

The Listening Project

A national
dialogue on
progressive
movement-building:
Problems, prospects, potentials

PRODUCED BY THE STAFF AND BOARD OF THE PEACE
DEVELOPMENT FUND

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The Peace Development Fund would like to thank,
first and foremost, all of the people who partici-
pated in the Listening Project interviews and focus
groups; we deeply appreciate your time and insight.

PDF would also like to thank all of those who
donated time to the Listening Project and the pro-
duction of this report, including the staff, board
members, and interns of the Peace Development
Fund. The following is an incomplete list of individu-
als and organizations that helped us; many thanks
to all of you: Abby Stranahan, Eli Lee, Ruth
Folchman, Michael Lehman, Paula Litt, Nacho
Gonzalez, Gary Phillips, Dan Petegorsky, Robbie
Kuenreuther, Teresa Juarez, Chuck Collins, Sharon
Rogers, and Leon Sompolinsky with the Data
Center in Oakland.

DESIGN

Glenn Ruga/Visual Communications

COVER PHOTOS:

Large photo: James Karales

Small photo: Impact Visuals

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Letter from the Director

The Peace Development Fund began our National Listening Project to explore ways to make ourselves more accountable to the grassroots communities we serve. We were committed to listen, to learn, and to take action. And we promised to share our findings with others—like you—who play an important part in the social-change movement.

The Listening Project turned out to be an incredible learning experience for PDF. As a very diverse group, we face many of the same challenges that the broader movement faces. We range in age from 19 to 60, hail from urban and rural areas—within and from outside the United States—and we represent a range of class backgrounds and current economic realities. We are racially and ethnically diverse men and women. We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and straight, with differing physical abilities. It takes great intention and great commitment to come together and to work through these differences. And it is through our work together that we are able to reshape the Peace Development Fund to be of greatest service to the movement.

We set out believing that listening is an important part of movement-building. Working on the Listening Project confirmed that. We also found out how valuable it was to provide a forum for people to come together and dedicate time to talk about building our movement for social change. In bringing people together, the project thus assisted in a small way the movement-building process we hope to see happen on a larger scale.

The Listening Project raises as many questions as it answers. We think it is healthy that there is an open, energetic dialogue about these issues. It presents challenges for all of us. We hope you agree.

Thanks to all of the people who participated in this endeavor and to those who encouraged and supported us along the way. It is with great joy that we present this report to the movement.

In Peace,

Linda Stout

Executive Summary

The Listening Project is the Peace Development Fund's attempt to gather and analyze the views of social-change organizers and activists about the current state of progressive political work. PDF is now using this information to develop more effective strategies for both our own work and, we hope, that of other progressive foundations and social-change organizations throughout the country.

The project arose from PDF's organizational concerns about the ability of progressive activists and organizations to facilitate real and lasting change. We are particularly concerned about the isolation in which much progressive work is conducted—geographical, informational, and ideological. The resurgence of the Right and its success in organizing its supporters and creating effective national coalitions have set these concerns in sharp focus.

During the winter and spring of 1997–98, PDF staff and board members interviewed 36 individuals and conducted six regional focus groups. Participants represented a broad range of progressive organizations, from rural associations to urban community groups to regional and national institutions. A majority were women and people of color.

The interviews and focus groups yielded a wide range of ideas, issues, and themes. Many problems were aired and a variety of potential solutions were offered—though participants were able to identify the frustrations and challenges more easily than they could articulate tangible solutions. While there was hardly unanimity in the conversations, a broad consensus emerged in participants' views on the major questions that arose.

DOES A “PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT” CURRENTLY EXIST?

We know that the underlying truth is that, as always, there are people everywhere who are struggling to improve the human condition. But for the most part, respondents felt that progressive activism is currently too disconnected and lacking in a shared analysis, consciousness, or vision to really be considered a

“movement” as such. Nonetheless, many identified themselves as part of “the movement,” in that they felt allied, if not sufficiently connected, with others working toward the same goals of social change.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO AGGREGATING PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL POWER?

Responses to this question fell into four broad categories:

- *Fragmentation*, caused by the geographic isolation of many groups, wedge issues such as racism and sexism, and conflicts between local and national issues and priorities.
- *Lack of strategic vision*, including few resources for long-term strategic planning and an overemphasis on seeking symptomatic reforms and providing services without a political context.
- *Media and marketing*, where our invisibility in the mass media, poor message articulation, and lack of a clear and unified progressive identity are major liabilities.
- *Survival issues* hampering efficiency and effectiveness, including the lack of consistent funding and fund-raising strategies, personnel issues such as high turnover, the scarcity of trained organizers, and burnout, as well as the need for up-to-date technology.

HOW CAN THE IMPACT OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL WORK BE INCREASED?

The ideas offered by Listening Project participants revealed seven major emphases, sometimes competing, sometimes complementary. The search for strong *issues* that could unite the movement was seen in terms of either a single, unifying issue or the development of multi-issue work that cuts through the complex web of problems facing communities today. Many people stressed the need for structural relationships among *organizations* that would foster the joint development of strategies and the coordination of resources. The need for a common *vision*

and analysis, developed in a participatory and inclusive way, was seen as central to building a broad “movement consciousness.” Local activists’ capacity to frame grassroots *organizing* within a larger conceptual context depends on political and popular education and an end to “politics-free” organizing; participants called for a “back-to-basics” approach to building community power on the ground, as well as for new approaches to organizing that will target new constituencies.

Despite a consensus that *leadership* must be more accountable to the grass roots, two conflicting views stood out, one holding that charismatic leaders are often self-serving and unaccountable, the other arguing that we are often too quick to oppose strong leadership. *Self-transformation* within the movement was emphasized: the need to combat institutional racism, sexism, and other oppressions within progressive organizations themselves.

Finally, simultaneous, multiple approaches to progressive social-change work were seen as crucial to *bridging the movement’s varied sectors*—bringing together people across constituencies, building stronger communities, and fighting fragmentation within the social-change movement.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FOUNDATIONS IN SUPPORTING PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL WORK?

Participants gave candid feedback on their relationships with funders. A major emphasis was on the need for larger, longer-term grants—particularly operating funds—to support long-term goals. Project-oriented funding was criticized as forcing resources into projects that do not necessarily reflect organizations’ real priorities or development needs. There was concern that grassroots organizations are driven by foundations’ missions, not their own. Foundations could place more emphasis on building the long-term capacity and political independence of progressive organizations. They could be more trusting and collaborative; rather than defining the outcome of the work they fund, they could follow the lead of organizations on the ground. Foundations can be more accountable to the communities, and not just the organizations, that receive their dollars.

CONCLUSION

The Listening Project has raised a number of profound questions for the staff and board of PDF. How can we recognize and support the movement-building potential within organizations and communities? How can we become a more accountable, more connected part of the movement-building process already under way? How can we address the very real power differentials among the communities, organizations, and institutions engaged in this work?

We are already implementing programs informed by the thinking and reflections of the people to whom we listened. We will continue to seek feedback from the project’s participants and others as they read this report. We offer this summary in the hope that you will take the time to read this report in its entirety, in order to hear what the participants themselves had to say. We welcome and look forward to your responses and insights.

Introduction

WHAT WAS THE LISTENING PROJECT?

The Listening Project was the Peace Development Fund's attempt to gather and analyze the views of social-change organizers and activists about the current state of progressive political work. They came from a variety of organizations around the country, working for social, environmental, and economic justice and equality from a variety of perspectives. PDF is now using this information to develop more effective strategies for both our own work and, it is hoped, that of other progressive foundations and social-change organizations throughout the country. Through one-on-one interviews and focus groups, PDF asked people to discuss a number of themes, including:

- What movement-building means
- What barriers exist to aggregating progressive power
- How the impact of progressive political work can be significantly increased
- What movement-building might look like in today's social and political environment
- What the role of foundations in supporting social-change work should be

WHY DID WE DO IT?

The Listening Project was initiated as a response to PDF's organizational concerns about the ability of progressive activists and organizations to build real and lasting change. Our concerns were spurred by several factors. PDF believes that far too many organizations are working in isolation, disconnected from each other, from larger national issues, and from information that can improve their effectiveness. In addition, many victories have been local; we need more regional and national successes. These factors, combined with concerns about the resurgence of the Right, convinced PDF that it is time to be asking serious questions about progressive political work. How can we create consequen-

ORGANIZATION TYPE	
Community-based groups engaged in some form of organizing	36 percent
Non-community-based groups that support grassroots organizing through training, funding, information provision, or other means	20 percent
Labor unions, policy and research institutes, electoral-policy interest groups, and educational organizations	20 percent
National or regional networks or associations of grassroots organizations	10 percent
Foundations (primarily public foundations) and philanthropic institutions	10 percent
Independent trainers and consultants who work with progressive social-change organizations	15 percent

Note: Some people and organizations in the above list represent more than one category.

