

BUILDING THE POWER OF WOMEN OF COLOR TO CHANGE PUBLIC POLICY

Lessons Learned From Ms. Foundation for Women Grantmaking



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Note: This report is based exclusively on information from grantees and program staff. It is not a review of academic or other literature, but rather a deep listening of grantee voices and analysis of our grantmaking.

“One of the many important lessons women can bring in this era of global politics...[is] that making things better on an immediate local level is a vital part of creating real systemic change.”

Colonias Development Corporation
Report to the Ms. Foundation for Women

Executive Summary

The Ms. Foundation’s vision is of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, immigration status, sexuality, disability or age. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued.

The Ms. Foundation has long felt that it is crucial to build the power of women of color to change public policy and thereby the systems and institutions that perpetuate discrimination and inequality around the U.S. Women of color—themselves disproportionately affected by unjust and flawed policies—are uniquely positioned to fight for change that is more inclusive and just. Drawing on their lived experiences across gender, race and class and their roles as caregivers, workers and community leaders, women of color develop and implement solutions that address not only their own needs and priorities, but also those of their families, communities and society as a whole.

Through sustained, multi-year financial and technical support, the Ms. Foundation has built the capacity of women of color-led organizations to change public policy at local, state, national and Tribal levels. Between 2003 and 2007, the Ms. Foundation made \$17.6 million in grants; **women of color-led organizations received \$7.3 million—or 41 percent—of these funds.** This significant commitment is more than *four times* the average for the 25 largest foundations.

This report describes the impact of recent Ms. Foundation funding on women of color-led organizations and public policy. It also documents lessons learned by Ms. Foundation grantees about the practice of women of color-led policy change.

In particular, our findings draw on the rich experience of 58 women of color-led organizations that received at least two years of Ms. Foundation support between 2003 and 2007 *and* strove to influence public policy. Their policy work not only included advocacy to inform legislative policy, but also efforts to influence the policies and practices of public agencies—from the federal Food and Drug Administration to local school boards. To document the impact of our funding and extract lessons learned, we reviewed three years worth of grantee reports, surveyed organizations that received grants between fiscal years 2005 and 2007 and conducted in-depth interviews with program staff and grantees.

We found that Ms. Foundation grantees achieved significant success in their advocacy campaigns: 63 percent of the grantees studied had at least one policy win between 2005 and 2007. There were several wins wherein we believe Ms. Foundation support made a significant difference, including:

- The creation and passage of the “Safety for Indian Women” title of the 2005 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act;

- The defeat—in 2005 and 2006—of parental notification ballot initiatives in California;

- Policy decisions promoting comprehensive sexuality education in California, Colorado, Washington and New Mexico;

- A change in California law that protects women who do not meet traditional “high-risk” criteria from being denied HIV testing and medical services at free clinics; and

Significant steps towards reforming the criminal justice system in New Orleans.

Grantees confirm that Ms. Foundation grant and non-grant support played a critical role in their policy advocacy. In our survey they cited the Ms. Foundation's grantmaking, convenings and communications activities as contributing to their capacity to influence policy. In grantee reports, they also detailed numerous ways in which the Foundation enabled them to engage actively in policy work. The Ms. Foundation often provided long-term general support, which gave groups time to organize in their communities, build relationships and hire policy staff as well as the flexibility to respond quickly to policy opportunities and challenges as they arose. Grantees cited deep relationships of trust with Ms. Foundation staff, which helped them address stumbling blocks and gave leaders the support they needed to stay the course. Many women of color-led organizations received their first, or at least early, funding from the Ms. Foundation, while there were others for whom the Ms. Foundation was their *only* source of support for policy advocacy.

Grantee Lessons

To analyze the lessons grantees have learned about how to most effectively build the power of women of color to change public policy, we looked closely at three groups of grantees:

The seven organizations funded by the *Public Voices, Public Policy: Realizing the Power of Women of Color* initiative;

Three women of color-led grantees that played a key role in the defeat of parental notification ballot initiatives in California in 2005 and 2006; and

Six women of color-led grantees of the Women and AIDS Fund (WAF) and the recently created National Women and AIDS Collective, formed in 2005 by WAF grantees and housed at the Ms. Foundation.

These grantees varied greatly in size and worked on an array of issues, at various policymaking levels and with diverse constituencies. Still, their experiences exhibit similar themes and lessons about how to build the power of women of color to change public policy. Over and over again, we heard about the importance of:

Building relationships and trust;

Leadership development and base-building;

Coalition-building;

Combining insider and outsider strategies;

Organizing across issues, policymaking levels and constituencies;

Language and culture; and

Messages and messengers that resonate in communities of color.

Lessons for Grantmakers

This report outlines how and why foundations should provide significant support to organizations led by women, people of color and specifically, women of color, if they want to promote progressive social change. Support that builds the capacity of and brings such diverse voices to the table is essential to building movements and strengthening democracy for several reasons:

1. A “true democracy” must include all people. By offering women of color—and women from low-income communities—the training, support and research they need to gain a voice at decision-making tables, women of color-led organizations contribute significantly towards **strengthening our democracy**.
2. Once they are mobilized and engaged as advocates and voters, communities of color can be a powerful force for progressive social change. And they are most likely to be **mobilized and engaged by organizations that are trusted** and have deep roots in their communities. Foundations need to identify and strengthen organizations that design their programs and leadership structures in ways that **deliberately build the power** of people in their communities.
3. As outsiders, women (especially low-income women, women of color and young women) are more **motivated to change the structures and systems** that govern our society and have more at stake in progressive social change.
4. Due to the life experiences of their constituents and

leaders, organizations led by and for women of color tend to **understand the linkages between issues** and strive to build alliances among progressive organizations working on different issues.

5. Women of color-led organizations tend to **work collaboratively with each other and other progressive organizations**. Over and over, Ms. Foundation grantees discussed how important it was to their policy victories that they had **deep relationships of trust** with their communities and that they cultivated long-term relationships with allied organizations. Women, of course, do not have a monopoly on relationship-building, but it has been shown that they tend to lead by developing relationships and networks.

In sum, women of color-led organizations tend to apply a cross-issue analysis, an understanding of the intersections between race, class and gender, and a focus on collaboration and relationship-building to their advocacy, all of which together serve as the basis for a more powerful and effective movement for progressive social change.

Furthermore, women of color-led organizations have shown that they can be very effective in bringing about changes in policy that benefit not only women, but also their families, communities of color and society as a whole. **Our research points to several reasons why women of color-led organizations have the potential to be particularly effective agents of broad-based progressive social change:**

1. **Women of color leaders**, especially those who share life experiences with their organizations' constituencies, are most likely to **understand the issues of concern** to the women in their communities and **may be more cognizant of the barriers women in the community face** to becoming involved in policy campaigns. By addressing the barriers to organizing and by helping women identify policy solutions to the issues that concern them most, women of color-led organizations can broaden the base of people advocating for progressive change.
2. Organizations led by and for women of color and their communities often focus on issues that are crucial to the

very survival of their leaders and constituents. **Together, organizational members and community advocates have a shared, long-term investment in policy wins**—and in each other; if they are not able to achieve their primary policy goal in the short-term, they take the time to think strategically about how incremental wins can lead to broader wins down the road.

