:

Life Cycle — Organizations go through life cycles. Fundraising will be different for an organization in its fourth year of existence compared to one that has been around for more than 30 years. Older organizations may appear to have withstood the test of time in one sense, but at the same time, they run the risk of exhausting their ability to find new sources of funding. The two longest-running groups in our CI reported having problems accessing new large grants. Both compensated for this by collaborating with partners and by organizing coalitions to seek new funding sources.

Culture — Fundraising for a cause such as ending the death penalty presents different challenges when compared to a cause such as saving a cultural heritage or the environment. In each instance there are different cultural and ideological sensibilities that must be considered when developing storylines for successful fundraising.

Structure — Two of our organizations, the day laborers group and the death penalty group, represent national coalitions with chapters or affiliate groups, each with their own leadership and separate fundraising activities. We discussed how the national groups have different issues from, say, a group imbedded and working within a rural community such as Sapelo Island, Georgia, or Marvel, Arkansas.

Fundraising Roles — Only one of us, Suzanne Bring of Jewish Community Action, devoted herself to fundraising as her primary responsibility. Two of us, Alice Kim and John Arvizu, were involved in fundraising as well as programmatic work. The rest of us engaged in fundraising as executive directors. In other words, fundraising was one of many responsibilities within our organizations.

We acknowledged the significance of these factors because they emerged during our reflections and ultimately influenced the outcome of our CI.

MEETING 1

Organizational sustainability was our focus

Our CI met in several cities nationwide, in retreat-like settings. We usually chose sites close to one of the participants' home city, yet far enough away that there was no temptation to check in at the office. Each of us entered the first meeting hoping that the CI experience would help with our individual fundraising activities. We were each expecting a practical, down-to-earth inquiry process rather than a series of theoretical discussions.

The issues we were to consider had already been chosen for us months earlier during a Leadership for a Changing World meeting, where key fundraising themes were identified and jotted on a large notepad during a brainstorming with a large group. The themes that emerged included:

- Capacity building;
- Long-term fundraising;
- Alternative funding sources (including earned income);
- Leadership development;
- Organizational development;
- Leadership succession;
- Future growth patterns;
- Safe, secure, long-term working environments;
- Personal sustainability; and
- Dependencies and independence.

Courtesy of Jewish Community Action

Jewish Community Action members voting together.

Nevertheless, the key theme of concern to our CI group was organizational sustainability.

Arriving at the question required an entire cycle of action followed by reflection. During our discussions, we asked ourselves: What is sustainability? What is financial sustainability? What does it mean to be self-sufficient? Which comes first, leadership development or capacity building? Is developing leadership the same as attracting leadership? By the end of the first meeting our tentative question was:

"How do we develop community leadership to achieve long term sustainability?"

Sapelo Island Cultural & Revitalization Society members working together at the fundraiser.

We agreed that our first action before our next Inquiry meeting would be to interview people within our organizations and our constituencies and determine how they perceive leadership as well as their fundraising roles and responsibilities. We also wanted to explore the factors that encourage leadership development toward long-term sustainability within our particular organizational structures.

Several common concerns began to turn up in our learnings, such as the fundraising responsibility of the Board of Directors, the impact of organizational structure, and the gaps between the grassroots and leadership.

MEETING 2

The "toolbox" concept emerges

At our second meeting, each of us presented findings from the interviews we conducted at our organizations. It was during this process that our organizational differences and challenges became most apparent. For example, we learned that the Powder River Basin Resource Council prioritizes its work based on resolutions passed at annual meetings. Jewish Community Action, on the other hand, carries out its mission by forming coalitions with other organizations. National Day Laborer Organizing Network is challenged with fundraising for itself as well as working toward the sustainability of the individual groups within the network. The Campaign to End the Death Penalty, however, has independent chapters ranging from well-organized groups to small loosely organized clusters of families affected by the death penalty. Each pays dues based on a sliding scale. Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society is membership-based, but only descendants of the island's original Gullah/Geechee families may vote and serve on the board.

Naturally, our organizational charts were drastically different, too. Yet, we all acknowledged that our boards had one thing in common: They were not as engaged in fundraising as they should be. The role often fell on staff.

By the end of the meeting, we agreed to create a product, perhaps a "toolbox." We wanted to focus more specifically on the "how" of raising money for social change organizations, which led us to the real question we wanted to pursue:

"How do we raise money to develop sustainable social change organizations?"

There was a consensus that our goal was to emerge from the CI with concrete information that would work for our organizations. We would document good practices, thus transforming our tacit knowledge into formal knowledge worth sharing with others.

