

# COMMUNITY CAPACITY-BUILDING

## Chapter I: Introduction

When the Center for Community Change (CCC) was created in 1968, the United States was being transformed by an extraordinary cascading of social movements. Immersed in those movements, the Center's founders designed CCC to build on these movements by helping develop grassroots organizations and leaders with the long-term capacity, vision, constituency and power to maximize social progress in the decades ahead.

**CCC's founding Board and staff came together from these different drives for reform to help consolidate and expand their impact. They set two principal goals -- helping build strong, effective, and accountable community-based organizations firmly rooted in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods, and helping them join together to pursue major reforms in national policies as well as significant improvements in their own communities.**

The winds behind creation of CCC and its growing numbers of low-income community-based affiliates included --

- The Civil Rights movement in the South and North;
- Movements for community control, self-determination, voting rights and institution-building including the Black Power, Chicano and American Indian movements, and the Neighborhood Movement;
- Powerful strains of youth organizing and leadership development, including SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), the Mexican American Youth Organization, the Appalachian Volunteers, VISTA Minority Mobilization, and the antiwar and other student movements;
- The "war on poverty" which channeled major federal funds to support the building of literally thousands of new community-based nonprofits to foster "maximum feasible participation of the poor" in tackling issues of poverty, race, and access to opportunity;
- Movements within Black churches and mainline Protestant and Catholic churches inspired by these social movements, the Social Gospel, and Liberation Theology, which provided vital funding and leadership on many social, economic and political issues;
- The rapid growth in expert training on systematic community organizing, popular education and grassroots leadership development stemming from the Alinsky, Fred Ross, Freirean and movement traditions;
- The Farmworkers movement and other progressive labor organizing; and
- The emergence of the women's liberation, student and peace movements.

CCC's mission was clearly stated in its articles of incorporation:

1. "To educate local community groups in low-income areas with respect to the issues affecting their communities and by marshalling and coordinating a variety of resources and technical information to help such groups with the skills and techniques necessary to deal with such issues.
2. "To provide counseling, guidance, and consultative assistance to individual groups or organizations seeking to utilize the resources of government in eradicating poverty.
3. "To establish through demonstration the need for and the machinery through

which the grievances of the poor can be presented to the administrators of the public programs affecting them and their communities.

4. "To do research on the major issues related to poverty and its causes and to develop programs to alter these conditions.
5. "To cooperate with other organizations to develop a national basis for assisting communities in planning their economic, social and physical development."

### **CCC's Early Years:**

The Center's founders and initial staff members brought a variety of strengths and approaches to the work. CCC's forerunner the Citizens' Crusade against Poverty (CCAP) was chaired by Walter Reuther, the visionary President of the United Automobile Workers. Its Executive Director Dick Boone had served on Robert Kennedy's staff before working at the federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO, or the "War on Poverty") where he created and championed its emphasis on maximum feasible participation of the poor. SNCC's Eddie Brown and Black labor organizer Charles Bannerman were key CCAP field staff-members before moving to the Mississippi Delta to create vehicles for county-wide organizing, leadership training and community development by people who emerged as leaders during the Civil Rights Movement.

When CCAP became the Center for Community Change, 5 of the original 7 Board members were close associates of Robert Kennedy, including Chairman Burke Marshall who had served as Kennedy's Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. CCC's first President Jack Conway had been Reuther's right-hand man at the UAW before joining the Kennedy Administration, eventually becoming Deputy Director of the Community Action Program, OEO's primary program for building local antipoverty programs.

Another key actor was behind the scenes as the major source of funding for CCC's early years – Ford Foundation Vice President Mitchell Sviridoff. Conway and Sviridoff were colleagues from UAW days, and they shared a commitment to assisting low-income and working-class communities to organize, build collective power, and negotiate for the resources, assistance and policy changes their communities needed.

When Conway resigned two years later, his successor was Rev. David Ramage, a key national leader in the Protestant church world, especially in its deep involvement in social movements throughout the US. Ramage was a major ally of Saul Alinsky and Fred Ross as they pioneered in organizing urban communities and the Farmworker movement.

Ramage brought two new leaders to CCC as Vice Presidents. Bishop Arthur Brazier of the Church of God in Christ had surfaced as the central community leader in organizing Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood to fight decline and gentrification, tackling the University of Chicago, Mayor Daley and others. Dr. Brazier was, of course, particularly committed to building powerful organizations and leadership in African-American neighborhoods. Raul Yzaguirre, who had emerged as an early leader in the Chicano movement in South Texas, consulted for the Center before becoming Vice President for CCC's quickly growing Field Program. Raul eventually stepped down to become President and CEO of the National Council of LaRaza, now known as UnidosUS.

