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Michael Jacoby Brown
training & coaching

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

Organizer's Edge

How Community Organizations Get Money

This month Joe Szakos of the [Virginia Organizing Project](#) asks us to look at how we fund our organizations and what the results are. Too many community organizations, as Mary Ochs and Fred Azcarate in past issues have pointed out, are too dependent on large "funders" and thereby weaken their organizations. It is a good time to ask why organizers do this and why this has not changed in so many years?



Joe Szakos has been the executive director of Virginia Organizing since 1994. He was the founding coordinator of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth and has also done community organizing in Chicago and Hungary. Joe has a Masters degree from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and is co-author, with his wife, Kristin Layng Szakos, of *We Make Change: Community Organizers Talk About What They Do-and Why*, published by Vanderbilt University Press in 2007. Joe and Kristin also edited *Lessons From the Field: Organizing in Rural Communities*, published by the American Institute for Social Justice/Social Policy Magazine in 2008. "Being a community organizer allows me to work with groups of people to make specific, tangible changes in their communities while helping individuals learn important leadership skills. I love having the opportunity-every day with Virginia Organizing -to help people raise their voices about the concerns they have, especially when it leads to major systemic changes."

Joe Szakos: Money Without Strings Attached

One of the main challenges facing grassroots community organizers today is raising independent money - the kind with no strings attached.

Independent money allows the people in the organization to decide what they want to do, when they want to do it, and where and how it will happen. Independent money allows the organization to stay true to the democratic part of the "roots" in "grassroots."

When a community organization is part of a national campaign, the grassroots organization is a million miles away from the decision-making table of the campaign. No real input into the campaign strategy, no say in what the metrics are, no voice in the timeline for actions.

When a community organization gets funding from a foundation, rarely is it on the organization's terms. And most foundations change their minds so fast that it is hard to count on any sustained support from them.

So why is it that most community organizations rely on national campaign contracts and foundation grants? Because there is just not enough energy dedicated to building a grassroots fundraising base that supports the organization.

As community organizers, we do (or we should do) one-to-one conversations, door knocking, house parties, and use a host of other ways to recruit people and get them active. We have sustained leadership development programs that engage people where they are and build new skills in the process. We understand that we need more and more active people to build a powerful organization, so we use a multi-faceted approach.

But we don't always spend similar time to find more ways to raise money to sustain community organizations. We need to put it higher on the organizational development list of priorities from the very beginning of our organizing work in a community. Dues, donations, events, and plenty of other methods are known, yet not utilized enough or as effectively as they could be.

Why do we need to raise money from our grassroots base? Because if we don't have independent money, then we are just working for the agendas of the national campaigns and the foundations, not folks on the ground. It's that simple.

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

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Michael Jacoby Brown Story

Who else you will hear from.....

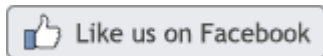
We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

- 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,
- Linda Honold, of Wisconsin Voices
- Attica Scott, now an elected official in Louisville, KY,formerly with Jobs with Justice,
- Quinn Rallings in Alabama with the PICO Network,
- Bob Van Meter with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,
- Walter Davis, in Tennessee, of the National Organizers Alliance,
- Deb 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,
- Claudia Horwitz, of Stone Circles in North Carolina,
- Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles
- and others, hopefully, including YOU

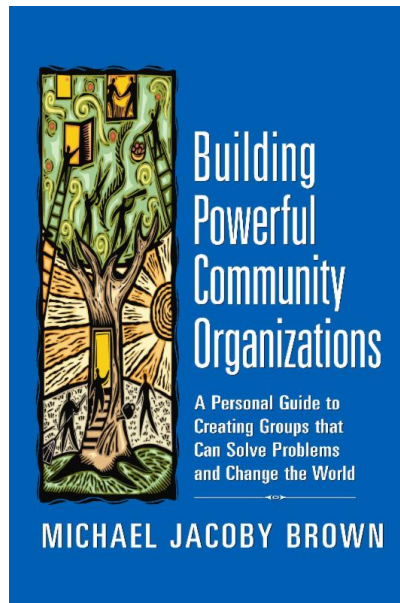
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