MEETING 3

The process was the path to the answer

We entered the third meeting with the goal of defining the basic structure of the "toolbox," of "fleshing out" some of the broad areas identified earlier, finding specific examples and strategies for fundraising work. We also wanted to identify new sources of information and reflection to support our inquiry.

We arrived with a complete inventory of strategies discussed in our previous meetings. But by the end of the meeting, much had changed in our understanding and goals for this CI.

CI participants in discussion.

This meeting proved to be a "watershed" moment in our CI and the beginning of what we would come to understand as our "epiphanies" about our inquiry. The change partly came about because of one of the activities we used for facilitating the meeting — peer consulting.

In peer consulting, we divided into pairs, and each person presented her action while the other person listened and asked questions. Then the pairs worked on seeking insights and examples that could help develop new strategies. The person in the "consultant" role worked with the other in a supportive but also probing and questioning manner to challenge and move the thinking forward. Through this exercise, we were able to identify concise and practical strategies for each person engaged in the exercise.

However, we still felt overwhelmed with our task of selecting themes and resources for our toolbox. The three meetings had produced many findings about strategies for fundraising for social change organizations. These had come from presentations and discussions of our individual actions, from information about workshops some of us had attended, and from books we had read.

Sensing the group's frustration, Theresa asked a pivotal question: "Who are we answering this question for?"

The resounding response: "For ourselves and our own organizations."

This reminder, in combination with the positive response to the peer consulting exercise, triggered an interesting reframing of our work.

CI participants in discussion.

We wondered: Could it be that the CI process was the path to our answer?

We started to question the usefulness of the toolbox idea, which seemed to be driving our inquiry. We began to doubt that we could offer solutions that had not already been offered before. We also reframed our fourth meeting, at which a fundraising consultant was to share a presentation with the group. We decided that, instead, the consultant would work with each of us on a specific fundraising challenge encountered at our organization, and the group would observe and make collective sense of the consultation.

In considering what had been of most value to us from what we had learned about our question to date, we began to notice the value of our systematic conversations over time about our work. Indeed, the CI process itself was emerging as a useful tool in supporting our fundraising efforts.

"The idea that this CI serves as a mentor to each participant is important," Alice noted, "and it would be good to figure out how we can develop mentoring groups or individuals locally to support our fundraising work."

John added, "The value of collectively seeking the answers to our questions is clear: a [leader] needs a group of mentors like this for our own work…a 'CI-like' process for each of us."

Suzanne, reflecting on the organizational diversity of our CI participants, noted that even though our organizations were diverse, representing different life cycles and leadership structures, we could still learn from each other using the CI process.

We began to consider what kind of product might result from our CI that would reflect this new understanding. Perhaps we could seek funding to continue the CI process in order to formalize our ideas about peer consulting. Perhaps we could consider how to form our own local CI groups. Perhaps we could work together to formulate and refine our organizations' fundraising plans as a test of our new ideas.

Whatever the outcome, it was clear that the focus of the CI had shifted, and the work of the next three meetings ought to support the new direction of the inquiry.

MEETING 4

We find the answer through collective learning

During the fourth meeting, a specialist in nonprofit fundraising conducted consultations around each participant's fundraising challenges, with the rest of the CI group observing the session fishbowl style. Prior to the meeting, the specialist was given details about each organization, so she would be familiar with the histories, organizational structures, budgets, etc. The CI participants were able to ask specific questions and hear the specialist's opinion about how to address particular issues.

This was followed by a sense-making session, in which we noted how we were able to learn about our own fundraising challenges from our colleagues' sessions with the specialist. In other words, even though the questions and issues were very specific, each listener was able to gain something valuable from the experience.

It was noted that typical fundraising workshops are often not able to address each organization's challenges in individual consulting sessions. At most workshops, participants may work on their own details, but they miss the opportunity to understand their issues in comparison to those of their colleagues. They miss the opportunity to engage in collective learning.

KEY EPIPHANIES OF THE CI PROCESS:

A CI group needs to own the question. This requires that participants clearly decide for whom they are answering their question. When we remembered that we wanted to answer the question primarily for ourselves and our own organizations, we were able to approach the question without the pressure of finding the answer for someone else. It was this freedom and individualization of the process that allowed the group to see the process itself as part of the answer to its question, and to recognize that this might still be of benefit to others outside our group.

We had to acknowledge that many of our ideas were not new. The hard work and actions of the first meetings produced much concrete information about our question, with insights and details about strategies helpful to our practice. But we also recognized that the formulas and tricks of the trade we shared were not particularly new or different from those offered in the resources activists already use (workshops, books, and consultants). As we shared our own experiences and the knowledge we each had drawn from these resources, we realized that it was the conversations and the process of sharing that helped support our organizational and personal challenges associated with fundraising.

