

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

July 2016

**Michael Jacoby Brown**  
training & coaching

*Helping organizations achieve their goals  
through recruiting and motivating others*

## Organizer's Edge ►

### ***Money and Community Organizing***

Money and community organizing is a tough subject-- . and an important one. Social justice organizations, like all effective organizations, need money for staff, offices, food, travel expenses, computers, phones, materials and supplies. Most of the money goes to salaries. Social justice organizations need money to attract and keep talented and skilled staff.



Historically, we have gone to "the funders" -- a small coterie of foundations who fund social justice organizing. (I suggest we ban these two words, given that our brains tend to build pathways for thinking and action that follow our language.)

### **Organizations at Risk: Beware of Changing Funding Priorities!**

I remember when I worked for the Jobs with Peace Campaign in the late 1980's. We got funding from the Rockefeller Foundation for our campaign for child care for several years. Then one year, I visited the foundation high in Rockefeller Center. The program officer stared out the window and told us he was now interested in domestic violence. Child care was out and so was our funding.

When I worked for an affiliate of the PICO network in suburban Boston, most of our funding came from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. (CCHD). CCHD has a policy of making its grantees take a funding break. (I don't know the theory behind this -- or even if they have

one -- or have ever tested the effectiveness of this practice.) When our "break" came our organization folded. No other foundations were interested and we had little funding from congregations or individuals.

Over the past 40 years I have spent a lot of time researching foundations, writing proposals, visiting program officers, getting (and not getting) grants, and writing reports to show how we used their money. I have met dozens of program officers and been in lots of nice offices. (Where I often fantasized about selling their rugs and art work to fund our organization) During all that time I worked hard to try to find out what the program officers wanted and tried to give it to them. I tried to present whatever we did in a language that would match their various guidelines. Over the years I have seen big checks come in the mail, as well as rejection letters.

Of course we all went to the foundations for the same reason Willie Sutton robbed banks. "That's where the money is." But just as robbing banks has its down side, so does going to foundations.

At least In part because these wealthy benefactors, in funding social justice, are going against their class and financial self-interest, their interests change - "like children with attention deficit disorder, as the former Executive Director of the Nathan Cummings Foundation told me once.

(For a view of how *right-wing philanthropy* works, see [Philanthropy and Movements](#) by Bob Kuttner, a great article)

The "liberal" foundations change funding priorities regularly. So child care funding is in for a few years, and then out, and maybe back again a dozen years later. There is rarely sustained effort on these difficult issues over the long haul -- which is what it would take to make a difference. If the program officers funded the same organizations over decades they would put themselves out of a job. So their incentive is to find new issues, new groups, test new theories, and change funding priorities.

A colleague recently told me that his organization, together with 60 others across the country funded by the same family foundation, lost a major grant with little notice. The head of the foundation decided that organizing was no longer a focus. This grant represented a significant portion of the organization's budget and the very short notice about ending the foundation's program made replacing the funds an additional challenge. Decisions like these make dependence of foundation funds risky, and emphasize the need to raise increasingly large amounts of our funds from the communities in which we work and individuals who support our work if we want to increase our ownership of our organizations and our independence. What foundation ever gave an organization enough money and guaranteed it long enough to be able to do the tedious long-term work of developing a real grass roots donor base?

### **National Political Campaigns: Where is the follow up?**

Anthony Thigpenn, a veteran organizer, once told me, "Organizing is 1% inspiration and 99% follow-up. " The Presidential campaigns could learn this lesson.

There has been a lot of small donor money raised during political campaigns. Bernie Sanders and Barack Obama raised millions thru the Internet for their campaigns. And some of these campaigns have had a real grass roots approach, meeting people and connecting to them deeply. Jeremy Bird did this in South Carolina during the 2008 Obama campaign and the national campaign used this model across the country. But where was the post-election follow up? There was talk (but no follow-up action) about building an organization ( *Organizing for America*) after the Obama campaign to build on the relationships that had been built. When I asked Jeremy Bird what the strategy for organizing follow up after the election, the response I got was "running Michele in 2016."

