

EDWARD W. HAZEN FOUNDATION

Lessons from the Field: A Report on the Hazen Foundation's 2005 Grantees

I. Introduction

The mission of The Edward W. Hazen Foundation is to assist children and young people, particularly minorities and those disadvantaged by poverty, to achieve their full potential as individuals and active participants in a democratic society. To accomplish this, we focus on public school reform and youth leadership development. The Foundation supports programs that use organizing as a way to build the collective capacity and power of communities to demand and obtain quality education for their children and to enable young people to play important roles in shaping public policy and making public institutions more supportive of their development.

In 2004, a review of its broad grantmaking strategies confirmed the Foundation's conviction that support of organizing can help low-income communities achieve sustained improvement of their public schools and young people develop as healthy, productive, and engaged members of society. Accordingly, we renewed our commitment to education and youth organizing and launched a five-year plan aimed not only at assisting specific grantees but also at enhancing the legitimacy and capacity of the fields of education and youth organizing. A first step was to take a close look at how Foundation grantees were doing:

- Were the education organizing projects supported by the Foundation addressing key education reform issues in collaboration with educators and policymakers at the neighborhood, district, or state levels?
- Were youth organizing projects supported by the Foundation attracting increasing numbers of young people and developing their effectiveness as advocates for social change?

The Foundation hired two consultants to help probe beyond the semi-annual progress reports provided by grantees and learn more about the common challenges facing grantees and other organizations that work to achieve social justice for all our young people and how these challenges can be surmounted. We are pleased – and proud – to share with you the results of our research.

Our first finding was that *education and youth organizing across the country is excitingly strong and vibrant*. As we will detail below, our grantees have already attained significant power in their communities, winning victories that have had systemic impact on school districts or even changed the physical environment in which children and youth grow up.

Second, we learned that *our most successful grantees achieve a balance between negotiation and confrontation* – between what some of them call inside and outside strategies.

Third, our research affirmed that *collaboration – at many levels – is a vital element in every successful organizing campaign*. All our grantees worked in collaboration with other community or regional organizations to achieve or expand their power. They attributed their success to their willingness and ability to work with others and to formal and informal collaborations among funders that provided them with critical financial support.

Fourth, we found that *context is crucial in education and youth organizing*. Each campaign has to be waged on its own terms, with the players, tactics, and analysis unique to that locale and that campaign – and each campaign must be evaluated with an understanding of its mix. Education organizing, for example, works because it builds political will to sustain reform but it builds that will through its focus on what matters to the local community.

Finally, *our grantees underlined the importance of stable funding for organizing*. Stable funding allows organizations to recruit and retain qualified staff and it enables staff and members to develop their skills, expertise, and relationships.

Parts II and III of this report lay out in greater detail the data underlying these findings for education and youth organizing respectively. Part IV highlights the challenges of education and youth organizing and suggests next steps for the field and for funders.

II. Education Organizing

Hazen supports education organizing because we believe public schools are a primary source of our democracy as well as key institutions in the lives of children and young people. We further believe that a high quality public education is the civil right of every student and that the full partnership of parents and communities in school reform is vital to ensuring that right. Hazen supports work at four sites across the United States: Los Angeles, Miami-Dade County, the Delta region of Mississippi, and New York City. In those places, our grantee organizations are visibly engaged with educators, school officials, and policy makers at the district, city, and state levels in addressing key educational issues. Among the significant victories they have achieved that directly affect teaching and learning are the following.

Curriculum:

- In California, South Central Youth Empowered through Action (SCYEA), led a six-year struggle to ensure that every student in Los Angeles high schools is offered, as the default, the courses required for admission to California's public colleges and universities. Beginning in fall 2008, every high school student will be offered the "A-G" or "college prep" curriculum.
- In Mississippi, Citizens for Quality Education, worked with schools to secure adoption of new, research-based literacy and math curricula.
- In Florida, People Acting for Community Together (PACT), persuaded the district to try a new literacy curriculum in several schools. Despite what our grantee saw as the success of the new curriculum, however, a new district superintendent cut short the pilot and imposed a centralized curriculum.

Teacher Quality:

- In New York, the Community Collaborative to Improve Bronx Schools (CCB), piloted a "lead teacher" program that offered incentives to master teachers to transfer to hard-to-staff and failing schools. CCB's careful monitoring and assistance made the program so successful that the district leadership expanded the program to an additional 200 schools in Fall 2006, and incorporated it into its collective bargaining agreement with the teachers union.

- In Mississippi, the Quitman County Development Organization, succeeded in having the district reverse a policy that had encouraged “90-day” or temporary teachers in the schools. The reversal provides greater stability in the classroom, gives teachers the opportunity to plan ahead, and encourages stronger teacher-parent relations.

Many of our grantees’ victories have impact beyond the classroom.