Key elements of the CI process helped us focus. Setting aside time for work and reflection, multiple meetings, time between meetings, equality of time for all participants to contribute, emphasis on listening to others and learning from others, and finally, seeing our peers as expert teachers, all led the group to see the CI process itself as a viable tool.

OUR INSIGHTS:

Four recurring themes are revealed

The insights and information collected and shared over the course of the CI process were very helpful to our practice. The value added was in how this information helped us support each other to address our organizational and personal fundraising challenges. In fact, it was in light of this support that our broader "findings" made sense and represented new insights worth reporting.

Our conversations covered a myriad of topics, ranging from issues of organizational effectiveness to the ideological roots of our work. Nevertheless, four recurring themes moved us forward in the inquiry. It was within the context of unpacking these that we arrived at the idea of the peer support model.

We have framed these insights as propositions for fundraisers in social change organizations. While we discuss them in-depth in another paper, here we present a few highlights to illustrate how the collective process not only offered new insights that enriched our work, but also led us to the conclusion that the process could become an important tool for fundraisers.

The four discoveries we captured from our conversations are:

- The meaning of "sustainability" must focus on fundraising to develop sustainable organizations. Clarifying the meaning assigned to "sustainability" is a key task of strategic fundraising.
- Fundraising for sustainability cannot take place independently of leadership development in social change organizations.
- Linking fundraising and sustainability requires strategically managing the organization's culture because of its unique nature in social change organizations.
- When the focus of fundraising is sustainability, fundraising becomes an organization-wide responsibility.

MEETING 5

Peer consulting helps us refine our ideas

Our fifth meeting became a testing ground for the group's idea concerning the role of a CI-like process, or what could be called "cooperative fundraising planning." We agreed to work on fundraising plans (or a portion of a plan) for our next fiscal year, using a useful format that the consultant had introduced. We used the peer consulting method to help each other refine the plan during the meeting.

We brought our financial information with us and advanced our plan at the meeting with a colleague acting as consultant. But before engaging our peer-consultant, we took time alone to do more work on our own. This "time out of time" to really focus on the "work away from work" proved important. Structured individual thinking and writing time are hard to carve out during regular work hours. Next, the consulting pairs began their work.

The exercise was successful. The group felt ready to create a model, using as input our experience with the CI. We realized this model could be used in our own communities and perhaps be shared with other social change organizations.

MEETING 6

The model takes shape

During our final meeting, the model was outlined as each of us shared our vision of how the guidelines for replicating our experience might look. We identified all the factors that would have to be considered — the ideal number of participants, how often they should meet, how the process should be facilitated, and so on. One discussion centered around where the CI group should meet.

Our CI received full funding from New York University, a partner with Leadership for a Changing World. Thus, we were able to meet in several cities. However, we recognized that many of the struggling organizations that would use our model would not have such generous support.

So, as we combined our ideas, we kept in mind that our model would have to be flexible. Organizations of varying sizes, missions, ages, and organizational structures would have to be able to adapt it to their needs.

We were excited by the many shapes our model could take. Our ideas flowed easily. It was a very different meeting from our first one 18 months earlier.

From the start, the CI process itself proved to be one of the most positive factors in helping support our work to make us more effective in our fundraising. Yet, we didn't immediately see it as the answer to our question.

We struggled. We grew frustrated. Some of us even questioned the usefulness of our participation in the CI. Yet, at the moment of our collective epiphany, it all began to make sense. It was in that instant that we discovered that the collaboration of people who play similar roles in diverse organizations produces a synergy that encourages creative problem-solving.

Courtesy of Jewish Community Action

Jewish Community Action members planning together.

We set out to create a new toolbox but soon realized it would be filled with used tools. So, we carved a key instead, a key we were eager to share with others tirelessly fighting for a better world. Our CI process was the key to a sacred space where we could reflect; a space where there was a collaborative spirit and equality in spite of our differences; a space that was safe and supportive; a space that would sustain us.

Suggested Readings

Alinsky, Saul. *Reveille for Radicals.* New York: Vintage, 1989.

Klein, Kim. *Fundraising for Social Change.* Hoboken: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Klein, Kim. *Fundraising for the Long Haul.* Hoboken: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Terkel, Studs. *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Difficult Times.* New York: New Press, 2003.

About the Cooperative Inquiry Facilitators and Participants

The following were participants and facilitators in this cooperative inquiry. The Research Center for Leadership in Action, a program of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University, led the research component of the inquiry.