3. Policy decisions that are made with the input of women and people of color early on are more likely to take their specific needs into account, broadening the impact of policy change.
4. Women of color-led organizations are more likely to understand how even well-designed policies can exclude women and people of color when they are implemented. This leads them to **focus on implementation and access** both in crafting policy changes, and after campaigns have been won.
5. Policymakers are **influenced by personal experience and testimony**. Many grantee organizations trained women in communities to speak in front of decision-makers, and are staffed by women who share the life experiences of their constituents.
6. Women of color-led organizations are better able to **craft messages and communications strategies that resonate** in communities of color and spur communities to action. Such organizations are also uniquely positioned to successfully target **ethnic media**.

Recommendations for Grantmakers

There are a number of ways in which foundations can help build the power of women of color and their organizations to change public policy. Ms. Foundation grantees outlined the following priority recommendations:

1. Deliberately **reach beyond the “usual suspects”** and identify potential women of color-led grantees.
2. **Provide long-term general support**. Short of this, there are several specific items funders could underwrite to bolster organizations' policy advocacy capacity.

3. Adequately fund the long and hard work of organizing and base-building and provide the resources it takes to change policy. **Understand that policy change is a slow process** with a lot of ups and downs; community organizing, base-building, leadership development and coalition-building take time and involve activities not immediately tied to policy campaigns.
4. **Provide tailored technical assistance** in skills such as fundraising, communications and organizational development.
5. **Build deep relationships of trust** with your grantees; provide grantees with opportunities for networking and relationship-building through convenings, listservs, conference calls and peer-to-peer exchanges; and **help grantees make strategic connections** with powerful organizations, decision-makers and other funders.



“Change does not happen overnight. It takes time and patience to build leadership.... Groups that gain women’s trust, and not only listen to their needs, but let the women speak for themselves, are the ones that can take political power and translate it into changing public opinion, policy and programs. We have seen time and time again in our work that when we really listen, and provide guidance, but let the women themselves decide on the campaign and their passion, that is when policies change.”

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates
Report to the Ms. Foundation for Women

Introduction

The Ms. Foundation for Women’s vision is of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, immigration status, sexuality, disability or age. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued.

The Ms. Foundation has long felt that it is crucial to build the power of women of color to change public policy and thereby the systems and institutions that perpetuate discrimination and inequality around the U.S. Women of color—themselves disproportionately impacted by unjust and flawed policies—are uniquely positioned to fight for change that is more inclusive and just. Drawing on their lived experiences across gender, race and class and their roles as caregivers, workers and community leaders, women of color develop and implement solutions that address not only their own needs and priorities, but also those of their families, communities and society as a whole.

This report describes the impact of recent Ms. Foundation funding on women of color-led organizations and public policy. It also documents lessons learned by Ms. Foundation grantees about the practice of women of color-led policy change.

In particular, our findings draw on the rich experience of 58 women of color-led organizations that received at least two years of Ms. Foundation support between

2003 and 2007.¹ In one way or another, all of these grantees strove to influence public policy, defined broadly as *changing public systems that govern people’s lives*. This not only included advocacy to inform legislative policy, but also efforts to influence the policies and practices of public agencies—from the FDA to local school boards. To document impact and extract lessons learned, we reviewed three years worth of grantee reports, surveyed organizations that received grants between fiscal years 2005 and 2007 and conducted in-depth interviews with program staff and grantees.

Listening deeply and honestly to the voices of our women of color-led grantees is part of a broader effort by the Ms. Foundation to **build women’s collective power to ignite change**. We aim to change public policy at all levels, with the ultimate goal of transforming the systems that govern women’s lives. We have already incorporated many of the lessons learned from this research into our strategy for building stronger social justice movements by creating and supporting connections—across race, class and gender, across issues and constituencies, across policymaking levels and across the country.

¹ Given the volume of grants being studied, we decided to include all grantees whose executive director or president was a person (usually a woman) of color. The Ms. Foundation’s grantee partners generally include organizations whose leadership reflects the constituencies served. Furthermore, the lessons learned in this report derive from case studies of 16 organizations that worked in communities of color and whose leadership and staff were predominantly people of color.



Ms. Foundation Funding and Women of Color-Led Policy Change

Through sustained, multi-year financial and technical support, the Ms. Foundation has built the capacity of women of color-led organizations to change public policy at local, state, national and Tribal levels. Between 2003 and 2007, the Ms. Foundation made \$17.6 million in grants; **women of color-led organizations received \$7.3 million—or 41 percent—of these funds.** Given the importance of multi-year funding to policy change, the Ms. Foundation awarded \$5.4 million in multi-year funding to 76 women of color-led organizations. The vast majority of these funds—79 percent—was used by grantees (a total of 58 organizations, who constitute the focus of this report) to support their efforts and build their capacity to change public policy. Eighty percent of this public-policy oriented funding supported advocacy exclusively at local, state, regional or Tribal levels. Less than one-fifth (14 percent) of the funds went towards policy work conducted exclusively at the national level, and about one-tenth (seven percent) supported policy work at national *and* state or local levels.

Policy Successes

Ms. Foundation grantees that received multi-year funding and focused on policy change achieved significant success in their advocacy campaigns: **63 percent had at least one policy win between 2005 and 2007.** Campaigns that did not succeed in meeting their policy goals often resulted in broadening an organization's base, deepening its alliances and better preparing it for a win the next time around. Several grantees also worked on issues that are yet to be resolved, such as comprehensive immigration reform.

Policy change often comes about by virtue of collaboration; rarely is any one organization solely responsible for a particular policy outcome, and foundations are even further removed from the ultimate outcome. It is possible, however, to identify when a grantee was instrumental—in some cases crucial—to a

“Ms. absolutely gets what we are about—empowering our community to make systemic change and connecting policy to community. They support our vision that the communities most affected by policy and most underserved—low-income, immigrant and young—must be part of policy change.

And it is not just the grants. The convenings have helped us to sharpen our planning, analysis and evaluation of how we do this work, so that the work does have outcomes. Ms. staff also tell the story of what grantees are doing to their own audiences which is also very helpful and important.”

Interview with Rocio Cordoba, Executive Director
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice

policy victory or when a foundation has contributed greatly to building a grantee’s capacity to advocate effectively. Based on a review of grantee reports from 2005 to 2007, a grantee survey, and in-depth interviews with grantees and program staff, we have identified several policy wins wherein we believe Ms. Foundation support for women of color-led organizations made a significant difference. Among the most important wins are:

The creation and passage of the new “Safety for Indian Women” (Title IX) of the 2005 reauthorization of the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which significantly increased funding for Tribal domestic and sexual violence programs, and stipulates annual consultative sessions between the Department of Justice and Tribal governments.

The defeat—in 2005 and 2006—of parental notification ballot initiatives in California.

The passage of a bill in Colorado that requires health care facilities to inform survivors of sexual assault of the availability of emergency contraception (EC) and requires pharmacies to clearly post whether EC is available.

Legislative victories and policy decisions by boards of education and departments of health promoting comprehensive sexuality education in California, Colorado, Washington and New Mexico.

A change in California law to protect women who do not meet the criteria for traditional “high-risk” groups from being denied HIV testing and medical services at free clinics.

A decision by local elected officials to take the proper steps to ensure that federal AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) funds were released to the US Virgin Islands.

A change in the way the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management regulates Native American traditional plant gatherers in California, and in doing so, sets the stage for government-to-government consultation with non-treaty Tribes.

A decision by the Minnesota Department of Education to recognize Dakota and Ojibwe languages as world languages, allowing for funding of immersion programs for children.

The creation of a visitation policy in San Francisco Juvenile Hall which allows incarcerated mothers to meet with their children in a family-friendly atmosphere.

