



The New York Immigration Coalition

CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP Concept Paper Summary

New York City's neighborhoods face a growing number of challenges and opportunities as new pressures confront residents and policy makers. With one million new New Yorkers expected by 2030, we must meet the growing need for affordable housing, increase opportunities for an expanding immigrant population, and ensure that critical services such as education serve our communities.

More than ever, city residents must have a voice in resolving these critical social and policy issues. Strong neighborhood leadership, using community organizing as a tool, is and will continue to be one of the most effective mechanisms for making neighborhood voices heard.

The **Center for Neighborhood Leadership** will be a comprehensive, cross-sector project, creating infrastructure to provide deep, multi-layered support that will strengthen neighborhood-based organizing in New York City. The Center will be formed as a joint project by issue-based umbrella group institutions with an organizational membership that represent and support the important neighborhood-based organizing sectors in New York City. Founding partners will include the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD), a membership organization of more than 90 New York City neighborhood-based housing groups that build and preserve affordable housing, and the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups in New York State that work with immigrants and refugees.

Those combined 290 member groups will tie the Center for Neighborhood Leadership into a very diverse membership base and broad geographic focus, working on a wide set of issues that are most pressing to their neighborhoods. This diversity and scale is central to the model of the Center because our goal is to support and strengthen the best community organizing that is currently taking place in New York City, but also to bring in an emerging universe of community activists groups that are well established in their communities, but have only begun to develop community organizing as a central strategy. The Center will build on the recent successes of ANHD and NYIC, which have both coordinated organizing support programs among their respective memberships that have brought new groups into community organizing at a critical and exciting juncture of the immigrant and the housing rights movement.

Currently, leadership development and community organizing in New York City is hampered by a severe lack of infrastructure and support. New York City has a significant neighborhood-based organizing movement which plays a vital role on many issues, but we lack the infrastructure for recruiting, training and supporting organizing that could dramatically build the power and capacity of the city's community groups to tackle our most pressing issues, neighborhood by neighborhood and citywide. Over the years, New York City organizers have consistently identified three areas of pressing need:

- **A Pipeline to Develop New Leadership** – A neighborhood's ability to respond to emerging issues is dependent on a base of strong leadership, supported by skilled organizers.
- **Support for Mid – Level Organizers** - Mid-level organizers often leave the field because they have stagnated in their organizing, and because they cannot see a clear career path to keep them

in the field. As a result, we lose many of the people who should become the deeply experienced, sophisticated organizers that we need to take on bigger issues.

- **Coaching and Skills Technical Assistance** – Neighborhood organizations need ongoing, individualized advice and technical support to develop stronger, more sustainable leadership development and organizing models, as well as the skills to build effective organizations.

The Center will begin with three primary elements:

1. **A year-long, full-time apprenticeship program for new leadership and organizers** that will create a pipeline for developing the organizers which community groups need to have a real voice on policy decisions.
 - Ten organizing apprentices will be placed in host organizations for nine-month, full-time internships with a significant stipend and health benefits
 - The apprentices will include a mix of neighborhood leaders and young people who have the potential to become organizers.
 - Center staff will arrange a training program for apprentices, including a week of training before the placement, and additional training and peer learning during the internship.
2. **A regular, semester-long seminar and learning community for mid-level organizers** that will provide advanced training and education for organizers to hone their organizing and strategic skills, broaden their view of organizing and community change work, stimulate and reinforce them in their practice, and help them see a long-term career path in the field.
 - Ten organizers will participate in each seminar with at least three years experience, some supervisory responsibilities, and the potential to rise to a more advanced level.
 - The seminar will be developed by the Center and hosted at a local academic institution, offering academic credit to participants.
3. **Ongoing coaching, training and technical assistance for organizing groups and neighborhood leaders.**
 - Monthly group trainings and coordinated peer-to-peer learning and mentoring will help neighborhood groups develop effective and successful organizing strategies, and skills.
 - Center participants will also met regularly to establish a high standard of work for groups to strive to reach.

The Center will emphasize a model of community organizing that is rigorous, but not dogmatic because there is no single model of organizing that works for every group. However, effective and durable organizing has some necessary elements:

1. Ongoing focus on developing leadership.
2. Infrastructure to engage and retain leaders and members at multiple levels.
3. Outcome-oriented campaigns that look to win a specific change.
4. Developing a broader issue analysis among leadership and members.

As the Center develops in the first few years, we will establish a partnership with a local public university to expand the education and career-track aspects of the program. The first step will be to arrange for apprentices to be able to earn college credit for what they learn during their year-long training – credit which is useful in itself and can be a first step towards a degree. We also will explore a collaboration with one or more institutions within the City University of New York system to create

degree programs which are specifically geared to educating organizers and directors and leaders of community groups. An opportunity to earn an AA, BA or Masters degree will give them valuable credentials and greater upward mobility as well as a chance to reflect, and to gain new knowledge and skills which can strengthen their organizing and community change work.

To ensure the commitment of participating groups to implement new skills in their day-to-day work, the Center will require an up-front decision of commitment, with top leadership participating in designing the training program and in peer discussions and strategizing during the year.

*For more information, please contact
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