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Acknowledgements
The members of the Leadership for a Changing World Research and Documentation team at the Research Center for Leadership in Action would like to acknowledge the many contributions of co-researchers, partners, and other social change leaders in LCW who have been active participants in shaping our learning. We want to particularly thank the Ford Foundation for its generous support of the LCW program and the Research and Documentation effort.

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program
Leadership for a Changing World is a program of the Ford Foundation that recognizes and supports community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it seeks to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees receive $115,000 and participate in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research and a strategic communications effort. LCW is a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and RCLA, NYU Wagner.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University
The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) promotes practice-grounded, social-science based, interdisciplinary research that will help strengthen both the theory and the practice of leadership in public service. The Center for Leadership in Action is based at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. It was launched in August 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation.

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Published 2007

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Better Together:

Linking Fundraising to Sustainability for Social Change Organizations

Written by: Sonia Ospina
With co-authors: John Arvizu, Suzanne Bring, Theresa Holden, Michele Johnson, Alice Kim, Kevin Lind, and Beatrice Shelby

Why is fundraising for social change so complex and full of challenges?

- Social change organizations are typically led by the communities most affected by economic, social, and racial injustice—which means that unlike a symphony orchestra or private school, they are not usually connected to wealthy individual donors.
- Foundation and corporate giving focus on the arts, education, health, and social services—rarely on progressive social change.
- Foundation and corporate grants are usually project-specific and time-limited. They are rarely intended for long-term, general operations.
- Social change organizations are often volunteer-led (a strength), but short-staffed (a weakness). Paid staff must work the mission of an organization, even while maintaining the organizational backbone (keeping the lights on, administering payroll, raising money, etc.).

In order to build social change, organizations doing the work must be able to sustain themselves. Sustainability depends on a reliable revenue stream so that staff, space, materials, and technology can facilitate the work, even when the organization is led by community volunteer leadership.

A group of award recipients and colleagues from Leadership for a Changing World—Group 4 (LCW-G4)—formed a cooperative inquiry (CI) (see box below) to explore this topic. This inquiry was one aspect of LCW's mission to engage participants in various research activities about the nature of their leadership.

What is Cooperative Inquiry?

Cooperative inquiry (CI) is a participatory research technique in which a small group of participants use their own experience to generate insights around an issue that is of burning concern to all of them. In this type of inquiry, participants formulate a question, agree upon a course of action, individually engage in action through their work, and then collectively make meaning from the data generated by their actions. This cycle of reflection-action-reflection is repeated several times until the group feels it has successfully addressed its concerns. On occasion, facilitators support the group to ensure that its members use the process to its full advantage. CI contributes to creating new knowledge grounded in practice, deepens the participants' leadership potential, and strengthens relationships among group members.

When invited to join a CI group to address a leadership question important to their work, several LCW-G4 participants gravitated to the issues of fundraising and organizational sustainability.

For 18 months, six participants—Alice Kim, Beatrice Shelby, John Arvizu, Kevin Lind, Michele Johnson, and Suzanne Bring—and two facilitators—Sonia Ospina and Theresa Holden—engaged in a systematic inquiry that brought them together (six meetings, two-to-three days each) to explore these issues. All hoped that participating in this cooperative inquiry would result in the development of practical ways to improve fundraising activities. Of concern to all was the relationship between fundraising and organizational sustainability. The group engaged in cycles of action and reflection to address the following question:

How do we raise money to develop sustainable social change organizations?

The answer cannot be given in a straightforward narrative. Rather, this CI proposes a model of explicit, deliberate, and sustained peer-support for those who fundraise on behalf of social change organizations. We describe this model in an additional paper.

The inquiry triggered considerable exchange of theoretical and practical ideas about the relationship between organizational sustainability and fundraising, based on the participants' many years of experience. Ideas were captured from facilitators' notes, taped session transcripts, flip-chart notes, and participants' self-reflection. This paper synthesizes vital insights derived from these records and articulates key propositions with regard to engaging in strategic fundraising for organizational sustainability.

Four central themes recurred during this CI, all of which will be further explored in this paper:

- The need to clarify the meaning of "sustainability";
- The need to make explicit the intimate connection between leadership development and fundraising;
- The need to shift the organization's culture so as to link fundraising and sustainability; and
- The need to frame fundraising as an organization-wide responsibility.