URBAN AND RURAL WORK

ORGANIZATIONS WORKING PRIMARILY WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS IN:	
Urban areas	35 percent
Rural areas	16 percent
Combination of rural, urban, and suburban	28 percent
Other organizations (e.g., unions, research institutes)	21 percent

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Community-based organizations (groups working in a specific local area)	40 percent
Regional organizations	28 percent
Statewide organizations	12 percent
National organizations	20 percent

RACE AND GENDER

Women	57 percent
Men	43 percent
People of color:	56 percent
African Americans	21 percent
Native Americans	13 percent
Latinos/as	12 percent
Asians/Asian Americans	10 percent
Those identifying as white	44 percent

Note: We intentionally sought a majority of women and people of color because we want to be accountable to the communities we serve. Those in “marginalized” communities, those who are oppressed, are not always heard. While communities being organized and served are frequently people of color and women, the leadership in community organizations is primarily white and male. In the Listening Project we sought to hear from those constituencies we feel are integral to a movement for social change, yet whose voices are not always at the forefront.

tial change on a national level? How can we make a transition from localized and disconnected work to a strong, broad-based movement?

PDF developed the Listening Project as an attempt to gain insight into these questions, as a necessary prelude to taking effective action. From the information we gathered, we are currently developing an analysis of how progressive political work can become increasingly powerful. The Listening Project's data and conclusions will be used to help refocus PDF's funding and training programs as well as our processes and structure. Although we set out to help ourselves become more strategic in our funding and training programs, we hope the insights offered in this report will also be useful to other organizations and individuals across the country who share our goal of creating a more effective progressive movement and a more equitable society.

TO WHOM DID WE LISTEN ?

A total of 82 people participated in the Listening Project; 36 gave one-on-one interviews and 46 participated in six regional focus groups. (A full list of project participants can be found in Appendix A.) Acknowledging that many different types of progressive work are necessary for change, we developed criteria that would include a diverse range of people working on a large number of issues and using a variety of strategies. Considering PDF's long history of focusing support on grassroots organizations, we wanted to place particular emphasis on the grass roots. We aimed for a majority of women and people of color (see below), as well as a representative mix of organization type, urban and rural work, and geographic location and scope.

HOW THE LISTENING PROJECT WAS CONDUCTED

Following the organizational, geographical, and demographic criteria we had adopted, 36 individuals were selected for one-on-one interviews — two-thirds of them from PDF's connections with social-change activists nationwide and one-third from recommendations by other interviewees. They were interviewed by telephone by members of PDF's staff in the winter and spring of 1997–98. The interviews lasted an average of an hour and a quarter.

In the spring and summer of 1998, focus groups were convened in six cities: Los Angeles, Seattle,

Albuquerque, Chicago, Boston, and Asheville, North Carolina. These locations were chosen to provide a wide geographical scope that would reflect distinctive regional issues. The focus groups averaged eight participants and typically ran three and a half to four hours. The participants were activists working in each region. Although the focus group questions were slightly different from the interviews, our intent was to cover the same themes in the context of group dialogue rather than individual responses.

The interview and focus group sessions yielded some 400 pages of transcripts and notes. These were analyzed to identify all the themes, ideas, and issues covered, all of which were then categorized by topic and cataloged for frequency. (See Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of the project's methodology.)

The Listening Project was a qualitative, not a quantitative, study. People talked and we listened. Not all the questions we had prepared were addressed equally in all the sessions, and in some cases not at all. This was due to time limits or, more often, because the discussions were intentionally open-ended to allow participants to air their views spontaneously rather than imposing a rigid question-and-answer structure. Thus, although many of the same points were made in one way or another by quite a few respondents, these opinions do not necessarily represent actual majorities or other quantifiable results. The focus groups and interviews were not intended to provide statistical data, but, rather, to be a collective sounding board on the state of social-change work.

While the interviews and focus groups covered a wide range of topics, it is safe to say that the responses we gathered do not represent the totality of thoughts and ideas participants have about the project's themes. However, we feel we were able to gain a meaningful understanding of the commonalities as well as differences in how people are thinking about progressive political work and movement-building. It is worth noting that, with some exceptions, participants were better able to articulate the frustrations and challenges associated with movement-building than to offer tangible solutions to the problems they specified.

What We Heard

This section is a synthesis of the major themes voiced in the Listening Project. Because of the huge amount of information gathered, it is not possible to convey here everything that was said. In most cases, points raised by more than a few people are included and those mentioned just once or twice are omitted. However, when an idea expressed by many directly conflicted with the view of a small minority, we wanted to represent the minority view as well.

A combination of narrative description and direct quotations is used, to encapsulate the responses of the project's participants. The quotations chosen reflect the major themes and emphases that arose. Thirty different participants are quoted.

Although it is based on responses to the questionnaires used for the focus groups and interviews, this section is not organized strictly according to those questions. In the discussions, participants did not always address questions in a linear way. Many of the ideas were connected indirectly and not always explicitly. Quite a few concepts and beliefs came up several times in different contexts during the sessions. Therefore, rather than providing a point-by-point accounting of questions and answers, the material below attempts to summarize the information gathered without too much repetition or overinterpretation. It is organized around four central points:

- What is a social-change movement?
- Barriers to aggregating progressive political power
- Increasing the impact of progressive political work
- The role of foundations in supporting progressive political work

WHAT IS A SOCIAL-CHANGE MOVEMENT?

A few years ago the Peace Development Fund began to use the terms “social-change movement” and “movement-building” in our political discussions and analysis development. Just within our own organization, we realized there were different under-

standings and beliefs regarding these concepts. Our internal diversity, in part, led us to explore the perspectives of others. The first portion of the Listening Project interviews, therefore, examined how participants define and conceive of a social-change movement. We did not suggest a particular perspective, but instead urged people to discuss and define terms for themselves.

The majority of respondents described a social-change movement as a critical mass of organizations and people working for social change and united by a common vision or common societal goals. Both explicit and implicit in people's responses was the need for a clear vision and a coherent set of relationships in which people work together with some shared strategies.

A small number of interviewees, however, held a slightly different perspective. As one person put it, a movement consists of a widespread "consciousness, perception, or frame of mind that connects people to a shared vision for change." When such a consciousness exists, they said, people are more apt to be politically active and connections between campaigns and organizations are more easily facilitated. Using this definition, these people suggested that a movement can arise both organically and through intentional work that promotes a shared vision for change and the desire to become politically active.

These two views, of course, are not entirely at odds. Whether a movement is based on a collective consciousness or on a critical mass of organizations, the crucial ingredient for both is a shared vision and analysis. At the same time, several people felt it important to state that organizations, rather than individuals, should be the building blocks of a social-change movement. Ideally, they said, organizations are more likely to promote accountability; what's more, insofar as the movement entails structural relationships and shared strategies or resources, people

"The Right keeps finding our fault lines and chipping away and building the divide even stronger, so that something like gay, lesbian, bisexual issues can be something that can be talked about very openly and attacked in the mainstream because there isn't a response ."

without organizational connections would have difficulty effectively plugging into actual movement-building work. Some of the people who expressed this view emphasized that by "organizations" they did not mean only formally constituted nonprofit institutions but also a variety of organized groups.

Only two interviewees were not interested in thinking about the potential for movement-building. They shared a similar critique of social-change movements, saying that although the values and vision of a movement can be embraced by many, the power is in the hands of a few charismatic, unaccountable leaders. This analysis led both people to suggest that the United States does not need a progressive movement but instead a strong and accountable national organization such as the ones they work for.

DOES A PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT CURRENTLY EXIST?

Nearly all the participants who were asked specifically if a progressive movement currently exists said no. For the most part, interviewees believed that progressive activism is currently too disconnected and lacking in a shared analysis, consciousness, or vision to really be considered a "movement." They felt there is presently no broad-based progressive identity, analysis, or consciousness that links people across geography or issues and lends itself to shared strategies. In this respect, they said, progressive activism currently falls short.

None of the participants who spoke to this issue offered concrete criteria for determining whether a "movement" exists at this moment. Many measured today's progressive activism against the recent resurgence of the radical Right, on the one hand, and the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s, on the other. People cited the widespread movement consciousness that inspired masses of people to be active in the 1960s. The apparently frequent communication between groups and networks at that time, as well as shared strategies and tactics, was seen as a defining factor in a movement. At the same time, despite a belief that these rather general characteristics are crucial, many respondents believed that the building of a progressive social-change movement in the next decade must look very different from how it has in the past. We live in a very different world, and the changing

social, economic, and political milieu demands different approaches.

Nevertheless, a couple of people believed that a broad-based progressive movement does exist, though it is still in its early stages. Several other people pointed out that a number of single-issue and geographically specific movements exist, citing as examples the labor movement, the gay and lesbian rights movement, and the environmental justice movement of the Southwest. People also indicated that it is easier to achieve the cohesion necessary for a movement to exist when working with a narrow issue, constituency, or geographic focus.

BARRIERS TO AGGREGATING PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL POWER

Fragmentation

Progressive organizations and activists face many impediments to the effective aggregation of power. The single factor that was mentioned with over-

“Isolation is a huge problem. [For example,] think about areas like Nebraska and Iowa, where the workforce of meat-packing plants are becoming increasing Latino. This population is alone and has little knowledge or resources to deal with workplace manipulation or backlash among predominantly white communities ... We need to help groups connect with other groups, expanding their sense of options and models and support networks.”

whelming frequency was fragmentation. People believe it will be hard for progressive power to coalesce as long as we remain so disconnected.