- In California, POWER and LA ACORN worked together to win the right for parents to be involved in their district’s nutrition policies. The parents will use their newly established power to improve community health as well as relations between school staff and community residents.
- In Mississippi, Citizens for a Better Greenville (CBG) sought to have the district welcome parents in schools and classrooms as partners in creating safe and nurturing environments for students. To achieve this, CBG recognized that the school district’s leadership had to be changed. The organization mounted a sustained effort to elect a “community friendly” city government that would appoint a parent friendly school board. In order to achieve school reform, in other words, CBG reformed city hall.

Most Hazen grantees work, as they put it, both inside and outside the system. For education organizing, inside typically means through system-sanctioned means such as parent-teacher organizations or school site councils (California) or school leadership teams (New York). Outside may involve petitions, demonstrations, and press events. Some New York and California grantees draw thousands to their actions, building power through demonstration of their numbers. But equally it could mean alliances outside the local education system with public officials and policymakers who then put pressure on the local school or district to engage with the organization. Mississippi grantees, for example, have built power through alliances with state legislators that impel local schools and districts to include them in trainings and curriculum decisions.

All our grantees have used alliances or collaboration with other organizations to increase their power. In Florida, grantees influenced important decisions about pre-K education through state-level coalitions with advocacy and education organizations. In New York, CCB attributes its initial success in gaining the lead teacher pilot to collaboration with the teachers union. In California, SCYEA built a large and diverse coalition powerful enough to win the right to a college-prep curriculum for all students.

Our grantees also use alliances and collaborations to build skills necessary to win power. Several pointed to their work with intermediary organizations that put them in touch with other education organizing groups across the nation, trained them in collective action techniques, helped develop their knowledge of education reform, and even introduced them to potential local partners. Others noted that they are local chapters of national organizations and reported that their national partners strengthen the local work in many ways.

For many Hazen grantees, it was their years of work building power and organizing outside the system that secured them a place inside “at the table.” Several pointed out that their continued ability to bring pressure from outside enhances their influence, credibility, and likelihood of success at that table. The strong constituency of parents, students, community leaders and organizations that Hazen is helping to build at its sites can play key roles in education decision-making because policymakers – and the members themselves – recognize it as capable of exerting power beyond the schoolhouse.

Organizers have long known that context is the key to success: successful education organizing groups perform in-depth analyses of the problems they face, the people and organizations that can help, and of potential remedies, looking carefully at why one remedy might be more effective than another in a given context. But our analysis underlined the importance of context even for our own assessment of our grantees' work.

Clearly scale matters: New York City grantees can pull many more supporters to their demonstrations than grantees in rural Mississippi. But the smaller action in Mississippi might have greater impact. And our survey showed that context is much more than scale: some of our Mississippi grantees, for example, are working to empower parents to advocate on behalf of their children before the same system – and, sometimes, the very same people – that failed them 20 years ago, stifling their own educational aspirations and ambition. Empowering these parents – whose children are still subject to corporal punishment in the classroom – to take on the system is very different from, say, marshaling opposition in New York City to gifted and talented programs that seem to exclude students of color. While the ultimate goal of both projects may be improved academic outcomes for all students, especially disadvantaged ones, the tactics, strategy, and short- or medium term goals for the projects will not be the same. At Hazen, we have learned that holding grantees to the same standard requires more than comparison of quantitative outcomes. We must evaluate proposals and reports in context and, when appropriate, adapt standards to the given context.

One of the most challenging aspects of this for us as funders has been genuine acceptance of grantee autonomy. We have always recognized, in theory, the importance of local and contextual identification of problems and resolutions. We have thus provided support aimed at enabling grantees to develop skills in using educational data to identify school or district problems and potential resolutions. Yet we have sometimes been surprised at the priorities chosen by grantees. In practice, accepting that grantees choose priorities that we might not have not always been easy for us. We address it by supporting participation in convenings, conferences, and trainings that give our grantees access to the best minds in education reform and advice from those most expert in achieving it, bringing together academic researchers, education practitioners, and skilled veterans of collective action campaigns. We also provide stable funding that helps grantees recruit and retain staff who are experienced and informed as well as committed.

III. Youth Organizing

Hazen supports youth organizing as a vehicle for low income youth and young people of color to develop as healthy, productive, and engaged members of society. We believe that youth development initiatives must also focus on changing public policies, systems, and institutions that affect their development and that, for these changes to be most relevant and supportive of young people, youth themselves need to be at the forefront of the change efforts. We see youth organizing as capable of enabling young people to play an active role in their own development while they also bring greater equity for their communities. We therefore focus the Foundation's support on work that helps young people develop an analysis of the conditions in their communities grounded in an understanding of structural racism and social inequity. We structure our youth organizing support differently from our education organizing: it is spread across the nation, with regional clusters of grantees in California, the Northeast (especially New York and Philadelphia), and parts of the South and the Midwest.