At the same time, CI participants described multiple, competing demands that affect the success of fundraising efforts, as summarized in this table:

Raising money for long-term sustainability	**VS.**	**Raising money for urgent short-term goals**
Raising money for an organization's local or chapter work	**VS.**	**Raising money for an organization's national work**
Investing time in developing new leadership	**VS.**	**Spending time raising money immediately and quickly**
Using development activities primarily to raise money	**VS.**	**Using development activities to create community and further the mission of the organization**
Seeking grants from foundations and corporations	**VS.**	**Fundraising from grassroots sources (i.e., individuals, small businesses, congregations)**
Segregating development responsibilities into specific staff and/or leadership roles	**VS.**	**Sharing fundraising responsibilities broadly throughout organization's staff and volunteer leadership**

We caution the reader about the limitations of our insights which in general, we believe can be successfully applied to other nonprofit organizations of the particular type we represent, that is, grassroots organizations driven by social justice values. These are organizations in which the structure, activities, and leadership process are grounded in a commitment to imagine and create a different world. However, we also understand that important variations among social change organizations affect how each approaches the fundraising task. Factors such as culture, organizational structure, the organization's place in its life cycle, mission, and substantive focus must be considered when exploring the practical application of these insights.

About this Document

This document is one of three that together compose the full report, titled Better Together, on this group's CI. The other two documents are included in this publication. ***"The Story of How Arriving at a Question Became the Answer,"*** which tells the story of the inquiry itself, its process, and how the group came to create a model is in the front pocket. ***"Peer-Led, Collaborative Fundraising Workshops for Social Change Organizations,"*** the actual model, is the center section of this publication. Although each document may be read and studied on its own, reading all three will provide a greater in-depth understanding of this inquiry, its resulting concepts, and proposed strategies.

This paper consists of four sections and a conclusion. In the first four sections, we examine four recurring themes and identify tensions associated with each. In the conclusion we present an overview of the paper, offering four propositions in response to the four recurring themes; these propositions are instrumental to answering the question guiding our cooperative inquiry.

We offer the product of our reflection not as the final word on the subject, but as a set of insights from our practice, a practice that helped us think differently about our work. We invite the reader to use this paper and its accompanying work model as an opportunity to reflect on his/her own practice and identify challenges, and to engage in "conversation" with our insights as the beginning of the reader's own inquiry into possible solutions.

Theme #1: The need to clarify the meaning of "sustainability"

We addressed the issue of sustainability from three perspectives, each associated with a distinct organizational need:

- The need to **sustain the organization** over the long run.
- The need to find ways to **sustain stable sources of funding.**
- The need to **create sustainable practices for fundraising.**

While these needs are interrelated in practice, disentangling them through CI sharpened our ability to learn from each other and to take what we learned back to our work.

Over the course of the CI, we identified some necessary conditions for sustainability. Sustainability is about built-in capacity for organizational results. It is about institutionalizing the means to ensure the right operations and the right human capital to produce the desired results. A key precondition to sustainability is that all members of an organization "own" the organization's mission. Such "ownership" will reduce dependence on particular individual leaders and will more evenly distribute the responsibility for the organization's long-term viability.

Organizational sustainability requires financial stability with some degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Sustainability is the ability to continue the work with minimal or no outside input, and it is heavily dependent on an organization's core constituency or membership. Again, staff, members, and constituents must take ownership of the organization, and such ownership must be passed down to younger members. Concomitantly, cultivating the next generation of leaders well in advance of leadership transitions is a key precondition for sustainability.

Discussing the preconditions to organizational sustainability exposed tensions surrounding fundraising in social change organizations:

Competing demand: Raising money for long-term sustainability versus raising money for urgent short term goals.

A social change organization needs resources to address the long-term interests of its constituent group and to address the immediate needs of individuals who might daily experience acute challenges to survival. At the same time, organizations want to engage in "movement building" for social change (a long-term need), and they want to be responsive to rapid fluctuations in local ordinances, attitudes, and events.

For example, one participant, John, reported that the National Day Laborer Organizing Network's (NDLON) challenge is to build a national network representing the collective, long-term interests of the immigrant, day laborer community, while supporting the immediate, often urgent needs of NDLON's constituents—individual day laborers themselves.

The more closely an organization works with a particular constituency affected by this kind of problem, the more the organization experiences this tension.

Beatrice, another participant, linked this dilemma to a large gap between communities and philanthropic organizations. Parents served by the Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center (BGACDC) live with profound local problems. Yet foundations, especially those at the national level, are far removed from these problems. We talked about the hard work it takes to link the two worlds.

Yet another participant, Michele, reported that community members expect to access the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society's (SICARS) organizational resources for personal use, without understanding that such funds come from foundation or federal grants. Keeping within grant requirements alienates the community and brings stress to those who must address the requests for help. Addressing the tension between long-term sustainability and short-term urgency requires considerable human sensitivity and managerial skill.

Competing demand: Raising money for an organization's local or chapter work versus raising money for an organization's national work.