Significant steps towards reforming the criminal justice system in New Orleans, including the creation of the Office of the Independent Monitor to oversee the police and the overhaul of the Orleans Indigent Defender Board, paving the way for the creation of a fully funded, model juvenile defender office.

Improvements to living conditions in trailer parks for Hurricane Katrina evacuees, including the commencement of public transportation and the closing of four trailer parks with toxic environments.²

There are also numerous examples wherein Ms. Foundation support contributed, but was not necessarily instrumental, to policy wins, or where a grantee was an important but not a lead player in the victories. Among the most significant are:

A 16-fold increase in federal funding—from \$10 million in 2005 to \$160 million in 2006—for family-based treatment for substance-abusing mothers and their children in the child welfare and criminal justice systems. As well, the incorporation of family-based treatment and alternative sentencing as major components of the “Second Chance Act,” signed into law in April 2008.

Provisions in the 2006 reauthorization of welfare reform that protect mothers who face domestic violence from participating in marriage-promotion programs.

FDA approval in 2006 of over-the-counter status for emergency contraception.

A 2005 New Mexico State Supreme Court decision affirming that community voices and social impact must be taken into account in environmental decisions, resulting in part in changes to state solid waste regulations. As well, an Executive Order signed by Governor Bill Richardson recognizing the existence of environmental injustice within the state of New Mexico and its disproportionate impact on people of color and low-income communities, and mandating that environmental justice play a role in state-level environmental decision-making.

The defeat of a 2007 proposal in the California Governor’s budget to cut aid to children receiving welfare after a 60-month time limit.³

Improving Grantee Capacity to Influence Public Policy

Grantee interviews and reports revealed the many ways in which Ms. Foundation support improved grantees’ capacity to influence public policy:

The Ms. Foundation often provided long-term general support. This gave grantees time to organize in their communities and build relationships as well as the flexibility to respond quickly to policy opportunities and challenges.

² The women of color-led grantees that the Ms. Foundation funded that played a key role in these victories are (respectively): Cangleska/Sacred Circle; California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) and Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice; COLOR; CLRJ; COLOR, Odyssey Youth & Young Women United; Women Alive Coalition; Virgin Islands Community AIDS Resource and Education; California Indian Basketweavers Association; Alliance for Early Childhood Professionals; Center for Young Women’s Development; Friends and Families of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children; Lafayette Restoration Center.

³ The women of color-led grantees that the Ms. Foundation funded that played a role in these victories are (respectively): Rebecca Project for Human Rights; LIFETIME; National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health; Colonias Development Corporation; LIFETIME.



Many women of color organizations received their first, or at least early, funding from the Ms. Foundation. This seed money often leveraged much greater resources from other funders.

Even for grantees that were more established and better funded, Ms. Foundation support was sometimes the only source of funding for policy advocacy.

In several cases, Ms. Foundation support allowed grantees to hire dedicated staff to work on policy advocacy.

Grantees also used Ms. Foundation funding to conduct, write and disseminate research to fill the gaps in research on women of color and to build their organizations' credibility. Support for media work was also essential.

Ms. Foundation funding for advocacy had a multiplier effect. Either because it raised an organization's profile or created new government funding streams, the policy advocacy supported by the Ms. Foundation often resulted in increased funding for the organization, which was then used to support additional policy work.

Through convenings and other forms of technical assistance, the Ms. Foundation provided grantees with training on policy advocacy and related skills such as strategic communications.

Informally, Ms. Foundation program staff have pushed grantees to be clear about their policy goals and strategic in their plans to achieve them.

Ms. Foundation program staff generally built deep relationships of trust with grantees. Most grantee leaders felt that the Ms. Foundation shared their vision and understood the challenges they faced. This had tangible benefits, as grantees were more open to sharing problems with Ms. Foundation staff and working out solutions; it also had intangible benefits, affecting grantees' ability to feel supported and stay the course.

The Ms. Foundation helped grantee staff make strategic connections with other organizations and provided opportunities for them to network and present their work at conferences with funders and policymakers.



A survey of women of color-led Ms. Foundation grantees also offers clear evidence of the Foundation's contribution to grantees' capacity to influence policy.⁴ The vast majority of respondents (86 percent or 18 grantees), said that Ms. Foundation funding "contributed greatly or somewhat" to their progress in changing public policies, while 67 percent said it "contributed greatly."

In addition to providing grant support, the Ms. Foundation also regularly brings grantees together for convenings (usually within specific funds) to provide capacity-building opportunities and encourage grantees to connect with and learn from one another. Grantees were asked to indicate the extent to which participation in these convenings helped strengthen their organization's ability to change public policy. Every grantee that replied said that the networking opportunities at the convenings "contributed somewhat or greatly" to their ability to change policy; 81 percent said they "contributed greatly." Similarly, 94 percent said

the convenings' knowledge-building sessions (defined as presentations or discussions on particular policy issues) "contributed somewhat or greatly" to their ability to change policy; 63 percent said they "contributed greatly."

About 90 percent of the grantee respondents felt that the Ms. Foundation's communication and advocacy strategies helped (greatly or somewhat) to build their policy-advocacy capacity. In particular they noted support for the framing of issues, disseminating publications and reports and motivating other funders to support policy advocacy by women of color.

⁴ In July 2008, a survey was sent to 41 women of color-led organizations that received at least two years of consecutive funding from the Ms. Foundation for Women between fiscal years 2005 and 2007. A total of 25 grantees responded (a response rate of 61 percent).



Mississippi ACLU
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Grantee Lessons Learned

To analyze the lessons grantees have learned about how to most effectively build the power of women of color to change public policy, we looked in depth at three groups of grantees:

The seven organizations funded by the *Public Voices, Public Policy: Realizing the Power of Women of Color* initiative;

Three women of color-led grantees that played a key role in the defeat of parental notification ballot initiatives in California in 2005 and 2006;

Six women of color-led grantees of the Women and AIDS Fund (WAF), and the recently created National Women and AIDS Collective (NWAC), formed by WAF grantees and housed at the Ms. Foundation.

Case studies detailing these grantees' experiences can be found on pages 29-33.

These grantees varied greatly in size and worked on an array of issues, at various policymaking levels and with diverse constituencies. Yet their experiences pointed to very similar themes and lessons about how to build the power of women of color to change public policy. Outlined below, these include lessons related to: relationship-building and trust; leadership development and base-building; coalition-building; insider and outsider strategies; cross-issue, cross-constituency, and cross-level organizing; language and culture; and messages and messengers.

Relationship-Building and Trust

The two words that surfaced most in interviews with grantee and program staff were “relationships” and “trust,” and they are themes that pervade all other lessons discussed below. In interviews, grantees addressed the importance of

building relationships of trust between organizations and communities; the need for effective coalitions and alliances to be based on long-term relationships; the time it takes to build relationships across issues, levels and constituencies; and how crucial it is that the right messages are delivered by trusted messengers.

This also extends to relationships between foundations and their grantees. The most positive praise for the Ms. Foundation highlighted the relationships of trust that grantees had with program staff, while the most critical comments came in the few instances where that relationship was lacking.

Leadership Development and Base-Building

Several grantees focused heavily on developing leaders within their communities and creating avenues for constituents to decide the organizations' policy-advocacy agenda. In many instances, they offered training that focused on preparing women of color to participate with knowledge and confidence on, or in front of, decision-making bodies, representing deliberate efforts to build the power of women who are generally excluded from policy tables.