Our youth organizing grantees are involved in a wider range of issues than our education organizing grantees. Most of them describe themselves as multi-issue organizations and we support their work on several issues. Still, reinforcing our own belief in the importance of public schools for young people, 11 of our 17 youth organizing grantees have chosen to work directly on education justice issues. Six of our grantees work on economic justice issues and six on juvenile justice issues, which are often closely intertwined with education issues (all our Mississippi education and youth grantees, for example, are involved in the coalitions that seek to break the schoolhouse-to-jailhouse connection fostered by Mississippi's harsh disciplinary practices in schools).

All our youth organizing grantees share the belief that young people should have a direct say in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families and that their unique perspective and role in society gives young people a vantage point from which they can exert tremendous impact.

Our grantees encompass a range of organizational models: some are youth-led and wholly youth-focused; others are inter- or multi-generational. Half of them are growing steadily, while the others are stable in size. Most grantees reported a direct correlation between their growth and their ability to achieve impact. With membership ranging from 7 to 2,075, our grantees include established youth organizations with stable staffing (including youth staff, aged 16-21) and substantial fundraising capacity as well as recently founded organizations with as few as 2 program staff members, both participating in fundraising.

The majority of our grantees provide academic support to their members as well as leadership development and training in organizing skills. Only a quarter provide direct social services, although all of them make referrals when appropriate. Because of limited resources and capacity, young organizing groups often struggle to balance meeting the individual service and youth development needs of their members with training in organizing and collective action skills. Most of our grantees believe they inculcate organizing skills among their members more successfully than academic or crisis management skills. But several of our grantees have reshaped their programs in creative ways and are meeting these dual needs more effectively.

Like our education organizing grantees, our youth organizers reported substantive victories:

- In East L.A., Inner City Struggle's United Students participated actively in the campaign that won a city commitment to build 3 new schools, including the first new high school in East L.A. in more than 75 years.
- In New York City, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice negotiated the clean-up of a toxic industrial waste site, and convinced the state and city to finance two waterfront parks along a newly restored Bronx River.
- In Chicago, the Southwest Youth Collaborative persuaded the Board of Education to institute 27 peer juries in high schools as an alternative to a harsh (and ineffective) suspension and expulsion policy.
- In Mississippi, Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County and Tunica Teens in Action worked together and succeeded in placing a new school in a racially diverse neighborhood rather than the all-white neighborhood originally planned.

- In Los Angeles, Youth Justice Coalition organized formerly and currently incarcerated youth to prevent youth who were being tried as adults from being transferred from juvenile facilities to county jails that housed adults. The campaign convinced the Board of Supervisors to transfer all the young people detained at the county jail back to a juvenile facility and to close the juvenile unit at the county jail. Incarcerated youth in Los Angeles are no longer subject to detention with adults.

For youth organizing groups, there was little debate about whether to use an inside or an outside strategy. For most, the campaign arose from the need to create a space or vantage point from which young people could hold community leaders and public officials accountable for developing and implementing policies and institutions that are supportive of young people, especially young people of color in low income communities. But like our education organizing grantees, our grantees in this field found that collaboration was key to building the power necessary to win significant victories. Youth organizers focused on educational justice pointed out that school reform must aim at whole districts rather than isolated schools. District-wide school reform, they added, requires collaboration not only with young people from other schools but also with parents, education advocates, and business and community leaders. Youth organizers focused on juvenile justice similarly recognize the need to build diverse coalitions to achieve real impact.

Several grantees noted the challenge of participating as peers in multi-generational campaigns; some remarked that the challenge intensified the motivation of their members to learn as much as they could about the issues – so that adults would accept them as knowledgeable and valuable partners in the work.

Like education organizing groups that sought out other groups doing similar work or relied on training and advice from knowledgeable intermediary organizations, youth organizing groups cited formal and informal alliances and networks as crucial to their development. In particular, our grantees spoke of convening and networking opportunities offered by intermediary organizations. They saw these networking opportunities as immensely important to strengthening and expanding their work.

Recruitment and retention of qualified staff is crucial for youth organizing, as it is for education organizing. But it is more complicated in youth organizing because of the commitment to and challenge of employing youth staff. Eleven of our grantees employ youth staff. On average, the staffers were slightly older than core leaders. Since, for most of our youth organizing groups, a key goal is that the young people graduate high school in a timely way and go (or at least have the opportunity to go) to college, some of our grantees are grappling with the challenges of employing young people without impeding their academic progress and promoting them in the organization without discouraging their college aspirations. For those more established organizations that welcome alums back as staff on their completion of college, the challenge is ensuring that the young graduates are paid a decent wage. Most of the adults involved in youth organizing want the young people to see social justice work as a way of life – and that means a salary that is capable of supporting a family.