Isolation was an oft-mentioned cause of this predicament. Geographic isolation is a huge prob-

A NOTE ON TERMS

Despite the prevailing view that a broad-based progressive movement does not currently exist, many respondents identified themselves as being part of “the movement.” This seeming paradox might be explained by a combination of the nuances of language and the persistence of optimism. Some interviewees said it is helpful to use the expression “the movement,” if only to refer to a loose-knit group of organizations and activists with a broad progressive agenda. Although this body of organizations is too fragmented really to be considered a coherent, broad-based movement, perhaps the prevalent use of the term represents the first step in building a movement consciousness that will facilitate connecting progressive groups. In any case, it was clear that people do want to identify with and speak in terms of “the movement.”

The distinction between “a movement” and “the movement” highlights the nuances in language used by participants. While “a movement” tended to mean a social and political phenomenon that most people consider does not meaningfully exist at the moment, “the movement” usually referred to the present body of progres-

sive forces that might one day be more united in vision, analysis, communication, and strategy. Interestingly, the pronoun “we” was also used repeatedly to signify that currently formless body of progressive forces.

“The Left” was also used with great frequency. Some people used the term to indicate the same group that constitutes “the movement,” while others suggested that “the Left” currently embodies too narrow a spectrum and must expand if it truly is to embrace a broad and powerful progressive movement.

Finally, the term “progressive” was used perhaps more frequently than any of those above, and with as little agreement on its exact meaning. People clearly had differing visions and definitions of the term; in fact, the term’s very ambiguity may help to explain why so many people said a “progressive” movement does not currently exist: There is no clear, shared “progressive” identity or analysis.

Despite differences in the use and interpretation of these terms, we sensed a general agreement on their meaning. The terms are therefore used in this report more or less interchangeably, without further definition.

“[Many groups] are working on antiracism issues, class issues, gender issues, sexual orientation issues, and what’s just mind-boggling to me is that there’s almost no overlap. I mean, no one is talking about how each issue relates to the other three ... [This is] fragmentation with a capital F.”

lem in certain regions of the country that have a large number of rural communities and a small number of progressive organizations and little activism. While many of the kinds of problems facing these communities are being effectively addressed in other regions, isolation inhibits these groups from learning of other organizations’ successful strategies. Whether it’s the high cost of networking and communication across long distances or simply being unaware of peer groups in other places, numerous isolated communities and organizations suffer from this lack of interconnection.

Conflicts associated with trying to connect to national and regional organizations and issues were a concern to participants. Many believed that connecting to larger groups and issues can detract from their primary organization. On the one hand, the costs in time and money involved in networking, attending conferences, and communicating regionally and nationally result in a drain on resources; on the other, there is a fear that organizational leaders will be lured away by state or national issues. In both cases, the result was perceived as a negative for the local organization.

Wedge issues were mentioned by many participants, who pointed out that the Right has been very successful in dividing us through the way it frames particular issues. Examples of wedge issues include seemingly “positive” environmental legislation that casts immigrants and immigration as being a problem, and antigay legislation that exploits the homophobia within our own ranks. Some people said that organizations feel they cannot take a stand on a particular issue because it might lose them membership and support.

The Right’s success in pushing wedge issues underscores the continued existence of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other oppressions, not only

in society’s institutions and the general population but also among self-identified progressive activists and organizations. Interviewees emphasized that we have not gotten past oppression issues. In fact, some suggested that dismantling oppression within our own ranks is a precondition of meaningful movement-building.

In that context, some also emphasized the need to connect the various strands of anti-oppression work. Single-issue identity politics is not enough if we are to build a truly broad-based progressive force. Some participants, while acknowledging the challenge of analytically linking oppressions, pointed out that we “lack a conceptual framework to connect issues and oppressions.”

Other troublesome sources of fragmentation identified by participants included *factionalism*, *ego*, *turf issues*, and *competition for resources*. When individuals or organizations are far more interested in their own successes than in the greater good, movement-building is severely hampered. Personal power-seeking, rivalry for funding, and disagreements over policy were some of the divisive factors mentioned. Despite the seriousness of these problems, interviewees were unable to offer concrete solutions.

“There is such pressure to keep your local profile and develop organizational capacity that it is almost counterintuitive to participate in something broader. There is the risk of investing something and not getting anything in return. Most of the organizing networks focus their training on building a strong organization, which doesn’t facilitate collaboration. What are the ways you can do both: build internal capacity and connect to other groups and struggles?”

“A lot of people think the large organizing networks should be working together. That will not happen any time soon because the egos are just too strong.”

“Everybody is trying to get the same dollar from the foundation community, and it has created enemies among friends.”

“How does service provision fit into the picture? The role that they [service providers] could play, that they are not consistently playing, ... is putting the individual's problem into a political context ... infusing service provision with a political context ... If a person goes for medical services, [for example, it should be] impossible to leave without having an understanding of the connection between the individual's health issues and the larger political climate.”

Lack of Strategic Vision

A number of connected themes emphasized by Listening Project participants addressed how progressive political work is implemented and how we develop our goals. Strongly expressed by some was the sense that we lack a clear, long-term, strategic vision—in short, we suffer from myopia. The result is what one person referred to as the “doing syndrome” and someone else called “spinning our wheels.” We can be working very hard, but without a long-term and strategic view of what we want to accomplish, we don't get anywhere; we can be doing much but building very little. Many people cited the lack of skills in long-term and strategic planning, combined with a lack of time and resources for reflection, as a cause for this condition. (Indeed, when people were asked to evaluate their participation in the project, many said how much they appreciated the opportunity to step away from their daily work and reflect on the critical, larger questions.)

People's belief that we need to think more strategically and longer term was often linked to a growing concern that progressive political goals need to be less defensive, reform-minded, and service-based. One consistent theme was the social-service vs. social-change dichotomy, with many people sharing the conviction that apolitical service providers are more harmful than helpful. While acknowledging that social services meet very real and immediate needs, people argued that providing services without a political context maintains the status quo. Service providers work primarily with poor and oppressed people, but they do very little to politicize or mobilize them. There was a strong call for the politicization of

“How do you organize in a way that allows people to see the possibilities of not only stopping the cutbacks but also getting something? We lack the capacity to gain ground or gain power. How do you actually get people to talk about gaining ground ... and ask the question, ‘What does change look like [to us]?’ ”

“We have no vision. I understand defensive work. Really, I do. But we are just going to spin our wheels if we can't take the time to develop that vision. [For example,] one of the mistakes of welfare organizing is that it is primarily focusing on the need for wage labor—paying jobs. It ignores the fact that raising children is a job, but it is unpaid work. We're not challenging the definition of work. If we don't challenge [society's] assumptions, we will not progress. We just can't take what they throw at us and try to make it hurt a little less.”

“Barriers stem from the very core of our society's value base. How can we move beyond individualism, for example? If our society's values do not change, then it will be difficult to change society. This [change] begins through education.”

service providers, and a few people even suggested that funders not support service provision that lacks political analysis and education.

A widespread concern was that progressive work is not building toward a new society or new institutions, but instead reacts to what is handed to us; there is too much emphasis on providing services and working for superficial changes in the status quo. We are having difficulty believing in the possibility of real change and challenging the dominant paradigms. Many people suggested that if we do not envision new ways of living and relating to each other and the world, we will never really progress. Integral to this thinking was the stated need to change certain oppressive cultural charac-

teristics; this stood out as a major theme of the focus group in Los Angeles.

Some people cited the risks of co-optation as contributing to the weakness of progressive goals. This was a major theme in the Chicago focus group. As organizations gain access to power and funding, there is ever greater pressure on them to “water down” their politics to maintain that access. Funding plays a significant role in co-opting progressive organizations; most of the funding available is not for explicitly political work, and many groups ultimately change their mission in order to stay funded.

Several people believed that lack of political ideology is partially responsible for the reformist tendency in current progressive work. Ideology helps develop a more comprehensive analysis of what needs to change while pushing political goals with a longer-term vision. It was also noted that funders have served as a barrier to the ideological development of progressive work because foundations themselves not only will not adopt a clear ideological or political stance but actually also discourage grantees from taking strong positions.

“Our lack of control and influence with the media is a huge barrier. The media control people’s perceptions of truth and reality and, currently, a great deal of the public’s notions of reality are very incorrect. The Right has been working hard buying radio stations and influencing the media, which has catalyzed their growth. The United Farm Workers own five radio stations in California and this has been a huge help in communicating with their base.”

“We don’t have the type of communication to override the propaganda that is on TV daily. We cannot filter through and filter out what is fed to people daily.”

“We need to better utilize the media to get our message across. We must move people, in part, through media messages. Let’s be realistic. We can’t expect everyone to have a critical analysis. We can’t do one-on-ones with 100 million people.”

“I would say that the failure of ideology and the fear of ideology contribute to [the public’s confusion about progressive politics] ... There is a definite fear of talking about class as being part of what we’re about ... Part of that has to do with funders ... We can’t use certain language in the proposals or it’s not going to fly.”