Other grantees fostered alliances to build and broaden their base. As is explained below, a common strategy was to form partnerships with other people of color organizations with an existing membership base. Once these organizations became campaign allies, they were able to mobilize their base in support of the grantee organization's policy goals.

Coalition-Building

The case studies consistently illustrate that women of color-led organizations tend to be involved in coalitions or partnerships with four different types of organizations:

Bringing Community Voices into Decision-Making

The Colonias Development Council (CDC) selected community members to attend meetings of local decision-making bodies such as school boards. With Ms. Foundation funds, they educated women from colonias about how these bodies work, trained them to do community-based research, and prepared them to participate actively, thus building the capacity of women of color to bring their voices to decision-making tables.

1. Mainstream women’s organizations and coalitions, which are often led by white women;
2. People of color organizations, associations or coalitions, which are often dominated by men;
3. Issue-focused and broad-based, social justice coalitions which may have diverse membership across gender and race, but do not necessarily focus on the particular needs of women of color; and
4. Coalitions among women of color-led organizations, which often cut across issue-areas.

Many grantees were involved in all four types of coalitions, while others focused on one or two. As detailed in the case studies, alliance- and coalition-building was crucial to many of the most significant policy wins. Underlying each grantee experience was the importance of not just going to coalition meetings, but building relationships with allies and coalition partners that started before and extended long after a particular campaign. This relationship building takes considerable time, effort, patience and resources, and can sometimes be very difficult. Yet working in coalition generally had significant payoffs, particularly since it served to multiply the impact of the grantees.

As our grantees demonstrate, working in coalition with other organizations and building alliances with diverse constituents is not only an effective policy-change strategy, but also an important means by which to build, unify and strengthen movements beyond traditional organizing- and issue-silos. One of the Ms. Foundation’s primary goals is to bring race, class, age and sexuality to the center of feminist organizing (a concept we call **social justice feminism**) and to bring gender to the center of broader progressive organizing (a concept we call **feminist social justice**). Grantees’ success in bringing women of color voices and leadership into coalitions of primarily “mainstream” women’s organizations are clear examples of *social justice feminism*. Meanwhile, their success in convincing people of color and other social justice organizations to join their campaigns helps create *feminist social justice*. The case studies demonstrate that feminist social justice and social justice feminist organizing is possible and effective. Yet grantees’ experiences also show that this kind of work is very labor- and resource-intensive and as such, must be deliberately supported by funders.

It is important to note that there were instances in which grantees pulled back from coalition work to focus on building the capacity of their own organizations so that they could return to the coalitions on stronger footing. Grantees also learned that they needed to be careful not to overextend themselves by participating in too many coalitions. One grantee actually set criteria for joining coalitions:

1. We don't sign up if we are the only women of color organization (sometimes we might recruit other women of color organizations to join, but sometimes there seems [to be] no room...);
2. We work with other women of color organizations [in] the coalition to come up with common goals;
3. Since we are generally one of the organizations with the least amount of resources, we let our coalition partners know that there are certain things we need in order to participate, such as funds to travel to meetings;
4. We are very clear about our priorities and objectives, and have a few key non-negotiables. If those do not get on the coalition's agenda, we will leave the coalition; and
5. We do a lot of relationship-building with coalition partners outside of the formal meetings, so that they truly recognize our expertise.

A Mix of Insider and Outsider Strategies

An advocate's toolbox includes many strategies. Some can be characterized as "outsider" strategies such as rallies, protests, petitions and letter-writing campaigns. Others are considered to be more "insider" strategies and involve cultivating relationships with key decision-makers in public agencies, meeting with Congressional staff and providing testimony at Congressional hearings, or sitting on boards, committees and taskforces. While Ms. Foundation grantees certainly used the full range of outsider strategies, many were very successful at using insider strategies and built relationships with people in power across race, class and gender.

Multiplying Impact through Coalitions

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) effectively leveraged its relatively small grants from the Ms. Foundation by working with coalitions during the campaigns to defeat parental notification ballot initiatives in California. In 2006, CLRJ designed a "message map" and communications strategy for the Latina/o community that was used by the statewide coalition, the Campaign for Teen Safety, in which CLRJ played a leadership role. In this way, the Ms. Foundation's \$50,000 contribution influenced how the \$5 million statewide campaign reached out to Latina/os.

“When there is no translator to provide multilingual support, the women cannot demonstrate their leadership beyond the community. Unless we address multilingual and multicultural societal barriers, there will be challenges no matter how strong our base is.”

Interview with Young Shin, Executive Director
Asian Immigrant Women Advocates

Cross-Issue, Cross-Constituency and Cross-Level Organizing

Grantees’ experiences organizing across issues, levels and constituencies were rich and varied. Some overarching lessons included:

Cross-issue organizing: Advocacy on a specific issue can be used as a platform to influence broader and often more systemic issues. This needs to be done deliberately so that the broader policy goals are not compromised in the process of winning more specific goals. Conversely, a cross-issue frame like reproductive justice (which, briefly, places reproductive rights and health in a social justice framework) can help win a single-issue campaign such as parental notification by redefining the issue and broadening the base of support.

Cross-constituency organizing: First, defining cross-constituency organizing is tricky and depends on one’s vantage point. For example, an outsider to Native American communities might see a national Native American organization as organizing a single constituency. The organization, however, likely sees themselves as organizing and building alliances not only among the large number of Native Americans around the country, but among sovereign *nations*. Further, as is the case within any ethnic group, there are always divisions and diversity of opinion and privilege across gender, class, immigration status, sexuality, age and other defining characteristics.

As in many other aspects of their work, grantees saw relationships and trust as key to working across constituencies. A grantee could not just “helicopter” into a new community and expect them to support a policy campaign. The most successful efforts to involve multiple constituencies in advocacy were based on long-term organizing, training, and even social-service work in communities that could then translate into support for policy campaigns.

Cross-level organizing: A few of the grantees studied worked cross-level, generally linking local groups to state or national campaigns and organizations. One lesson that surfaced was the need to consistently organize and support women at local levels and to intentionally connect them to national organizations and campaigns.

Language and Culture

Among grantees, language emerged as a key theme, organizing focus and social justice issue. Translation at meetings was a goal of grantees’ advocacy, while the lack thereof was an obstacle to coalition-building. Many put considerable energy and resources into translating materials into multiple languages, and language revitalization and language access were the focus of many campaigns.

The importance of culture also emerged as a consistent theme in the grantee case studies. Cultural preservation and revitalization were at the core of grantees’ work in Native

American communities; cultural ceremonies, for instance, played an important role in winning over allies. As well, grantees' understanding of a community's culture influenced how they organized and at what pace. This is best illustrated by Ms. Foundation Women and AIDS Fund grantees who frequently identify the need to address stigma before women are able to publicly engage in advocacy.

Message and Messengers

Grantees emphasized the importance of using messages that resonate in communities of color—a topic closely related to issues of language and culture. Grantees felt that they were best able to craft successful messages because of their deep understanding of the communities in which they worked. For example, the women of color-led organizations involved in the parental-notification campaigns in California continually stressed that they did not just translate messages into Spanish or Asian languages, but that they created entirely different messages that resonated in Latina/o or Asian American communities.

The messengers were as important as the messages. Women of color-led organizations are uniquely positioned to target ethnic media, an arena in which it is sometimes easier to get coverage as compared to mainstream media. But it is not necessarily just simpler, it's strategic: a presence in ethnic media can help advocates win the support of other people of color leaders who can be very influential in mobilizing a broader base and in advocating for policy change with policymakers.