IV. Challenges and Next Steps

Our research identified several challenges for education and youth organizers. The most notable for the field – and the most amenable to Foundation assistance – are these:

ARTICULATION OF COMMON LANGUAGE, POLITICAL ANALYSIS, AND VISION FOR REFORM

While education organizing groups rightly insist on the importance of context in implementing and assessing their work, by and large they share a common language, political analysis, and vision for reform. Our research showed that youth organizing groups did as well, though fewer expressed awareness of this.

Race and class were central to the analysis of almost all our grantees, but how to address race and class remain questions with which we found our grantees – and the field as a whole – still struggling. Our grantees in education and youth organizing alike spoke of the need to come together to articulate a shared political analysis and vision for achieving social justice. Regular and frequent communication with and about each other can help them further develop the common language and adapt their analysis and strategy as conditions warrant.

Foundations can support convenings or conferences where education and youth organizers can meet with their colleagues and academic researchers or other experts in their field to articulate this analysis and vision

They can enable regular and frequent communication through support of intermediary publications and/or websites.

DEVELOPMENT OF TOOLS FOR MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

Both youth and education organizing grantees raised the need for better data collection. Several grantees thanked us for undertaking our research, noting the questions helped them reflect on what they were doing and pointed out the need for more systematic collection of various kinds of data (e.g., on student outcomes, on skills development, on political strength).

Several grantees commented that they were still figuring out which data was most relevant to helping them strengthen their work. Increasing numbers are an obvious index of some success, one which both depends on and contributes to concrete victories. But for organizations, a key question remains: how to assess concrete but incremental victories – that is, how can an organization measure whether a victory moves one closer to the long term goal of education reform, youth empowerment, or social justice? Grantees face the challenge of balancing the need for short-term victories that boost morale and numbers with the need to keep their eye focused on longer term goals.

Foundations, again, can support convenings or conferences where practitioners and researchers can discuss and identify criteria and measurements for success, short and long term, or where practitioners can talk about their work with others facing similar dilemmas.

Foundations can support research or technical assistance projects aimed at developing and/or implementing these tools.

These tools will be of value to practitioners but also to funders. Many of us are among those most insistently clamoring for results now. Tools that identify indicators of success and evaluate incremental victories may enable funders to pursue long-term strategies in the face of changing fashions or trends in the philanthropic world.

ADEQUATE AND STABLE FUNDING

Data collection is not just about developing tools – we already have many of those. But data doesn't collect itself: staff must have the (paid) time to do it.

Adequate staff salaries are a central issue to organizing groups. Successful campaigns to change policy require substantive knowledge of both policy issues, which are often complicated, and political context, which can be byzantine. Organizers must develop and be able to communicate this knowledge. Without adequate organizer salaries, organizers may feel compelled to move (upward?) into management. Promotions are good things, but perhaps the field also needs career ladders that honor and reward expert organizers.

As noted above, youth organizing groups face a special need to ensure adequate staff salaries at all levels. First, they must be able to provide their youth staff with compensation on par with what they would get elsewhere, helping to develop a pipeline of youth leaders. Second, stable staff is crucial to the process of leadership transition, in which some youth move into adulthood and other young people take their place in the organization. Third, the organizations must demonstrate that young people can continue to work for social justice without sacrificing their financial future. Young people must see that adults who work for social justice are paid justly.

Foundations committed to social justice recognize that this commitment is not – and should not be – synonymous with a reduced standard of living. Foundation staff must work with our own colleagues to ensure adequate compensation for social justice workers.

EXPANDING AND ADVANCING OUR WORK

Our most rewarding finding is that our grantees have already achieved real power and concrete successes in their work. Our education organizing grantees are having a visible impact in schools, school districts, and even cities. Few have yet achieved victories that extend statewide. But many of them told us that they must now build power on a statewide basis because it is at the state level that key decisions about teacher quality and educational resources are made.

Foundations can provide financial resources that enable local groups to expand their geographic base and also social capital: we can make introductions among organizations with similar goals and philosophies. And we can underwrite the work of collaborating.

Foundations can spread information about how reforms are achieved and what their impact is to other parts of the country.

Our youth organizing grantees spoke of the need to expand their work to groups still underrepresented. While Black and Hispanic youth are heavily involved in the work of our grantees, making up 47% and 37% of our grantees' membership, Hazen grantees do not have significant membership among non-Hispanic immigrant and Native American youth. Moreover, some of our grantees expressed concern about whether they were adequately addressing issues of sexual orientation. At Hazen, we are working on ways to reach out more effectively to young people underrepresented by our grantees. We welcome discussion with other grantmakers on this topic.

The Edward W. Hazen Foundation is gratified that our deeper look into the work of our grantees affirmed both the value of education and youth organizing as strategies to help young people achieve their full potential as individuals and active participants in a democratic society and the value of our support for those strategies.