“I was active in the [anti-]domestic-violence community for a long time and when we had no money and no one respected us, we had that clarity of vision ... we knew what we wanted. Well, as soon as the city starts recognizing domestic violence as a legitimate issue and there’s money available, then there are task forces set up by the mayor’s office ... and pretty soon no one’s going to say anything about what is really happening to battered women because they don’t want to offend ... the top city officials who are going to give them a seat at the table at the advisory council that isn’t going to do [anything] anyway.”

“There is an increase in money for groups who want to provide services to head off the welfare reform crunch. But this prevents people from addressing the real issues. Right now, homeless people can receive four blankets [from a service organization,] but God forbid that person actually raises the issue of wanting a home. Straight services inhibits raising people’s consciousness ... We need to have services, but it needs to be connected to analysis development and organizing.”

Media and Marketing

Our lack of influence with the media is critically damaging. Our work is simply not being reported. The adage “Good news is no news” seems to rule the mainstream media. The media’s constant barrage of

sensationalized headlines and virtually complete neglect of movement successes and progress were considered major contributors to activists' sense of cynicism, hopelessness, and apathy. Adding insult to injury, the media were also seen as creating and spreading serious misconceptions about reality—for example, distortions of the effects of “welfare reform.” Media-created myths drive wedges deeper between constituencies and make the struggle to win public opinion ever steeper.

Project participants believed that progressive organizations have utilized media resources poorly.

“Perhaps the most important component, or at least the currently most lacking component, to such a [progressive] movement is an overarching set of ideas, themes, and issues that define the movement for the public-at-large and connects people who are in and out of social-change organizations. The Left currently lacks a clear articulation of themes that move and connect people.”

It was felt that progressive work needs to become much more media savvy. We need to gain access to conventional media outlets in order to get the word out, yes, but we should also explore the creation of alternative media resources. Not until our media skills significantly improve will our message be heard with the scope necessary to reach millions.

We need improved marketing skills as well. Many people identified poor message articulation as a major liability. Progressive work must craft campaigns in ways that resonate with the general public; to do this, we must have a clear and unified progressive identity. In this respect, there was much comparison to the Right's success at developing a few “big ideas” that not only arouse the public but also provide a standard behind which their organized forces can gather.

Survival Issues

Day-to-day survival issues confronting grassroots organizations were high on the list of barriers inhibiting progressive power. It was felt that because of the lack of assured and consistent funding, organi-

zations spend too much time fund-raising simply to stay alive. With multiyear grants from foundations, organizations could spend less time fund-raising and more time on their program work.

People also mentioned personnel issues as significant inhibitors: burnout, the lack of trained organizers, high staff and volunteer turnover, and the difficulty of hiring new people. Many asked how we can better nurture the people engaged in the struggle. How can we build a shared understanding that a commitment to working for social change is long-term work? One solution offered was to keep in mind that activists are whole human beings and that people have personal needs that should not be sacrificed to their activist goals. As one participant complained, “People still don't get it. Child care needs to be provided for the involvement of parents and if you have a meeting at dinnertime, you need to provide food.”

Besides money, access to technology was the resource often mentioned as most needed and most lacking. Antiquated computers and software, no fax machine, and limited or no access to the Internet significantly diminish organizations' capacities. Work moves slowly, the scope of potential outreach is constricted, and networking with other organizations and people is too costly or difficult. Some said that many groups on the Left don't even realize what is possible with today's technology; in this regard, the Right is light-years ahead.

INCREASING THE IMPACT OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL WORK

As seen above, if one overriding theme ran through people's critique of the progressive movement today, it was the idea that progressive political work is fragmented and disconnected. We need to find a way to reduce the fragmentation and fuse together our disparate issues, strategies, and efforts. Participants' ideas on how this might come about revealed eight major emphases, sometimes competing, sometimes complementary: issues, organizations, vision, analysis, organizing, leadership, self-transformation, and community-building.

Issues

A few people believed that movements arise organically: We will come together when a particular issue

surfaces that speaks powerfully to people and resounds with a sense of critical need and immediacy. Most respondents, however, were highly skeptical of this idea. Some thought welfare reform might be such a unifying issue, but acknowledged that it has yet to rally the masses. Will the majority of progressive organizations hear the call at the proper moment and drop their own agendas to work for one issue? Unlikely, some said; one specific issue will not unite us. We are too diverse; local and regional needs are too many and varied; what's more, these connections don't just happen spontaneously, they have to be built intentionally.

Rather than waiting for a single key issue to bring us together, many participants issued a strong call for the development of multi-issue work. The connections among issues are becoming increasingly clear and many people thought of single-issue work as isolating. Multi-issue work, they stated, has the ability to build diverse organizations that cut across the lines of class, race, and gender; also important, multi-issue work better addresses the complex web of problems facing communities today. Departing from the single-issue movements of the past, many interviewees promoted a broad-based vision.

Organizations

Many people stressed the need for structural relationships that allow for the joint development of strategies and the coordination of resources. Quite a few suggested that various networks of grassroots organizations could play a key role. Pointing to the benefits of coming together in one institutional home, some proposed that the Labor Party may be that structure. The possibility of a national organization that would unite progressive forces was not generally felt to be a strong prospect; even those who supported it were cautious about the accountability of such an organization and underscored the need for grassroots representation and pluralistic leadership.

Vision and Analysis

Woven through many participant responses was the belief that a common ideological and analytical vision is an essential component in strengthening progressive political work. Many people felt that the lack of a common vision is perhaps the most fundamental barrier to developing strong ties among the

diverse areas of progressive work.

Many people underscored the idea that a shared vision for change is a central precondition for aggregating progressive power and facilitating working relationships across difference. However, there was a great deal of caution in these discussions. There was real concern that proactive attempts to forge a national or regional progressive vision for change could be exclusive or imposed. A progressive vision, it was felt, must be developed in a way that is participatory and inclusive, built on the ideas of community-based organizations and their members, organizers, trainers, and other stakeholders. The vision has to respect the differences among us as well as the things we share. It needs to be developed in such a way that people will feel accountable to that vision. In other words, it needs to be widely felt, widely discussed, and widely understood.

A related theme, which emerged repeatedly during discussions, was the belief that local work needs to be performed within a broader analytical context. In order to unite progressive work and augment our power, we must "think globally" while working

"We need more than issue-specific campaigns. If you jump from issue to issue, your constituency may change. How can organizing focus on something larger that will politically transform people and sustain their involvement in a larger, comprehensive, progressive agenda?"

"The acknowledgment of the need to build relationships across barriers so we can work together and win begins to build on our understanding of why single-issue organizing, which often deliberately tries to avoid the intricacies of cross-cultural relationship building, has failed to build a movement."

"We can't afford a single-issue movement. It has to be broad-based. The attacks and wedges are so intense that we need to get people to agree to at least come to the same table."

"I always think of our [individual political work] as one of the 10,000 pieces of the puzzle. The problem is that we all don't know what the frame for this puzzle is, so we have no idea where these pieces go in the puzzle. I think it is indeed a fundamental task to find out ... what the puzzle all put together looks like."

"I am wary of national organizations that claim to be broadly representative of many groups on the Left. These national organizations tend to be mostly white-run, for instance, and somewhat arrogant ... We need national organizations that are truly pluralistic and representative of the strong grassroots groups that are doing progressive work."

"If a national organization or network was to emerge and take leadership, it would have to have strong relationships with organizations on the ground as well as a national profile. [It] would have to have trust with local organizations and the capacity to ... move things on the ground throughout the country, not just in Washington."

"[A progressive movement] has to have a strategy for change within local communities that is informed by a broader perspective but starts where people are at, not imposed by where a small group thinks people should be. There are too many people who are talking about 'movement' on the national level but who are out of touch with what is the reality on the community level."

"The level of dialogue in the organizations I work with tends to be about moving our organizations forward, without a great deal of explicit talk about how things may affect the wider landscape or the people who are working in other areas ... In order for us to really begin to start thinking about movement we need to develop a consciousness

that our work is about something broader than any one organization."

"[We are] really trying to ... work with people in their communities to look at a particular issue that they are passionate about ... and see how that contributes to broader political context in an explicit way, and getting people over the hurdles of 'Oh, I just care about my community, but I'm not political.' "

"[Movement-building] involves building strong individual organizations that have legs ... It involves winning issues in the context of a broader perspective and it involves building alliances in a meaningful way, which I think is in the spirit of saying 'I'll be there,' so that there is a sense of not only collegiality, but a spirit of presence and holding each other's values and issues so that we stand together."

"We are so cut off from our own history that it is important to cultivate an identity of being part of a history of progressive, radical struggle. Sometimes, we lose sight of what it is we have accomplished. A movement consciousness maintains a sense of hope and strength."

"Here again is a call for a common vision ... a set of unifying principles to which the group can be held accountable. I think this is critical; otherwise, we continue to operate in a vacuum of accountability. It's one thing to be accountable to a community, but that may not be enough if the community is steeped in misinformation and misguided analysis, or if we are. And so a set of unifying principles at least begins to shape a common framework for understanding what we are about. The Declaration of Independence, as flawed as it is, at least offers a framework for debate about what we want our reality to be. We need our own alternative."