Overcoming Stigma as a Pre-Condition for Policy Activism

As the Women Rising Project (WRP) in Austin, Texas states in a report to the Ms. Foundation, "stigma...is the main barrier to disclosure and, by extension, to public advocacy." Overcoming that stigma has meant addressing it head on, giving women opportunities to work on advocacy behind the scenes, helping women come to terms with their HIV status through training, support groups and anti-stigma, public-education campaigns in communities. Several Women and AIDS Fund grantees have found that once they have invested the time in addressing stigma, women can become powerful advocates for policy change. But this can take many months, or even years.

In the long run, policy advocacy can lessen the power of HIV/AIDS stigma in communities. As another Ms. Foundation grantee, the African Services Committee, reports, "the increased visibility and voice of the African HIV-positive community will help to dismantle the stigma of HIV, enabling others to feel more comfortable in seeking testing and securing the help they need."



Women Alive
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Lessons for Grantmakers

Why Support Organizations Led by Women of Color?

If foundations want to promote progressive social change, our analysis of women of color-led organizations engaged in policy change across the U.S. suggests that funders should include in their portfolios a significant number of organizations led by women, people of color and more specifically, women of color. We know that support that builds the power of organizations to bring diverse voices to the table is essential to building movements and strengthening democracy. Furthermore, women of color-led groups have shown that they can be very effective in bringing about changes in policy that not only benefit women, but also their families, communities and society as a whole.

Building Movements and Strengthening Democracy

A “true democracy” must include all people. If large populations of people (such as women or people of color) are not represented in the public and private arenas where decisions are made, democracy suffers. Yet still today, those who are most affected by policies remain nearly invisible at policymaking tables— particularly at federal and state levels. This is especially true for people of color, even though they may be the majority in this country within a generation.⁵ By providing women of color, particularly women from low-income communities, with the training, support and research they need to participate fully at decision-making tables, women of color-led

organizations can contribute significantly towards **strengthening our democracy.**

Once they are mobilized and engaged as advocates and voters, communities of color can be a powerful force for progressive social change. They are most likely to be **mobilized and engaged by organizations that are trusted** and have deep roots in their communities. Organizations whose staff and leadership are reflective of the community, particularly across gender, race and class, and have worked in the community, are more likely to be capable of building relationships with and being trusted by community members.

It is not enough, however, to fund organizations with women of color in executive positions. Foundations need to identify and strengthen organizations that design their program and leadership structures in ways that **deliberately build the power of people** in their communities.

Women (especially low-income women, women of color and young women) tend to be outsiders, and tend to have less of a stake in preserving the status quo than those who benefit from the status quo. They will therefore be more **motivated to change the structures and systems** that govern our society and have more at stake in progressive social change.

Due to the life experiences of their constituents and leaders, organizations led by and for women of color tend to **understand the linkages between issues** and strive to build alliances among progressive organizations working on different issues. Living at the crossroads of gender, race, class and multiple other identities, the women of color leaders we spoke to understood how these converging

⁵ Sam Roberts, “In a Generation, Minorities May be the US Majority,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2008.

“[We] seek to address deep-seated school equity issues by bringing together friends and neighbors to work together to build their capacity to engage with their children’s education. This model of taking a homespun local approach to bringing about systemic change is one that [we] see as a model of women’s activism and one of the many important lessons women can bring in this era of global politics—namely that making things better on an immediate local level is a vital part of creating real systemic change.”

Colonias Development Corporation
Report to the Ms. Foundation for Women

identities determine how policies impact individuals and communities—a concept known as **intersectionality**.⁶

We also saw multiple examples of women of color-led organizations **working collaboratively with each other and other progressive organizations**. Increasingly, people of color organizations and leaders are playing an important role in influencing policy in this country. Women of color are often positioned to change people of color-led organizations from within, and then bring the power of these groups to bear on social justice issues that impact women and families. Bringing them on board puts more power behind advocacy about so-called “women’s issues” and strengthens the voice of people of color on these issues.

Over and over again, Ms. Foundation grantees talked about how important it was to their policy victories that they had **deep relationships of trust** with their communities, and that they cultivated long-term relationships with allied organizations. Women, of course, do not have a monopoly on relationship-building, but it has been shown that they tend to lead by developing relationships and networks.

In sum, women of color-led organizations tend to apply a cross-issue analysis, an understanding of the intersections between race, class and gender, and a focus on collaboration

⁶ See Appendix page 34.

and relationship-building to their advocacy, all of which together serve as the basis for powerful and effective strategies to strengthen democracy and ignite social change.

Promoting Effective Policy Change

Support for women of color-led organizations has proven to be an effective way to improve the lives not only of women of color, but also of their families, communities and society as a whole.

As the case studies illustrate, the significant, systemic impact that these grantees have achieved demonstrates that **women organizing around the day-to-day issues that are most important to them**—whether it is access to plants for basket weaving, concern about their children growing up near a landfill, or fear for their daughters’ safety—**can have far-reaching effects on local, state and national policy**. What is good for women is good for everyone. As Ellen Bravo, of Ms. Foundation grantee the Multi-State Working Families Consortium, asserts in her recent book, “The changes feminists want are not favors to women, but a better way to do business, raise families, build societies.”⁷ It is important to recognize, however, that broader systemic impact does not happen by accident. Rather, it happens when it is a part of grantees’ analysis and longer-range plans.

⁷ Ellen Bravo, *Taking on the Big Boys* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), p. 3.

Our research points to several reasons why women of color-led organizations have the potential to be effective agents of progressive social change.

1. **Women of color leaders may be more cognizant of the barriers women in the community face** to becoming involved in organizing campaigns. For example, do they have to negotiate power dynamics in their families before being able to speak in public; does the support of other women in the same situation help them realize that they are not alone and that their personal problems often stem from systemic problems; and how can organizing and advocacy be integrated into activities they are already engaged in, rather than adding one more demand on days jammed with multiple economic and care-giving responsibilities? Women of color leaders—especially those who share life experiences with their organizations’ constituencies—are also likely to **understand the issues of concern** to the women in their communities in a way that others may not. By addressing the barriers to organizing, and by helping women identify policy solutions to the issues that concern them most, women of color-led organizations can broaden the base of people advocating for progressive change.
2. Organizations led by and for women of color and their communities often focus on issues that are crucial to

the very survival of their constituents. In many cases, the staff of these organizations share not only a similar ethnic background to the women in the communities in which they work, but also similar life experiences. **Together, organizational members and community advocates have a shared, long-term investment in policy wins**—and in each other; if they are not able to achieve their primary policy goal in the short-term, they take the time to think strategically about how incremental wins can lead to broader wins down the road.

3. Policy decisions that are made with the input of women and people of color, especially early on, are more likely to take their specific needs into account. In general, this makes the **policy change more effective because it will often benefit more people and will more likely meet the needs of those who are disproportionately affected by the failed policy it is intended to replace**. Ignoring the impact of a policy on a particular group can also undermine the policymakers’ intent. For example, if federal HIV testing guidelines do not recognize that women of color are disproportionately at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, those women may be denied access to testing at federally-funded sites, remain unaware of their status, and unknowingly put others at risk. This hampers efforts to reverse the course of the epidemic and exacerbates an existing public health crisis.