So, in spite of the grass roots funding the Obama campaign, there was little being built, little follow up with those donors who could potentially replace the foundation money that is here today and gone tomorrow. We will see what happens with Bernie Sanders' "revolution." I hope there are as many \$27 donors to build an on-going organization as there were to get him *almost* to the Democratic nomination.

### **Subject Undiscussable**

Unfortunately, most of the discussion about foundations and "the funders" is undiscussable, too hot to handle. Those who rely on the foundations are reluctant to criticize them. I would be too if I were still a non-profit Executive Director, as I have been for many years. It was only after I shed this role, and some of the personal anxiety I have about money that I have been able to get far enough above from the fray to see it for what it is: a trap that keeps the powerless powerless. While I was in the business of trying to get grants, please the program officers, fit my work into the ever-changing guide-lines and prove our worth, I could not gather the mental space to see how this was affecting me and my organization.

I recently raised some criticism of The Boston Foundation --how they were hiring more staff to run their own campaigns rather than funding community based groups. When I said this with a room full of people, many of whom in private will bemoan their fate and the fickleness of the foundation, there was stony silence. With foundation staff in the room no one would risk the slightest criticism.

When I went to another foundation with a colleague (a person of color) and saw her treated like an idiot (being asked the most basic questions about her work), I asked her if I could describe this racist interaction in print. No, she said. Her organization could not risk losing the funding. So, racism and other indignities are perpetuated because what goes on is undiscussable.

No one currently in the work is willing to describe what is going on. It is a dance. The partners know their roles and even though the music is going to stop, no one is willing to leave the dance.

It is time to turn off the music and figure out some new dance steps.

## Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

[Visit Our Website!](#)



**Michael Jacoby Brown Story**

### Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

**Jessica Tang:** Boston Teachers Union, AFT

**George Luse** of the Mass Teachers Assn,

**Scott Reed** with the PICO Network, ,

**Cathy Howell**, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

**Caesar McDowell** of the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,

**Diana Bell** of Community and Labor United,

**David Hernandez** of the California Education Assn,

**Attica Scott**, running for State Rep in in Louisville,

**Bob Van Meter** with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,

**Walter Davis**, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.

**Debra Askenase**, of Community Organizing 2.0,

**Deb Fastino**, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,

**Rebecca Gutman**, with SEIU-1199,

**Tim Dean**, of SEIU-1199,

**Mary Ochs**, long time organizer in Los Angeles  
and others, hopefully, including YOU

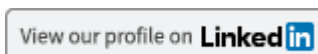
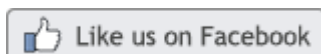
### Other Useful Links

<http://michaeljacobybrown.com/>

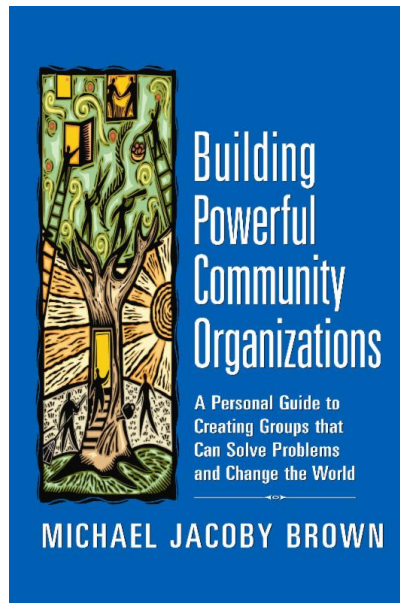
[Road Map Consulting](#)

[Visions-Inc](#)

[Visit our Website](#)



[Buy my book](#)



ading

Michael Jacoby Brown Training and Coaching | [mjbrown246@gmail.com](mailto:mjbrown246@gmail.com) | <http://www.michaeljacobybrown.com>  
10 Brattle Terrace | Arlington, MA 02474