“We need to build a movement analysis, so that people who are concentrating on local work make connections beyond their work as well as develop a better understanding of how in their context they could be working for more systemic ... restructuring.”

locally—we must generate a shared analysis of the larger political environment in which we live and work. Great emphasis was placed on the need for community-based organizations to develop the ability to frame their local work in a way that connects to a national discourse and helps people make connections beyond their local issues.

These discussions also stressed the need to build a “movement consciousness.” This concept was articulated in many ways: as an awareness of the need to think beyond one’s particular issue or region; as a sense of solidarity with other organizations; as a belief in collaboration; and as a recognition of the need to think and act politically. Many felt that as more groups and individuals embraced this consciousness, a progressive political cohesiveness would be easier to achieve.

The emphasis on placing our work in a broader context also arose in the expressed need to integrate better an international analysis into domestic political work on every level—national, regional, and local. There was real concern that most progressive organizations are ill prepared to understand how the globalization of the economy and culture affects our work. Some people wondered how our strategies should change to account for the fact that decisions seriously affecting local communities are decreasingly made at the community level.

Most project participants who were concerned about a lack of understanding of global issues called for more popular education and training to

“There’s no ideological presence ... The idea that grassroots activity is just a skill that is connected to no political program, to me, is one of the most serious failings of the Left ... I am concerned that we don’t abandon the idea that it really takes not community organizers but political cadres to start political movements.”

help organizations make the necessary connections. People mentioned the need for not only basic economic literacy education but also training that brings home global issues and cultivates a sense of solidarity among international communities. Some contended that without building this analysis, progressive work will be merely a Band-Aid and will become largely ineffective in the long run.

While emphasizing the need for political education, several people talked about the need to be more ideological. In these comments, ideology seemed to be defined as a set of ideas and values

“I tend to believe that one of the fundamental problems is that we lack a common understanding of what are the fundamental forces of oppression and therefore ... we may be very effective in the specific things that we do, but since we do not connect, we do not generate a more meaningful effect.”

that help form a critique of current society as well as articulate generally our vision for a better world. These people contended that without a coherent set of principles and values that guide us, our work tends to be reactionary rather than proactive and piecemeal rather than holistic.

One question stood out from these discussions: What, exactly, should be the political analysis or ideology that defines a progressive movement or identity? What will be the tie that binds us? There was no clear answer. Some people suggested that class is the principle that will most effectively connect issues and constituencies. That suggestion was reinforced when PDF asked people what issue or issues have the best potential for coalition work. The most frequent response was economic justice issues.

Organizing

In stressing the importance of building ideological analysis and a movement consciousness, many participants spoke directly to the implications with respect to organizing. If we are to increase local activists’ capacity to frame their work within a larger context, they said, political and popular education should be an integral part of grassroots organizing.

If we are not developing people's critical consciousness and analysis of the systems, institutions, and culture that create unjust societal relationships of power and wealth, what is the purpose of our organizing? Development of a concrete, critical analysis will help progressive work become less reformist and more strategic. It was felt that as organizations deepen their political analysis, they will be more likely to address the root causes of societal problems.

There was a strong critique of "politics-free" organizing. Those expressing this view felt that

"I intentionally live in a white, middle-class suburb because I believe that's where the work needs to happen. There is a tendency to think that the work needs to happen in Roxbury or Dorchester, but the truth of the matter is that a lot the work needs to happen in the white middle-class suburbs, where we need [to work on] understanding how racism, classism, and genderism and sexual issues all fit together to perpetuate privilege."

"You take most Anglo-American progressives, they don't go organizing white workers. They don't organize white poor people. . . . They want to keep organizing Latinos, the African Americans, the women, the poor on welfare. But we really have to bring all the forces to the front and develop links. For that, the leadership is really lacking."

"A serious problem is a lack of real building of a grassroots base. There are too many incestuous communities of activists around the country. We all know who we are and we are very comfortable working with each other. There needs to be more leadership development. The Left needs to go beyond the Left."

"We need a willingness to be bold, instead of the tendency to just stick to what we know."

"There are too many people, organizations, and processes uninterested in truly reaching out to the grass roots. How many welfare reform coalitions are formed around the country that have very little representation among people on welfare? They are social service providers or well-meaning organizations that don't want to do the work needed [for outreach] or for other reasons they don't include grassroots folks."

"That is what cracks me up about these intellectuals, because they're talking about, 'The movement should be this way or the movement should be that way,' and they don't have a clue of what people are having to deal with. I have some shops of single women with children that work 12 hours a day, and the things that they have to deal with are just absolutely incredible. But nobody has organized them or given them an expression for their leadership so you never hear their voices ... because nobody is reaching out to them, and that structural part is the most difficult thing to break ..."

some organizations are stuck in an operating mode that stresses "empowerment." But our goals need to be more than giving people a voice or a job, they argued; we need to politicize people and build our collective critical analysis. This theme also arose among several trainers, who felt that providing organizational development or organizing tools without theory or consciousness-raising is problematic.

In the context of these views, the opinion was strongly voiced that progressive work also needs to get "back to the basics"—we must build our base and organize, organize, organize. There was a perception that many groups that started out interested in organizing people and building community power are increasingly moving away from that toward advocacy or other work. A few people expressed disappointment with the community development sector, which began mostly as membership organizations in the

“We don’t understand the need for leadership. We don’t groom leadership. We don’t respect leadership. In South Africa, Mandela is very respected. Even if people don’t agree with some of his stands, he is not demonized. We are so ... individualistic. If a leader makes one controversial stand, then we throw them to the wolves and start our own group. This is one reason why we can’t come together. People are not willing to sacrifice something to join forces.”

“Organizations within the network rely too heavily on a few leaders. This is not sustainable, particularly if our goal is building a movement that is about being self-directed. This is a huge challenge. So [we are] spending a great deal of time on rank-and-file leadership development.”

1970s but slowly prioritized straight housing and economic development without direct ties to communities or leadership development. Many people insisted that until we reach out to more people and do the hard work of door-knocking, we will not gain power.

Several people were also critical of how and to whom outreach and organizing are usually directed. Too much organizing tends to take on a ghettoized quality, they felt. For instance, it is unpopular to work with the white middle class, but we must acknowledge they are a huge power base—although, as one participant suggested, such work must take a different approach.

Several people described current organizing as being “tired” and “lacking creativity.” Many participants called for a more flexible approach to creating and implementing organizing strategies. The world is rapidly changing, they said, and as our environment changes, so must we. Although some approaches to social-change work are proven and still relevant, we should challenge ourselves to “step out of our box.” As organizing becomes more creative—and perhaps even fun—we will see the benefits in increased energy, improved spirit, and greater numbers of involved people.

Several people advocated an increased use of direct action as a useful organizing strategy. It was felt that it is not always in our best interest to use a cooperative approach, particularly when the targets of an organizing campaign have no intention of negotiating in a principled way. When necessary, we should not shy away from becoming more confrontational to escalate issues to a state of crisis in order to settle disputes. Civil disobedience can also demonstrate a moral strength that can attract others to support a cause. People also spoke to the ability of direct action to deepen people’s political commitment and increase a sense of our own power.

Leadership

In the discussions, participants’ most frequent take on leadership—both individuals within organizations and institutions in leadership positions within the movement—was that it needs to be more accountable to the grass roots. There was a sharp critique of coalitions and campaigns whose leaders do little to seek input or guidance from the people for whom they claim to work. While accountability was a major theme, few offered any detailed thoughts on what accountability should look like in practical terms.

Another emphasis in this area was the need for increased attention to leadership development, particularly among the “rank and file.” There was a strong call for pluralistic leadership that reflects our diversity and can speak from experience.

What stood out most conspicuously in these discussions was that many of the opinions about leadership were sharply conflicting. On one side was a

“We should live our organizations’ missions now, as much as we can, given the constraints of a capitalist society held in place by the myriad of ‘isms.’ Attention to process, or the values underlying the work, is our second chance to benefit from the mistakes of earlier movements where, for example, labor unions held up the rights of workers as long as they were white and male. We can make a commitment to address those issues under our control even while working within an oppressive framework.”

“This is part of a cultural change in modern American society. People are not engaging at the community level ... It’s a function of the atomization of society ... presumably starting with the building of freeways that allow people to move into the suburbs. Instead of communities now, we are individual households, nuclear families.”

critique of charismatic leaders who are apparently unaccountable; seemingly implicit in this opinion was the need for some structural form of accountability. On the other side, some people suggested that we could use a little charisma, or even a lot of it; in this view, perhaps, the ultimate test of accountability is not structural but depends on whether or not people heed the words and advice of a leader.

Do we throw our leaders to the wolves at the first disagreement, as one respondent claimed? Or have we just not had the right leaders to gather behind? A few people argued that U.S. Americans are unwilling to compromise and cooperate in order to aggregate power. One of these reported a joke among international activists, who say that in the United States democracy means that every five people can start their own organization.