“The key ingredient of our success is that at every single point, we involve mothers who have gone through the system—they testify and are part of conversations with lawmakers and advocates. They bear witness to their journey and to their intelligence. This makes lawmakers and advocates really understand the fact that these women are mothers and are worthy of real opportunities for health and healing. Otherwise we would lose because their humanity would be denied.”

Interview with Malika Saadar Saar, Executive Director
Rebecca Project for Human Rights

4. Women of color-led organizations are more likely to understand how even well-designed policies can exclude women and people of color when they are implemented. This leads them to **focus on implementation and access** both in crafting policy demands and once policy campaigns have been won.
5. Policymakers are **influenced by personal experience and testimony**. Many women of color-led organizations have trained women in communities to speak for themselves in front of decision-makers, and are staffed by women who share the life experiences of their constituents.
6. Women of color-led organizations are better able to **craft messages and communications strategies that resonate** in communities of color and spur communities to action. Such organizations can also successfully target **ethnic media**. This is important for several reasons:

In many parts of the country, ethnic media has a wide reach and penetrates communities of color in a way that mainstream media does not;

Ethnic media is often seen as a trusted messenger in communities of color; and

It may be easier for advocates to access and be covered by ethnic media than it is to access and be covered by mainstream media.

Recommendations for Grantmakers

How Foundations Can Effectively Support Women of Color-Led Organizations

There are a number of ways in which foundations can help build the power of women of color and their organizations to change public policy. Ms. Foundation grantees outlined the following priority recommendations:

1. Foundations should deliberately reach beyond the “usual suspects” and identify women of color-led grantees. This may involve sending Requests for Proposals to networks of women’s and people of color organizations, holding conference calls to answer the questions of groups with limited experience applying to foundations, and one-on-one outreach. Collecting information from grantees on the diversity of their boards and staff also signals a commitment, allows for targeting of support to organizations led by people of color, and enables foundations to monitor their progress in supporting such organizations.
2. Foundations that aim for policy outcomes should consider providing long-term general support grants. These give the organizations the flexibility to do what is needed to organize and win campaigns. It is important for support to be long-term, because building power and changing policy takes time, and financial security allows leaders to spend less time fundraising and more time developing relationships and engaging in policy advocacy.



3. Short of general support, grantees noted several specific items funders could underwrite to bolster grantees' policy-advocacy capacity. These include:

- Dedicated policy staff;

- Considerable staff time to organize and build relationships in the community and with coalition partners;

- Travel to meetings and hearings so that women of color staff and constituents can be a force at the table and build relationships, and so that constituents can testify from their lived experience;

- Translation at meetings and of materials;

- Resources to conduct, write and disseminate research to fill the gaps in knowledge about women of color and to build the credibility of the organizations;

- Strategic communications, including media outreach and messaging (especially that which targets communities of color); and

- Technology to support organizing and advocacy and training to use the technology effectively.

4. Grantees called on funders to understand that policy change is a slow process with many ups and down, and that community organizing, base-building, leadership development and coalition-building take time and require activities not immediately tied to policy campaigns. They urged foundations to take this into account when

determining outcomes measures. Furthermore, while a small grant can sometimes make a huge difference, grantees cautioned funders to be realistic in setting expectations about what organizations can accomplish on limited budgets. They appealed to foundations to fund adequately the long and hard work of organizing and base-building and provide the resources it takes to change policy.

5. Grantees repeatedly cited their need for tailored technical assistance in skills such as fundraising, communications and organizational development. Foundations can either provide or fund this technical assistance and should design it in collaboration with the grantees.
6. As we have noted, grantees attributed much of their success to building relationships, connections and networks. Funders can promote these connections in many ways. First, they can strive to build deep relationships of trust with grantees. Second, through convenings, listservs, conference calls and peer-to-peer exchanges, funders can foster connections among the grantees. Two Ms. Foundation practices were cited as particularly important to movement building: funding grantees to bring an allied organization to convenings and inviting both former and current grantees to convenings. Finally, foundations often have access to powerful organizations, decision-makers and other funders, and can play an important role in linking grantees to these key players.



Grantee Case Studies

Realizing the Power of Women of Color

The Ms. Foundation's Public Voices, Public Policy Initiative

The Ms. Foundation's *Public Voices, Public Policy* initiative deliberately set out to build the power of women of color to change public policy. Seven grantees worked within five broad ethnic groups on at least 11 major issue areas, nationally and in several states. All of the grantees increased the access, agency and power of women of color, and every one had at least one policy victory. Some of these victories were stunning and significant, with long-term systemic implications.

Impact on Public Policy and Lessons Learned

Cangleska, a *Public Voices* grantee and a domestic violence service provider on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, was a key player in securing a significant victory in the creation and passage of the new "Safety for Indian Women" title (Title IX) as part of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization in 2005. Cangleska helped secure this victory through its Sacred Circle Project, one of five domestic violence resource centers created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Cangleska's strategy for winning on Title IX combined coalition work, culturally appropriate outreach and a willingness to work across issue areas. Cangleska participated in two types of **coalitions**. For several years, Cangleska worked with national women's organizations (such as the National Organization for Women and Legal Momentum) on the National Taskforce to End Sexual and Domestic Violence. Like many of the *Public Voices* grantees, Cangleska used Ms. Foundation funds to **get seats at the table**. In this case, the *Public Voices* grant enabled two Native American women to participate in all Taskforce meetings leading up to the reauthorization of VAWA. They were heartened by the

support of the women's groups on the National Taskforce for Title IX and their interest in being educated on broader Native American sovereignty issues as well.

Equally important to the victory was Cangleska's success in cultivating the National Council of American Indians (NCAI), an organization of the major national Tribal governments. By hosting a traditional "wiping of tears" ceremony at an NCAI conference for leaders who had experienced the death of a loved one as a result of domestic violence, Cangleska **successfully integrated culture and ceremony into its advocacy work**. They reached NCAI members on a personal level, creating passionate champions for their cause.

Cangleska also successfully employed **cross-issue organizing** in its campaign. By discussing Title IX as an issue not only about women's safety, but also about Native American jurisdiction and sovereignty, Cangleska was able to secure major support from NCAI. This support was instrumental to victory both because it put the unified power of the Tribes behind the Title and because Tribes are allowed to lobby Congress to a degree Cangleska, as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, cannot. Cangleska's alliance with NCAI has lasted well beyond the Title IX victory. Tribal leadership is now invested in the issue of safety of Native American women and Cangleska maintains a taskforce on the issue within NCAI.

Another *Public Voices* grantee, the **Rebecca Project for Human Rights**, focuses on increasing the availability of family-based treatment for substance-abusing mothers. At the national level, with support from the Ms. Foundation and several other funders, the Rebecca Project was instrumental in convincing Congress to increase federal funding for family-based treatment *16-fold* from \$10 million in 2005 to

“We have been successful because we were able to bring the women’s anti-violence movement and the Indian world together. Our work created a bridge that was wide enough to allow all of us to walk on.”

Cangleska Report to the Ms. Foundation for Women

\$160 million in 2006. They also succeeded in making family treatment and alternative sentencing a major component of the “Second Chance Act,” which was signed into law in April 2008. At the state level, the Rebecca Project successfully advocated for a law in Arkansas that prevents the automatic placement of mothers on the state’s child maltreatment registry if they or their infants test positive for illegal drugs during delivery.