Organizations like NDLON and the Campaign to End the Death Penalty (CEDP) work at the local level as chapters and at the national level through a national office or coordinating body. Such organizations experience structural tension when raising money for the local work or chapters while trying to do the same for the national efforts or office. This is a complicated problem, given that local and national efforts are typically interdependent. John argued that the strength of a network and the strength of each organizational member are inextricably linked. Alice agreed, stating that when chapters do good local work, they tend to support the national work through chapter dues, publicity, and volunteer leadership.

This tension produces potential competition for grants. What if the chapters and the national office are seeking the same grants, during the same or concurrent grant rounds? To complicate matters further, various chapters are often at different stages of growth and have dissimilar fundraising needs.

In situations in which local chapters pay membership dues to the national organization, the national may find itself weakened should locals become unable to pay those dues. John suggested that fundraising staff help ensure the sustainability of local chapters, while recognizing the need to sustain the national effort or office. Discovering how to ensure attention to both organizational levels is a key issue for effective fundraising.

Fundraising for long-term sustainability also requires that an organization engage in continuous reevaluation of its relationship with constituents, foundations, and individual donors. Organizations must avoid depending on too narrow a base of financial supporters and must imbue emergent leadership with a clear understanding of the organization's fundraising strategies.

Theme #2: The need to make explicit the intimate connection between leadership development and fundraising

Sustainability in social change organizations requires leadership development, and leadership development creates sustainable organizations: The two are inseparable.

Many social change organizations are grounded in the belief that organizations and constituent communities must be organically connected. In these organizations, leadership is not top down; rather, it must emerge from the community that benefits from the organization. When an organization has relied on leaders from outside the constituent community, it is a mighty task to shift to leadership from within the constituent community. Members of the constituent community—which may be one that has struggled against oppression—may find it difficult to see themselves in positions of organizational leadership and may continue ceding positions to others from outside of the organization's constituency. This self-perpetuating cycle often runs contrary to the organization's social change purpose. Therefore, organizations seeking social change must discover and develop leadership from within.

Beatrice reported that this is not easily accomplished at BGACDC. Twenty-eight years ago, BGACDC was formed by a group of parents seeking to provide opportunities for their children after of regular school day activities. Over the years, hundreds of young people have grown up with the benefit and support of BGACDC. These children are now parents; the founders are grandparents; and the organization needs new leadership, which has not naturally emerged from the constituent community. Therefore, BGACDC is offering programs for adults between 18 and 39 years of age to develop new leaders. Even at a social change organization created by its own constituent community, new leadership must be cultivated.

Few "schools" exist to train and develop community leadership from within communities. There are, of course, hundreds of programs in the United States, but most are for people in the for-profit world, or those who already have some higher level of formal education and/or leadership experience. Therefore, it is often left to individual organizations to discover methods of leadership development and to develop and run their own leadership training programs.

Many social change organizations prioritize grassroots consensus-building to set goals for their organizations. They seek the wisdom of their constituents to govern their organizations. From this constituency, these organizations find new leadership and build the connection between programs and funding. Without a clear connection between money supporting the organization and the organization's programs, the constituent community cannot become self-empowered. Therefore, the need for grassroots leadership must be developed specifically to participate in fundraising. Several challenges accompany this need.

Competing demand: Investing time in developing new leadership versus spending time raising money immediately and quickly.

The amount of time needed to cultivate new leadership and the time required to raise money for immediate needs are in direct conflict. Fundraising is both urgent and time consuming, which means that many organizations will simply allow the most experienced person to do most or all of it. Little time is allocated for developing new leadership.

In addition, philanthropy and fundraising are complicated and require skills, knowledge, and confidence. A considerable gap exists between the lives of the young leaders-to-be from the constituent community and the world of philanthropy and all its intricacies. But it is crucial that social change organizations develop fundraising leaders from within their constituent communities and that these leaders take control of the fundraising. Concurrent development of new leadership and fundraising, through peer mentoring or collaborative problem-solving, is one potential answer.

Theme #3: The need to shift the organization's culture, so as to link fundraising and sustainability

Fundraising for a social change organization cannot be disengaged from the key values that drive the work. This is true for any nonprofit. But the work of social change organizations extends well beyond instrumental goals to achieve programmatic success. It is aligned with a broader vision for a better world. In this context, fundraisers are also always organizers, advocates, and committed activists for social change.

Other staff and volunteer leadership might be reluctant to recognize this. They often see fundraising as secondary work. Bringing in money to support the main work is someone else's job. When funds are scarce, of course, eyes turn to those in charge of the fundraising, but otherwise, a culture of complacency can develop.