Self-transformation

There was a strongly expressed belief that many progressive activists and organizations ignore or underemphasize attention to internal work. Although some organizations may focus on fighting institutional racism and oppression, when confronted by issues of racism and oppression within their own ranks, many groups sweep these issues under the rug. Participants who acknowledged this reality questioned how a progressive agenda can truly advance if “progressive” organizations and activists are unwilling to be challenged and engage in the difficult work of self-reflection and transformation. For example, it was said that men need to examine how they may perpetuate the dynamics of male domination within a meeting or an organization. How successful is an organization that may win real victories, while women within the organization feel silenced or disempowered? Can we truly transform society if we can’t transform ourselves?

Within this discussion, people mentioned the importance of process. How does the way we do our work empower or oppress, include or exclude? Sometimes the most efficient means to an end can be subtly destructive. Too often the value we place on *product* (achieving results) tends to devalue *process* (building the capacity to do it in a way that honors our values); the two must be more fully integrated. These ideas mirror the words of Audre Lorde: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

Bridging the Movement’s Varied Sectors

Many participants mentioned the need for simultaneous, multiple approaches to progressive social-change work. It was repeatedly emphasized that we need to be working toward a point where collectively we are stronger than the sum of our parts. Some of the crucial points raised were these:

- Grassroots organizing builds our base.
- A political network puts progressive policy into legislation and develops electoral leaders.
- A research-and information-management component provides the data to inform successful campaigns and intelligent policies.
- A cultural and spiritual component nurtures and strengthens us in the struggle.
- A progressive media component builds mass understanding and support for progressive organizing and campaigns.
- Progressive policy organizations can shape our vision into legislation and concrete plans.
- Training and education build consciousness and skills.
- Progressive philanthropy provides the necessary resources and involves people across class lines.

A sharp point of tension was uncovered when people discussed the difficulties of bringing together people from different fields and educational backgrounds. Several people felt strongly that the various sectors of the movement are simply uninterested in connecting to one another. This was perceived by some as a central weakness of the Left. According to some participants, many activists are working with the opinion that their strategy is the most effective path to change, without understanding the synergistic role of the various progressive sectors. For example, some people suggested that

without grassroots organizing, there will be no base of people to push progressive policies through, yet many organizers perceived policy organizations as uninterested in building relationships with the grass roots and grassroots organizers as uninterested in pushing an agenda that their constituents have had no voice in creating. People said that if policy development lacks strong connections to the grass roots, progressive policy will remain disconnected from real-life issues.

One of the necessary strategies suggested for building connections and decreasing fragmentation was *community-building*. There was a perception that individualism is growing and the physical, cultural, and spiritual links among people are weakening. In this context, community-building can take many forms and was spoken about in various ways. Community-building can be something that helps connect people on a conscious level, as the calls for “black pride” and “black power” linked thousands if not millions of African Americans in the 1970s. Community-building can also focus on connecting people physically as well as cognitively within a specific location, like a neighborhood.

THE ROLE OF FOUNDATIONS IN SUPPORTING PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL WORK

Before beginning discussions of this topic, PDF’s facilitators told participants that we were looking for honest feedback about the role of foundations in supporting social change. We asked people to be as critical as they wanted to be. Although many people acknowledged a fear of straight talk with funders, most respondents did not stint on candor.

Not surprisingly, the need for larger grants and multiyear grants stood out as a major emphasis. Progressive organizations spend far too much energy chasing small, one-year grants and do less program work as a result. Social change on any level is a long-term undertaking. Participants stressed that foundations must recognize that major campaigns are not won in a year; they need to provide organizations with long-term support they can count on, so that fund-raising doesn’t become such a distraction from the real focus. The application process itself should also be made easier.

“It’s ironic that most of the Left’s social-change foundations are the worst in supporting movement-building. These foundations have been extraordinarily issue-driven, changing focuses constantly ... The more traditional foundations, on the other hand, are much more likely to make large, infrastructure-building, multiyear grants.”

“Foundations interested in movement-building should look at capacity-building, making commitments to organizations rather than programs. We have several programs that we believe have a synergistic relationship, yet we are forced to sell our programs separately to funders with narrow funding priorities, because foundations can’t see or are not looking for the totality of the work.”

It was also widely felt that the tendency of many foundations to fund projects rather than providing general operating support weakens the impact of progressive political organizations. People complained about the need to frame their work into narrow issues and special projects to fit funding guidelines. Such funding practices result in short-term projects that poorly reflect the authentic, complicated needs of communities and organizations. In addition, the lack of general-support grants engenders institutional weakness. Organizations are forced to concentrate resources in specific projects (at times contrived) that do not reflect their real priorities or development needs. The lack of general-support funding can engender poor communication systems, little access to up-to-date technology, ineffective administrative infrastructure, inadequate

“Foundations should help grassroots groups build endowments. We need that security as well. Endowments shouldn’t just be for foundations, you know.”

"I sent to a program officer from a 'progressive' foundation some materials that had come out of an economic training program we do ... and the program officer, who understands himself to be a leftist, freaked and said all the references to corporate power would have to come out because it just wouldn't fly ... Because [we were] in a position of having other resources, we said ... ['Forget it,] we're not going to compromise our politics.' "

attention to media and marketing work, and poorly paid or inadequate core staff.

Frail institutions have weak credibility, something progressive political work can ill afford. Organizations build trust with communities when residents know groups will be around for the long haul. And as organizations strengthen themselves internally and gain credibility, new avenues to philanthropic support should open, for example, facilitating successful fund-raising from their own constituents. Foundations therefore should be looking at building the long-term capacity of progressive organizations.

There was a great deal of talk about how dependence on foundation funding, especially if current practices continue, inhibits the development of solid organizations and political work. Capacity-building was articulated by some as strengthening the ability of organizations to stabilize, increase, and diversify their funding bases. These discussions underscored the need not only to build stronger institutions but also to build political independence. In this context, most foundations are seen as a stumbling block to developing strong, progressive political work.

Sally Covington's report on the funding practices of conservative foundations (see Appendix E) came up several times. Those discussions emphasized that a strength of the Right's funding is that conservative foundations are openly and comfortably political and ideological. On the other hand, the large foundations that grant to "progressive" organizations are perceived as shying away from strong political stances. In fact, there was an extensive perception that these seemingly progressive founda-

tions still represent the interests of the moneyed elite and will therefore seriously constrain how political grantees can be.

There was very little sense from Listening Project participants that foundations are in the struggle with them. People suggested that foundations should lose their "arrogance" and begin to develop relationships with grantees built on "respect," "trust," and "partnership." Some suggested that a good place for funders to start would be improving their ability to listen.

A related concern focused on the perception that foundations do not reflect on their own power and

"I watched them [foundations] create Black and Latino inner-city political leadership in the late '60s and '70s and then come back in the '80s and announce that they were dissatisfied ... and so they go and create another one."

"The problem with policy is that it has no feet. The — Foundation was visiting here one time and they had this big session on linking policy and organizing. They had like 27 policy people and only three organizers ... The question became, How do we get progressive policy in the hands of the grassroots folks? Obviously it ain't getting there ... and this guy from one of these Midwest think tanks says, 'My job is to manufacture policy, I don't retail it.' In one sentence he just dismissed any power that grassroots people have."

"I do think there are funders out there who look into buying feet for policy—you know, 'I'll give you grassroots money if you carry out this policy.' ... So that [policy] is grafted onto the grass roots, not developed within ... In whose interest are these policies? They can't be in the interest of community folk if they [grassroots people] were not in on the [policy's] development."

their role in supporting change. Many people suggested that, rather than giving direction from above, foundations should follow the lead of organizations on the ground. In other words, foundations should not define the outcome of work they fund. Too many organizations' missions are already driven by funding rather than by internal political vision and analysis. People's concerns about foundations' undue influence also stemmed partially from the perception that foundations have historically anointed leadership, based not on a level of authentic support but on their own will and wishes.

The role of foundations was the primary emphasis in the focus group in Albuquerque and mirrored much of what PDF heard elsewhere. There, Listening Project participants underscored the role that funding and foundations play in creating disunity within the movement. Many people pointed to the high level of competition for funders' dollars as a barrier to collaboration. People want to maintain distinct programs in the hopes of gaining an advantage while vying for funding.

Participants stressed that foundations need to be accountable to the communities, not just the organizations, that receive their dollars. People referred to major rifts caused by foundations going into certain regions with a limited sense of who is working in that region and then, partially out of ignorance, developing relationships with a restricted set of organizations. In this dialogue, people criticized a perceived "glass ceiling" they felt foundations have built for grassroots organizations and organizations of color. It was reported that some community-based organizations feel they are punished for their

"Perhaps the most important thing to understand is the difference between mobilizing and organizing. Mobilizing puts large numbers of people at an event. Organizing develops a critical analysis among people and develops leaders ... Mobilization may be good for winning reforms, but until we have a critical mass of grassroots people with an analysis that calls for revolutionary change, we will not be successful."