As it was for Cangleska, pursuing a multifaceted strategy was key to the Rebecca Project’s success. They combined advocacy training, an “insider” strategy and a willingness to work in unlikely coalitions, bridging differences in order to gain “buy-in.” The Rebecca Project runs 11 “Sacred Authority” chapters at family treatment centers around the country. Project staff, themselves mothers in recovery, train Sacred Authority mothers as policy advocates on-site, in conference calls and at an annual meeting in Washington, DC. Training prepares women of color to participate with knowledge and confidence on or in front of decision-making bodies, thus building the power of women to advocate for themselves at policy tables from which they are generally excluded. With a strong presence on Capitol Hill, Rebecca Project mothers bore witness to their journey and their expertise and **policymakers were influenced by their personal stories and first-hand experience.**

For the Rebecca Project, winning on their specific issues required building **alliances across different sectors** such as child welfare, criminal justice and reproductive rights. Nonetheless, the Rebecca Project found that **working in coalition** was difficult in the early years. Some advocates in

the coalitions felt uncomfortable working with mothers in recovery as peers, and some tended to see substance-abusing mothers as the problem rather than a key part of the solution. Interestingly, earning lawmakers’ respect enabled the Rebecca Project to earn respect from allies in the criminal justice and child welfare communities. The reproductive rights community, on the other hand, did not initially see the links between its goals and the child custody rights of incarcerated and recovering mothers. Over time, however, the Project has seen a marked increase in their openness to embrace the idea that the right to be a mother is as important as the right to abortion.

Organizing to Save Our Lives

The Ms. Foundation’s Women and AIDS Fund and the National Women and AIDS Collective

Today, AIDS in the United States, and indeed around the world, has an increasingly female face—and a face that is more likely to be black, brown or poor. But in 1996, the year that the Ms. Foundation established the Women and AIDS Fund (WAF), virtually no one in this country was paying attention to the growing epidemic among women. The story of WAF and the **National Women and AIDS Collective** (NWAC) is an example of women seeing and knowing the truth on the ground before it was acknowledged by anyone in power. It is also an example of approaching a problem and creating solutions in a way that perhaps only a women’s fund could have done—with dogged persistence, patience, support, love, tears and laughter.

"I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on the...issue of how HIV testing is conducted. I was shocked to learn that one of the bills...includes the statement that HIV is no more stigmatized than "any other transmissible disease." ...The sponsor of this bill knows nothing about E., who barely spoke for weeks when she first came to SMART, who is struggling with her daughter's rejection of her because of HIV. She doesn't know T., who was in this country only a short time when her uncle, a doctor, threw her out of the house because she is HIV positive. She doesn't know...D., who took many months to get up the courage to tell her boyfriend about her status only to have him abandon her in response. I am a woman of color living with HIV and I disagree with changes to Article 27F."

Susan Rodriguez, Executive Director, Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS Research and Treatment
Excerpt of testimony delivered to the New York State Assembly Health Committee

The Ms. Foundation's Women and AIDS Fund is **the only national fund dedicated solely to supporting advocacy by and for women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS**. WAF supports grassroots organizations that advocate for policies and services to meet the needs of HIV positive women. Every year, the Ms. Foundation has brought together every current and former grantee in this area for a convening; for several years, the Ms. Foundation also provided one-on-one, on-site technical assistance to WAF grantees.

Over the last twelve years—through funding, technical assistance, relationship-building, leadership development and networking—the Ms. Foundation has helped grow a cadre of organizations and leaders who have created a national movement of women advocating to change HIV/AIDS policy. That movement is embodied in the National Women and AIDS Collective, created in 2005 by WAF grantees to advocate for policies and services at the national level. NWAC is currently housed at the Ms. Foundation, which provides it with funding, technical assistance and strategic communications support. Its current policy goal is to revamp the CDC's outdated HIV data-collection system that yields policies, programs and funding tragically inadequate to address the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS epidemic among U.S. women.

Challenges and Lessons

Building Relationships and Trust: Despite a compelling need to apply a gender, race and class lens to HIV/AIDS

policy, it has taken years to build the capacity of groups led by and for HIV positive women of color to impact public policy. More so than other women of color-led organizations, these groups have been isolated and under-funded. Organizations focused on women and HIV/AIDS face particular challenges, including stigma as a barrier to public advocacy, the impact of death, disease and stress on organizational development and the struggle to gain acknowledgement of the authentic experience that HIV positive women bring to the policymaking table on a complex medical issue.

Ms. Foundation grantees' efforts to build the power of HIV positive women paralleled the efforts made by the Ms. Foundation to build the power of these organizations. The grantees and the Ms. Foundation learned surprisingly similar lessons about how to overcome challenges—through time, patience, trust, relationship-building and networking.

Leadership Development and Base-Building: Grantees made deliberate efforts to build leadership among HIV positive women of color in their communities. These organizations met the women where they were and systematically built their power to advocate for themselves and others. Women had access to structured leadership training, long-term mentoring and the opportunity to use policy advocacy to develop their leadership skills.

Like its grantee organizations, Ms. Foundation staff did not sit back and wait until policy changed. In addition to creating a supportive environment, the Ms. Foundation encouraged

its grantees to move to collective action. The Ms. Foundation had to be flexible and patient, but it went to great lengths to grow a network of women and organizations that resulted in NWAC. Since its inception, NWAC has developed and refined its policy position, held meetings with CDC staff, hosted a Congressional briefing sponsored by Senator Hillary Clinton (NY-D), presented at several conferences and developed communications materials.

Race, Class and Gender: The intersections of race, class and gender are intertwined in every aspect of women and AIDS organizing and advocacy. NWAC's policy demand is specifically about gender, race and class: gender, because current CDC HIV data-collection methodology excludes a disproportionate number of women; race, because most of the women infected while in heterosexual monogamous relationships are women of color; and class, because women with HIV are disproportionately low-income. Moreover, by intentionally engaging women of color and HIV positive women in its leadership, NWAC is a vehicle that helps give women of color credibility and legitimacy.

Impact of the Ms. Foundation on Grantees' Ability to Influence Policy

Despite the relative newness of the women and HIV/AIDS movement and the fragility of most grantee organizations, the Ms. Foundation's Women and AIDS Fund has had a tremendous impact on the capacity of grantees to influence public policy. Through NWAC, the Foundation has helped build the power of HIV positive women to impact national policy. At local and state levels, the Foundation's funding and technical support has greatly bolstered the capacity of grantees to be at decision-making tables and to advocate successfully for policy change. For most grantees, WAF is their only source of support for policy advocacy. And Ms. Foundation **funding for advocacy has had a multiplier effect.** Either because it raises an organization's profile or creates new funding streams, the policy advocacy supported by WAF has often resulted in increased funding for the grantee organization.

Protecting Teen Safety in California

The Role of Women of Color-Led Grantees in Defeating Parental Notification Ballot Initiatives in California

The Defeat of Propositions 73 and 85

In 2005, anti-abortion activists succeeded in getting a proposition on the ballot in California that would have required doctors to notify a minor's parent or legal guardian 48 hours before performing an abortion. The vote was a cliff hanger—polls on the day before the election showed a tie—and the proposition lost by only 335,000 votes.

Not to be deterred, anti-abortion advocates placed another parental notification bill on the ballot in California in 2006. It was also a cliff hanger, but in the end, Californians sided with reproductive justice advocates by an even higher margin than they had the previous year. The proposition lost by eight percent, representing half-a-million voters.