The fundraiser often feels alone in his/her efforts to ensure the organization's sustainability. Too often, the organization's culture fails to understand that long-term sustainability must be everyone's concern and responsibility. Hence, the organization's culture around fundraising must be managed strategically, to help all staff understand fundraising, and to incorporate the message that fundraising is about "adding value to the work." However, this reveals yet another tension:

Competing demand: Using development activities primarily to raise money versus using development activities to create community and further the mission of the organization.

Opportunities to engage the constituency in supporting the organization, for example, through individual donations, cultural festivals, raffles, fairs and other grassroots activities, typically have a mission-appropriate educational or community-building component. Fundraising without such associated components is likely to be less effective. Balance between education/community building and fundraising is key. A cultural festival whose primary goal is to raise money will look very different from one whose primary goal is to build pride and knowledge of cultural heritage.

Two participants in our CI work for organizations hold cultural festivals. NDLON's day laborer cultural festival is a community organizing and fundraising tool. The event pays for a local soccer tournament, which is itself a venue to develop key relationships and discover new volunteer leadership. NDLON members sell tickets to the festival and thereby engage in grassroots fundraising. But because the festival is instrumental—organized to support a programmatic event—its quality is not central to its effectiveness. In fact, too much energy spent on festival quality diverts attention away from community organizing goals.

In contrast, SICARS has developed an annual cultural festival to directly strengthen the organization's mission, to promote knowledge about and pride in the history of Sapelo Island and its descendants. The festival is not a fundraising tool but a mission-related activity. At the same time, its potential to become a fundraiser cannot be denied. In the case of both NDLON and SICARS, the question is the same: Where do planners put the most energy, into the mission-related activity of the festival or into fundraising activity?

Competing demand: Seeking grants from foundations and corporations versus fundraising from grassroots sources (i.e., individuals, small businesses, congregations).

Finding the right balance between grassroots fundraising and grant-seeking is key to organizational sustainability. During our CI, some realized that we have been too dependent on grants and need to start paying serious attention to drawing resources from closer constituents. Others noticed that relying heavily on grassroots giving underestimates the potential value of grants. How much time should be devoted to each? What percentage of an organization's budget should come from each? The right mix varies from organization to organization, but we agreed that grassroots fundraising must rise to the occasion, especially when grant income is low.

Grassroots fundraising activities are investments in organizational sustainability. It became clear to our CI group that an organization must have a base of financial support from its own constituents. Relying only or primarily on grants is a recipe for trouble because eventually, foundations shift focus, fund other worthy causes in the community, or indicate preferences for new projects or organizations. No social change organization can depend exclusively upon grants, because constituent leadership (and ownership) of the organization is core to social change work. Membership fees; earned income; and donations from individuals, small businesses, congregations, and civic groups are all examples of grassroots income.

Ultimately, the constituents, staff, and board members should support the organization from the inside out. One CI participant recalled a consultant's words to this participant's board: "Why should others give to you if you don't give to yourselves?"

This is tricky in social change organizations that work with low-income constituents. Even when community members' giving capacity is modest, the organization cannot assume that there is no giving capacity; such an assumption is usually wrong and always patronizing and disempowering.

At the same time, it is hard to solicit financial contributions from constituents who are already strained. However, organizations must ask each person to make a contribution that is meaningful in the context of his/her means.

Membership organizations are challenged to determine a membership contribution amount that allows broad participation, the need to demand accountability for membership fees, and the desire to ensure that no members are alienated from the work because of inability to pay. Collectively determining what constitutes membership, what degree of activity and financial contributions are expected of members, and what mechanisms facilitate membership accountability can clarify the commitment and tasks associated with grassroots fundraising.

In summary, fundraising in social change organizations requires both managing the organization's culture and using the culture of the constituent community to develop grassroots fundraising that is effective and sustainable.

Theme #4: The need to frame fundraising as an organization-wide responsibility

In organizations that represent a grassroots constituency, development needs to harmonize with the organization's mission. All involved, especially board and non-development staff, must understand the full picture of the organization, including its financial needs. When this is done well, a synergy develops between the organization's core work and its fundraising, and fundraising is not isolated from organizational programs. Even when there is one dedicated fundraiser on staff, all others, including the executive director, program and operations staff, board, and other key volunteer leadership, must view fundraising for organizational sustainability as part of their work, as well.

In this CI, all participants had multiple roles in their organizations. Each was also the primary fundraiser. Several participants reported that use of external fundraising consultants proved disappointing. Kevin said that hiring a consultant to design and implement a capital campaign was ineffective, because the consultant needed to be steeped in the culture of the organization and its constituents in order to be successful. Much time and money was spent on this consultant; ultimately, the organization's board devolved the capital campaign responsibility onto the executive director.