"I think it is going to be a positive sign [when] people see action as part of their life. Kids will be going to school and saying, 'I'll be late coming home from school, Mom, we've got the demonstration today.' 'Okay, Johnny, don't forget to bring a brick.' "

"Direct action has been extremely effective in the past, with the labor movement in the 1930s and the civil rights movement ... There needs to be a level of militancy that pushes people into direct action. These are tactics that win. So developing a constituency that is comfortable with direct action is important."

success: If their budgets grow "too large," some funders stop supporting them because they hold the notion that only national, regional, or white-run organizations should have a substantial budget.

Despite the critical things people had to say about foundations, many people felt there are positive roles funders can play. The most frequently mentioned of these was helping to convene and connect progressive organizations. Networking opportunities are crucial for reducing the high level of fragmentation that exists across the movement, and funders could make it more feasible for useful gatherings to happen. Some participants also suggested that funders make it their job to educate the wealthy and build a community of funders who understand their valuable role in progressive social change.

Conclusion

CONCLUSIONS: PERSPECTIVES FROM PDF

During the Listening Project, PDF heard from many people working on critical issues and engaged in struggle in communities all over the country. We heard the assessment that at this time in history the progressive movement is in a state of “ebb,” a time of rebuilding and reorganizing, as the U.S. and global context and circumstances shift around us. We also heard that progressive political work will have a meaningful impact on our world only when the social-change movement adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

While Listening Project participants shared many good ideas about how to build a movement, as well as visions of what a broad-based movement might look like and toward what end a progressive movement should be working, there was no real consensus on these issues. But participants did describe movement-building as a complex and multilayered process that requires many different roles and focuses.

And certainly, within the movement at this time, there are major concerns about our ability to organize successfully across the race and class divides that pervade American society. While we work to transform these aspects of ourselves and our communities, we also need to respect and support the autonomy, self-determination, and differences among us, for they embody the strength and beauty brought to this movement by our diverse communities. For Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, lesbians and gays, and others, the vision assumes assimilation not into a melting pot but into a tapestry of color and culture, spirituality and language, history and struggle. Something new is being modeled, and in many cases the struggle is taking place quietly, out of the public eye, through cultural vehicles. In other cases it is being waged in land campaigns, where communities are attempting to gain control of their immediate environment, geography, and natural resources, and to confront corporate and governmental degradation of the earth. These and other efforts represent the

unglamorous, day-to-day hard work about which leaders and organizers spoke to us through the Listening Project.

Having listened, our obligation as funders, trainers, and organizers in the funding world is to embrace and act on the messages given to us. One clear message was that the funders' world has a moral as well as a strategic challenge to become more organized, more accountable, more connected, more a part of the overall movement-building process that is under way. We need to heed our own advice, sacrificing some of our autonomy, some of our desire to be innovative and cutting-edge, for the hard work of organizing resources and transferring them to the front lines where a movement is being built, where dedicated workers are healing from past wounds and carrying on the fight.

As a foundation and training institution, PDF is interested in supporting progressive movement-building, working with the relationship between building organizations and building a movement. One question PDF has highlighted for further exploration is how to recognize and support the movement-building potential within organizations and communities.

The task at hand for PDF is not only to support those groups that already embody and embrace the idea of progressive movement-building, but also to offer the education and training needed to help expand the base among the diversity of people and experiences that comprise our society today. Only through our collective efforts will we build a vibrant and cohesive movement.

And while promoting movement-building, we must discuss the very real power differentials among communities and organizations engaged in this work. How do we address the widespread inequity in current and historical access to resources? And how can we deal with issues essential to a movement-building process that come out of historical experiences of oppression, such as Native American treaty rights, which are not negotiable and cannot be sacrificed for movement-building?

For the Peace Development Fund, the Listening Project raised as many questions as it answered. Still, the ideas and opinions of the project's participants have helped us better understand the current state of progressive social-change work and the challenges of progressive movement-building, as

well as how PDF can best assist and nurture that process. PDF hopes that funders, organizers, scholars, donors, and others will also gain insight from this project; we hope you will do your own soul searching and partnership building with people and communities on the front lines.

If Latin American leader Che Guevara is remembered for one statement above all others, it was his belief that "a true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love." It is this compassion that we wish to express, and this respect and honoring of the struggle that we wish to offer you as we conclude this report. There is much analysis and much discussion yet to be done, at many levels and in many venues. But principally, we wish to honor the example of hard work and sacrifice, and to bring our intellect and creativity to bear on the great challenge of building a movement that remembers, respects, and honors our collective past and leads to a more humane and just future.

Finally, we thank all who worked with us on this project, who gave generously of their time and thought, who challenged the Peace Development Fund to be more than the sum of its parts and to be a true partner as a conscious and courageous participant in this struggle. We dedicate our work and our resources to reach that higher level; we welcome your comments and critiques; and we invite you to hold us to an ever-higher standard as we move on with what the movement has given all of us.

Appendices

Appendix A

LISTENING PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWEES

Bineshi Albert
Youth Action
Albuquerque, NM

Jane Bai
Committee Against Anti-Asian
Violence
New York, NY

Rob Baril
Direct Action for Rights & Equality
(DARE)¹
Providence, RI

Michaelann Bewsee
Arise for Social Justice
Springfield, MA

John Bixler
Dakota Rural Action
Brookings, SD

Donna Chavis
Native Americans in Philanthropy
Lumberton, NC

Scott Douglas
Greater Birmingham Ministries
Birmingham, AL

Jerome Scott
Project South: Institute for the
Elimination of Poverty and
Genocide
Atlanta, GA

Larry Ferlazzo
Sacramento Valley Organizing
Committee (IAF)
Sacramento, CA

Tom Goldtooth
Indigenous Environmental Network
Red Wing, MN

Ellen Gurzinsky
Funding Exchange
New York, NY

Jeanne Guana
Southwest Organizing Project
Albuquerque, NM

Stephanie Gut
San Diego Organizing Project (PICO)
San Diego, CA

Debra Harry
Independent Consultant/Trainer
Nixon, NV

Cherri Honkala
Kensington Welfare Rights Union
Philadelphia, PA

Dan Hosang
PUEBLO
Oakland, CA

Paul Hyry
Community Education Project
Holyoke, MA

Rebecca Isaacs
National Gay & Lesbian Taskforce
Washington, DC

Alice Ito
National Network of Grantmakers
Seattle, WA

Leroy Johnson
Southern Echo
Jackson, MI

Kenneth Jones
Exchange Project
Jacksonville, FL

Terry Keleher
Applied Research Center
Oakland, CA

Larry Kleinman
Pineros y Campesinos Unidos
Noreste
Woodburn, OR

Joan Olson
Cultural Bridges
Hamburg, PA

Sonia Peña
Center for Third World Organizing
Oakland, CA

Dan Petegorsky
Western States Center
Portland, OR

Rachel Rosenbloom
Jews for Racial and Economic
Justice
New York, NY

June Rostan
Southern Empowerment Project
Maryville, TN

Diane Russell
Institute for Conservation Leadership
Tacoma Park, MD

Rinku Sen
Center for Third World Organizing
Oakland, CA

Young Shin
Asian Immigrant Women's Advocate
San Francisco, CA

Patrick Sweeney
Western Organization of Resource
Councils
Billings, MT

Joe Szakos
Virginia Organizing Project
Charlottesville, VA

Madeline Talbot
ACORN
Chicago, IL

Ingrid Washinawatok
Fund of the Four Directions
New York, NY

Leah Wise
Southeast Regional Economic
Justice Network
Durham, NC

ALBUQUERQUE FOCUS GROUP

July 6, 1998

Lori Goodman
Dine' CARE
Durango, CO

Santiago Juarez
Revisioning New Mexico
Española, NM

Teresa Juarez
Independent, formerly with
Revisioning New Mexico
Chimayo, NM

Martha Ojeda
Coalition for Justice in the
Maquiladoras
San Antonio, Texas

Ray Padilla
Colonias Development Council
Las Cruces, NM

Gilbert Sanchez
TEWA Environment Watch Alliance
San il defonsa Pueblo, NM

Kathy Sanchez
TEWA Women United
San il defonsa Pueblo, NM

CHICAGO FOCUS GROUP

June 30, 1998

Lisa Arnold
Bickerdike Redevelopment Corp.
Chicago

John Donahue
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Chicago

Nacho Gonzalez
Voorhees Center
Chicago

Dian Lovett
Homeless on the Move for Equality
(H.O.M.E.)
Chicago

Richard Monje
UNITE (Union of Needle Trades,
Industrial and Textile Employees)
Chicago

Adolph Reed
Labor Party
Chicago

David Smathers
Midwest Center for Labor Research
Chicago

Fran Tobin
REACH Project (Renters Escrow and
Community Housing Fund)
Chicago

BOSTON FOCUS GROUP

June 26, 1998

Oscar Chacon
Centro Presente, Inc.
Cambridge, MA

Jim St. George
Tax Equity Alliance for
Massachusetts
Boston

Antonietta Gimeno
Boston Women's Fund
Boston

Tommie J. Hollis-Younger
Haymarket People's Fund
Jamaica Plain, MA

Pam Kelly
Neighbor to Neighbor
Cambridge, MA

Linda Johnson
Women's Statewide Legislative
Network
Boston

June Lee
Boston Women's Fund
Boston

Trinh T. Tuyet Nguyen
Coalition for Asian &
Pacific American Youth
Boston

Mike Prokosch
Formerly with the Committee in
Solidarity with the People of
El Salvador
Dorchester, MA