Ms. Foundation Grantees

Over the course of several years, the Ms. Foundation supported two women of color-led organizations to work on the Proposition 73 and 85 campaigns: **California Latinas for Reproductive Justice** (CLRJ) and **Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice** (ACRJ). Both organizations built broad coalitions of social justice and civil rights organizations, engaged in cross-issue organizing and employed powerful communications strategies that reached important messengers and audiences.

Lessons Learned

Coalition-Building: Both CLRJ and ACRJ invested considerable effort in bringing other Latina/o and Asian social justice and civil rights organizations into the campaign. Groups that had little experience discussing reproductive justice not only signed on to the campaigns, but also learned from CLRJ and ACRJ how to incorporate messages about the propositions into their ongoing work.

For example, together with the Dolores Huerta Foundation (DHF), an organization that organizes immigrant farm workers in the Central Valley of California and is now a

grantee of the Ms. Foundation, CLRJ created a coalition of 100 organizations from the Latina/o civil rights, health access, immigrants' rights, social justice, reproductive justice, women's rights, educational justice and legal communities to oppose the propositions. CLRJ and DHF also proposed and won approval of a resolution at the *National Latino Congreso*—a gathering of over 2,000 Latina/os from 20 states who are creating a united Latina/o agenda—endorsing the “No on 85” campaign. This was significant both because this organization generally does not take a stand on reproductive rights issues and because it incorporated CLRJ's messages into email outreach to over 400,000 recently registered Latina/o voters.

Since the parental notification campaigns, CLRJ has continued to cultivate its relationships with these social justice and civil rights organizations and has helped these groups in their own work, thus building strong new allies for the reproductive justice movement.

Cross-Issue Organizing: At first glance, the proposition battles seem to be single-issue campaigns. What is significant about ACRJ's and CLRJ's approach to the campaigns, however, is that they deliberately used a cross-issue reproductive justice frame—one that envisions the complete physical, mental and spiritual well-being of women and girls by ensuring that women and girls have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about their bodies, sexuality and reproduction—to win a single-issue battle. Both tied parental notification to other issues in their communities such as immigrant rights and lack of access to health insurance, and engaged allies from other social justice movements. In addition, they deliberately reached out to people who were not pro-choice and worked on a range of issues of importance to their constituents beyond those defined as reproductive rights.

Messaging and Messengers: Change happens when a trusted messenger in a community mobilizes its constituency. The Ms. Foundation's long-term support for organizations like ACRJ and CLRJ enabled them to be a consistent presence in their communities, not just campaign volunteers who dropped in during an election year. This bedrock of trust and relationships is especially

important for sensitive and controversial issues like abortion and parental notification.

Women of color-led organizations were able to craft messages that resonated in their communities. This went far beyond translating existing documents into different languages. It was about understanding what arguments work. Although ACRJ's base is in the Asian community, ACRJ created a sophisticated “No on 85” toolkit for organizers designed to be useful to organizers working in any community of color.

Both organizations effectively targeted ethnic media outlets and received considerable coverage. In fact, CLRJ was called upon to design the Latina/o communications strategy for the entire campaign. In this way, the Ms. Foundation's \$50,000 contribution influenced the way the statewide \$5 million campaign reached out to Latina/os beyond CLRJ's immediate constituents.

Did Ms. Foundation Support Make a Difference?

In the 2005 election, support for the parental notification proposition by Latina/os dropped dramatically in the last few weeks of the campaign—from 71 percent to 54 percent on the eve of the vote. In the 2006 election, Latina/o support held constant at 50 percent, despite the fact that Latina/os were a major target of the anti-abortion organizers. Asian opinion remained the same in both election years. Ms. Foundation Program Officer Desiree Flores firmly believes that “if ACRJ and CLRJ did not exist, we would not have had the same outcome. They were crucial to the victories.”

Whether Ms. Foundation support made a difference in 1,000 or 100,000 votes, by supporting groups like CLRJ and ACRJ it contributed greatly to expanding and diversifying support for reproductive justice in California. This is also significant on a national level since California's leaders of color are influential nationally, and as a “majority minority” state, California's demographics are prescient of the country's future demographics. Equally important, these campaigns demonstrated that using a reproductive justice framework is effective in winning reproductive rights campaigns.

Appendix

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a tool for analysis, advocacy and policy development that addresses multiple discriminations and helps us understand how different sets of identities affect access to rights and opportunities. While all women are in some ways subject to gender discrimination, other factors including race and skin color, caste, age, ethnicity, language, ancestry, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic class, ability, culture, geographic location, and status as a migrant, indigenous person, refugee, internally displaced person, child, or a person living with HIV/AIDS, in a conflict zone or under foreign occupation, combine to determine one's social location. Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality starts from the premise that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power. People are members of more than one community at the same time, and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege (e.g. a woman may be a respected medical professional yet suffer domestic violence in her home). Moreover, intersectionality helps us to understand and assess the impact of these converging identities on opportunities and access to rights, and to see how policies, programs, services and laws that impact on one aspect of our lives are inextricably linked to others.

For example, many female domestic workers experience sexual assault and abuse at the hands of their employers. It is the intersection of the worker's identities (e.g. female, poor, foreign citizen) that put her in the position of vulnerability. It is the intersection of the policies, programs and laws (e.g. employment policies, citizenship laws, shelters for abused women) that support and maintain the vulnerability. Because the policies do not respond to the specific identities of domestic workers, they do not allow the women to enjoy their right to be free from violence.

Finally, intersectionality is a useful strategy for linking the grounds of discrimination (e.g. race, gender, etc.) to the social, economic, political and legal environment that contributes to discrimination and structures experiences of oppression and privilege. So for example, an analysis of poverty would not stop at finding that women are disproportionately poor in a given region, but would explore which groups of women are poorest, which policies and practices contribute to their poverty, how the historical and political situation contributes, and whether development projects and policy initiatives are addressing the specific problems faced by different groups of women.

—Excerpted from *Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice* by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), August 2004.

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Women's Funding Network

All grantees interviewed

Participants of the *Women of Color and Public Policy* initiative meetings and *New Women's Movement* meetings. (The Ms. Foundation has engaged deeply with women leaders from national groups, grassroots organizations, activists, academia, and others through our *Women of Color and Public Policy* initiative and the *New Women's Movement* meetings where discussions about social justice feminism took shape.)

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About the Author

Anna Shireen Wadia has 20 years experience in domestic and international philanthropy. She has supported and documented multiple strategies to improve low-wage jobs and increase opportunities for low-income women and families as well as efforts to encourage voter engagement and influence public policy. Ms. Wadia has consulted for the Ford, Annie E. Casey and Ms. Foundations, the National Council for Research on Women and MDRC. Prior to launching her consulting business, Ms. Wadia managed community and economic development programming for the Ms. Foundation for Women in the United States, and for the Ford Foundation and Catholic Relief Services in Africa. Ms. Wadia co-authored *Kitchen Table Entrepreneurs: How Eleven Women Escaped Poverty and Became Their Own Bosses*, published by Westview Press as well as several reports on best practices in women's economic empowerment. She earned her BA from Yale University in 1984 and holds a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University.

Ms. Foundation for Women

The Ms. Foundation for Women, a social justice foundation, delivers strategic grants, capacity-building and leadership development to over 150 grassroots and national advocacy organizations throughout the U.S. Ms. Foundation support enables groups to create connections across issues, constituencies and policymaking levels to strengthen social movements and ignite change on behalf of women, families and communities. Since 1973, the Foundation has granted more than \$50 million to organizations in rural and urban areas nationwide.

Ms. Foundation for Women

Building women's collective power to ignite change

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