How the role of primary fundraiser is managed in social change organizations has important consequences. Specialized fundraisers or executive directors left to do the work alone experience isolation and stress. At the same time, when the key fundraiser has too many other responsibilities, he or she can easily become overwhelmed. Between program deadlines, organizing tasks, and periodic crises, grassroots fundraising and grant-seeking work can lose priority in any given day or week, to the detriment of the organization's long-term sustainability.

Competing demand: Segregating development responsibilities into specific staff and/or leadership roles versus sharing fundraising responsibilities broadly throughout an organization's staff and volunteer leadership.

Should ultimate accountability for fundraising rest with one individual, who becomes an expert and devotes all energy to it? Or should this primary fundraiser also devote time to the organization's programs? Or should fundraising be spread among several different people? Finally, is fundraising the responsibility of paid staff, of board and other volunteer leadership, or of both?

Distribution of fundraising responsibilities is sometimes random, but more often, deliberate. There is a great deal of variation among social change organizations. In this CI group, one person specialized in fundraising, others were chiefly responsible, and still others were executive directors with a full range of responsibilities. Each structure has its advantages and disadvantages.

Retaining a staff person dedicated to fundraising means that at least one person constantly thinks about this work. It also means paying for a specialist, or investing in training existing staff. Finally, in hiring a fundraising professional, the organization must ensure that this individual shares its passion for the mission and programs, to minimize the risk of isolation and disconnection.

Opting for shared responsibility for fundraising often means that all think about the future of the organization. But staff might resent fundraising work, viewing it as peripheral to the organization's mission and programs. Finally, when a single person has sole responsibility for fundraising while having other significant operational or program responsibilities, the former can quickly become swallowed up by the demands of the latter. Several times during this CI, several participants reported difficulty in focusing on fundraising-related actions because of urgent programmatic needs.

Participants in this CI agreed that building a collective approach to fundraising in our organizations would be ideal. It became clear to us that a "one person" or "one department" approach does not support the goal of organizational sustainability, nor would it help create sustainable fundraising practices. Even when one person holds the job of fundraiser, fundraising really belongs to the entire organization. Systematic and ongoing training and sharing of knowledge can develop collective responsibility for fundraising, while helping those involved feel less overwhelmed.

Four key conclusions about strategic fundraising in social change organizations

As we explored the relationship between fundraising and organizational sustainability, our conversations covered myriad topics, ranging from issues of organizational effectiveness all the way to the ideological roots of our work. Four central themes recurred throughout this CI group; each of these themes has been described in this paper. We therefore offer four conclusions about strategic fundraising in social change organizations:

Conclusion #1: Fundraising in social change organizations means not only finding financial resources for right now, but also fundraising for sustainability. Clarifying "sustainability" is key to strategic fundraising.

Conclusion #2: Fundraising for sustainability cannot take place independent of leadership development in social change organizations. If fundraising is redefined—from finding financial resources to ensuring that there is an organization to pass to the next generation of leaders—then ensuring that new leaders care about sustainability is key to fundraising.

Conclusion #3: Linking fundraising and sustainability requires strategic management of the organization's culture. The unique culture of social change organizations, as well as the nature of the constituent community, presents specific challenges requiring explicit attention.

Conclusion #4: When the focus of fundraising is sustainability, it becomes an organization-wide responsibility, even when an organization has a staff person dedicated to fundraising.

These conclusions have not been tested yet in other contexts; their power, however, comes from the collective wisdom of this CI. This CI used several systematic cycles of action and reflection to glean knowledge from personal and organizational stories, unique and common challenges, identification of best practices, and peer consulting. We invite others to explore these conclusions within the context of their own work.

About the Cooperative Inquiry Facilitators and Participants

The following were participants and facilitators in this cooperative inquiry. The Research Center for Leadership in Action, a program of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University, led the research component of the inquiry.

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Acknowledgements
The members of the Leadership for a Changing World Research and Documentation team at the Research Center for Leadership in Action would like to acknowledge the many contributions of co-researchers, partners, and other social change leaders in LCW who have been active participants in shaping our learning. We want to particularly thank the Ford Foundation for its generous support of the LCW program and the Research and Documentation effort.

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program
Leadership for a Changing World is a program of the Ford Foundation that recognizes and supports community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it seeks to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees receive $115,000 and participate in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research and a strategic communications effort. LCW is a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and RCLA, NYU Wagner.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University
The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) promotes practice-grounded, social-science based, interdisciplinary research that will help strengthen both the theory and the practice of leadership in public service. The Center for Leadership in Action is based at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. It was launched in August 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation.

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Strategic Communications & Planning provided editorial support.
Steve Kulp provided design and production services.