The team thus brought strong track records and great skills to the Center's mission of helping poor people, especially people of color, develop the leaders, organizations, institutions, and broader alliances they needed to impact the issues which most concerned their constituencies.

After years with Operation Crossroads Africa and the National Urban Coalition, Pablo Eisenberg succeeded Ramage and was CCC's Executive Director for almost two decades. He built on CCC's grassroots commitment and reinforced the Center's fundraising strengths and its voice and advocacy efforts, playing an assertive and effective leadership role in pushing foundations to contribute more generously to grassroots organizations and social change efforts. Pablo also succeeded in convening national partners to collaborate in a series of coalitions tackling other national policy issues, including fighting cuts in federal spending on community and social programs and opposing efforts to weaken federal enforcement of essential civil rights,

citizen participation and other standards. Pablo's Deputy Andy Mott – who had directed the Center's field program and been active in building national coalitions -- succeeded him as Executive Director for five years of continuity, further strengthening the Field programs and creating a new Policy Unit to supplement the work of other staff who had in-depth knowledge and contacts on particular issues.

**Over this 35-year period, there was remarkable continuity at CCC.** The Center's basic purposes remained essentially the same. Early on, the Center's 1970 Annual Report described the Center's mission as –

“providing technical assistance to minority and low-income community-based organizations on a wide variety of programs aimed at bringing about genuine economic and social change among the poverty-stricken in urban and rural America; to intervene on behalf of local groups of the poor with private and public institutions which have power and resources; and to focus national

attention on issues dealing with human poverty and deprivation.”

Thirty years later, CCC summarized its work as follows –

*“How do you transform low-income communities? Create greater opportunities and fairness in our society? Foster greater democracy? Through harnessing the power of many – bringing low-income people together to create their own organizations, launching coalitions of many groups, working across racial and geographic lines, pursuing a broad range of strategies to bring about change. This is what the Center for Community Change has done in hundreds of communities for more than three decades.”*

From the beginning, a central challenge confronting the Center was deciding how to implement its mission most faithfully and effectively in a changing world within the resources available to the Center at any given time. This has required a continuing reassessment of the objective conditions in the universe in which the Center operates, and tough choices on the mix of field and policy work, and how best to attract the flexible operating support needed to support its core staff and operations while also being able to respond swiftly to new needs and opportunities.

Despite a generous two-year start-up grant from the Ford Foundation and a commitment from Ford to stay involved for at least several years, albeit at reduced grant levels, funding for CCC's core staff and operations promised always to be scarce. Jack Conway's successors concentrated heavily on broadening the Center's funding base, with Eisenberg having particular success as he combined his strong critique of foundations with dynamic outreach to new funders.

**Knowing that core funding would continue to be scarce, the Center developed a three-pronged strategy for expanding its resource base and impact.**

First, the Center **multiplied its impact by creating and leading national coalitions** on issues of critical importance to poor people and people of color. This was especially important at two points – when conservatives launched efforts to cut the domestic budget or weaken progressive policies, and when new Democratic Administrations began to consider new policies on domestic issues.

Second, CCC became skilled at **developing “Integral Special Projects” which attracted funding** which enabled the Center to expand both its field staff and its team of specialists and to fully integrate their work with the Center's central programs. The special projects thus supplemented the core funding by attracting support from federal agencies, foundations and corporations which were interested in particular aspects of the Center's work rather than providing general support.

Third, the Center **acted as the fiscal agent and grant administrator for dozens of “Non-Integral Special Projects”**. While they operated independently, their activities were directly aligned with the Center's mission and values, and they **greatly increased CCC's range of relationships and partnerships and the breadth of its impact. Several significant national organizations and coalitions were birthed through the Center as were many joint policy initiatives. These valuable opportunities kept increasing as the Center earned a strong reputation for collaboration, strong support and not taking credit grew over the decades.**

**This mix of strategies enabled the Center to “punch well above its weight”.** The

following chapters highlight CCC's work in its three principal areas of activity – organizational and leadership development, economic opportunities, and housing and neighborhoods, with a briefer section on how some CCC activities and people intersected with political developments in the US. during the first 35 years.