Carlos Rosales
Mass Tenants' Organization
Boston

Grace Ross
Women's Alliance
Framingham, MA

Dara Silverman
Neighbor to Neighbor
Cambridge, MA

ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA FOCUS GROUP

May 28, 1998

Chandler Cochran
Youth Initiative Project, Inc.
Brunswick, GA

Meredith Dean
Appalachia Women's Alliance
Floyd, VA

Laura Gordon
Western NC Central Labor Council
Asheville, NC

Alan McGregor
Independent Consultant
Asheville, NC

Mildred Myers
South Carolina Environmental Watch
Gadsden, SC

Jearlean Osborne
Community Dream Makers
Biloxi, MS

Corry Stevenson
South Carolina United Action
Orangeburg, SC

Connie Tucker
Southern Organizing Committee
Birmingham, AL

LOS ANGELES FOCUS GROUP

May 18, 1998

Maisie Chin
LA PASS
Los Angeles

Ferd Eggan
City of LA, AIDS Office
Los Angeles

Paula Litt
Liberty Hill Foundation
Santa Monica, CA

Ruben Lizardo
Community Development Tech.
Center
Los Angeles

Gary Phillips
MultiCultural Collaborative
Los Angeles

SEATTLE FOCUS GROUP

May 15, 1998

Neal Adams
A Territory Resource¹
Seattle

LeeAnn Hall
Northwest Federation of Community
Organizations
Seattle

Soya Jung
Washington Alliance for Immigrant
and Refugee Justice
Seattle

Alan Rabinowitz
Pequod Fund
Seattle

Jen Ray
Idaho Women's Network
Boise, ID

Kelley Weigel
Rural Organizing Project
Scappoose, OR

¹ No longer with this organization

Appendix B

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Through our funding and training work over the past 17 years, the Peace Development Fund has established many ties to groups and individuals working for social change throughout the country. Using these connections, and following the organizational, geographical, and demographic criteria outlined in the Introduction, the staff and board of PDF collaborated to create a list of potential participants for the Listening Project.

After narrowing that list to reflect the diversity required by our criteria, we selected two dozen interviewees. During the first round of interviews, these people were asked whom they would recommend to be included in the Listening Project. From those suggestions, the pool of people who constituted the last third of our 36 interviewees was created. Participants in the six regional focus groups were representatives of organizations working on the ground in those areas, recruited through our existing connections to those organizations.

Although we have included organizational affiliations with the list of project participants (see Appendix A), we encouraged people to speak from their individual perspectives. We did not want to ignore the great variety of participants' work and experiences, past and present. All the interviewees and focus-group participants were promised confidentiality (thus none of the quotations used in this report is directly attributed). We adopted this policy in order to increase participants' trust and thus to increase the project's access to people's ideas, opinions, and concerns. PDF taped all of the focus groups and almost all of the interviews, but the tapes were used solely to assist in capturing more fully the thoughts people presented.

The interview and focus-group sessions yielded more than 400 pages of transcripts and notes. We then highlighted (literally) all the ideas, opinions, concerns, and questions raised. That information was then categorized. The categorization process involved some interpretation of what project partici-

pants had said. For example, if several people mentioned that organizations are too rigid in the strategies they use, their comments were grouped with opinions on the need to be flexible in using strategies and tactics. Interpretation also involved judging, within the context of what was said, whether some people were saying similar things but using different language.

This sort of interpretation was necessary because of the enormous amount of information that had to be sorted and categorized. However, when interpreting participants' responses, we took great care to maintain the integrity of what they had actually said. In addition, whenever possible, the participants who are quoted in this report were recontacted to ensure that their comments are, in fact, presented in the context they originally intended. After all the ideas presented by participants were categorized, the interview notes and focus-group transcripts were read through several more times, to record the frequency with which each categorized point was mentioned. This process illuminated what was said, by whom, and by how many.

Appendix C

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

SECTION 1:

Background Information

- 1) Name:
 - 2) Sex:
 - 3) Race/Ethnicity:
 - 4) Age:
 - 5) Organizational Name:
 - 6) How would you describe the work of your organization and issue focus? (*Short answer needed—2 or 3 sentences*)
 - 7) Please describe your geographic focus. (*Short answer needed—2 or 3 sentences*)
 - 8) If your work is primarily in a local community or region, how would you describe the community in which you work in terms of urban, rural, suburban, or other. Please don't feel constrained to these categories. (*Short answer needed—2 or 3 sentences*)
- A) Please describe the economic and racial makeup of the community or region in which you work. (*Short answer needed —2 or 3 sentences*)

SECTION 2:

Concepts Regarding Social Change and Social-Change Movements

- 1) Does the vision of the kind of society you are working toward embody reforming our current society's structures, institutions, and relationships or does it embody fundamentally changing or transforming our current society?
- 2) When you hear the term "movement" or "social-change movement," what does that mean to you, what might that look like?
- 3) Do you currently see yourself as part of a movement?
— If yes, why?
— If not, why not?
- 4) The Peace Development Fund is interested in supporting a broad-based social-change movement. By broad-based, we mean a movement that

cuts across and connects issues and constituencies. Please describe the essential components in a broad-based social-change movement that has the capacity to win fundamental change.

- 5) Describe particular organizing strategies that may be more effective for building such a movement.
A) Are there particular issues that lend themselves to coalition-building and linking constituencies?
- 6) What are the barriers that prevent you and your organization from thinking and acting in a way that prioritizes movement-building or from increasing your impact?
- 7) Describe the larger barriers that go beyond your organization and inhibit aggregating progressive power or the growth of a national movement.
- 8) What resources are necessary to increase progressive political power and/or build a winning movement?
- 9) What do you think is the role of foundations in movement-building?
A) How could/should foundations be more accountable to the constituents they are trying to serve? (*in PDF's case, the progressive, grassroots social-change movement*)

Notes:

The following two questions were dropped shortly after the beginning of the project because the information was considered unnecessary:

- 1) Do you or does your organization belong to or actively participate in any other organizations, networks, or associations? If Yes, please describe them.
- 2) What are the 3 most important components of the kind of society your organization is working toward?

When the project started, Question 2 in Section 2 began as follows: How would you define a social-change movement? This question was reworded after the first 20 interviews in order to elicit clearer responses.

The Listening Project is part of a larger process the Peace Development Fund is engaged in called the Strategic Transition Process (STP). The STP was explained to the first 20 interviewees, who were asked for feedback in the form of the following two questions:

- What do you think about the STP process?
- Would you suggest changes in the process?

The first two-thirds of interviewees were asked: Could you think of one or two people or organizations that you believe would have valuable insight for this project? We are particularly looking for organizations that represent an organized base or constituency.

Appendix D

FOCUS-GROUP AGENDA AND QUESTIONS

PDF Introduction

Welcoming

Brief introduction to the Peace Development Fund

Why is PDF organizing these focus groups?

The Listening Project

What we plan to do with the information

Brief review of agenda and format

Questions?

Participant Introductions

Questions:

- 1) How do you feel about the state of progressive social change today?
- 2) What would need to happen to increase the effectiveness and impact of progressive social-change work?
- 3) What would it take to build a national, broad-based, democratic movement for fundamental change in this country?
- 4) Is movement-building a goal worth prioritizing?
- 5) What issues lend themselves to movement-building and what strategies are most effective in furthering movement-building?
- 6) What does or might movement-building mean for your work?
- 7) What resources and skills are needed to further the impact of progressive political work?
- 8) When you look at the various groups doing training/education for progressive social change, what types of skills/issues/experiences are currently being offered? What types are not being offered? What more is needed?

Wrap-up

Evaluation

Appendix E

BACKGROUND READING

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Appendix F

LISTENING PROJECT FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

As an extension of the Listening Project, the Peace Development Fund wants to present some of the questions that arose while conducting the Listening Project. The following are questions that the staff and board of PDF will be wrestling with in the coming year and beyond.

1. How can we identify movement-building potential within an organization? Within a region?
2. What are the organic aspects of movement growth?
3. What are the aspects of movement that need to be built intentionally?
4. How might foundations help convene and connect progressive organizations?
5. What is the work necessary to increase the impact of progressive political work that may have nothing to do with movement-building?
6. How does one build a national broad-based movement challenged by geographic isolation, oppression, and factionalism?
7. How can the philanthropic community organize and work more effectively to create noncompetitive funding as a strategy to break down factionalism and build a broad-based national movement?

Not only is the Peace Development Fund very interested in hearing any of your thoughts on the above questions, but PDF would also greatly appreciate any feedback you may have regarding either the Listening Project or this report. Please send written feedback by mailing your comments to either address below:

listening@peacefund.org

or

**The Peace Development Fund
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PO Box 1280
Amherst, MA 01004
Fax: 413-256-8871**

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7. How can the philanthropic community organize and work more effectively to create noncompetitive funding as a strategy to break down factionalism and build a broad-based national movement?

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