SUSTAINING GRASSROOTS SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS IN CALIFORNIA’S LATINX COMMUNITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Report by the Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training & Research Action Design

Winter 2017
AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the spring and summer of 2015, the research team conducted in-depth interviews by phone, video, and in-person with individuals from 21 organizations who fundraise for movement-building work in Latinx communities across California. We also interviewed two fundraising consultants who work closely with grassroots social justice organizations. We asked participants about:

• Vision for sustainability: How their organization was currently resourced, how they would like to see their support sources change, and what it would take to realize their vision of sustainability for their own organization and for social justice movements more broadly.

• Fundraising approaches and capacity: How they as individuals, and their organizations as a whole, approach and structure fundraising work. We also asked who within the organization was involved in fundraising, and what fundraising looks like in practice.

• Money and finances: We asked participants to share their own personal experiences with money, as well as their thoughts about their organization's current, and ideal, financial and fundraising practices.

• Strengths, needs and challenges: Finally, we asked participants to describe their fundraising strengths and strategies. We also asked what they need most to become more sustainable, and what challenges they face in getting there.

KEY FINDINGS

Vision and Values: Building Sustainability

• Grassroots social justice organizations strive, and often struggle, to center community accountability & autonomy in their fundraising and sustainability efforts.

• Shifts in the funding climate frequently push organizations in directions they do not feel are guided by their communities or values.

• Organizations want to know what works for their peers.

• Many organizations struggle with the question of who to ask for support, as well as who should carry out fundraising.

• The reproduction of class, race and other forms of privilege in philanthropy and nonprofits, as well as individual and community experiences of privilege and oppression, shape access to funding and affect individual and organizational experiences of fundraising.

• Some organizations work to build shared ownership, trust, accountability, sustainability, and grassroots leadership through transparency and shared decision-making around organizational finances and fundraising.
Practices and Approaches: Structuring Capacity

• Grassroots community organizations expressed that operating in a continual state of flux—driven by internal and external factors—can strain the well-being of individuals and the sustainability of the organization.

• Fundraising silos can lead to individuals feeling alone in the work and impact an organization's ability to meet programmatic goals.

• Fundraising teams and shared leadership models present viable alternatives to the quagmire of fundraising silos.

• Fundraising strategy, skills, and infrastructure are essential to building capacity for immediate organizational work and future staying power.

Tuning the Field

• The fundraising world is not reflective of communities.

• Relationships built on shared understanding, allyship, and accountability can support grassroots movements.

• Grassroots organizing and advocacy, grounded in visionary leadership, committed allies, and resources to sustain the work, has the power to transform communities.

• Rural and semi-rural organizations that work directly with or within Latinx or Latin American indigenous communities face unique sustainability challenges.

• Rural and semi-rural organizations pointed to shifts they want to see happen in their communities, that would center community knowledge and work, build local infrastructure for grassroots, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations, and be responsive to the unique local circumstances and unique solutions required.

• Funding restrictions, requirements or agendas can push organizations to shift in ways they don't feel are accountable or aligned with their mission, and can also hamper their ability to do what they do best: make change.

• Reflection and dialogue on current fundraising models, strategies, and approaches that support movement building in Latinx communities is much needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Organizations

• Use fundraising and sustainability efforts to strengthen grassroots leadership and movements.

• Reflect with your constituents on fundraising roles and strategy, and work to lessen your dependence on foundation support.

• Experiment with grassroots strategies and structures for fundraising work that can sustain the organization and are sustainable for all involved.
Sustaining Grassroots Social Justice Organizations in California’s Latinx Communities

• Explore partnerships in fundraising efforts.
• Provide flexible scheduling for capacity building trainings and support.
• Co-create multilingual spaces and information that link communities in the struggle for social change.
• Tailor capacity building to be specific to staff and member desires and needs for acquiring fundraising skills.
• Break down silos between fundraising and other organizational work.
• Create practices of open dialogue and transparency around organizational finances, financial decision-making and fundraising work.

For Funders

• Prioritize self-determination, community accountability and long-term sustainability in grantmaking by providing general operating support, multiyear grants, larger grants, minimal or no grant restrictions, and forms of capacity building that organizations seek.
• Invest in structural change grantmaking with an intersectional lens to understand interlinked struggles and support multi-issue work.
• Be a connector and peer educator to link organizations and their members to potential donors and other sources of aligned, long-term support.
• Explore and invest in new models of accountable grantmaking such as transparent, participatory grantmaking that prioritizes the leadership of communities directly impacted by social inequalities.
• Honor the time, experiences, knowledge and vision that individuals and organizations share with funders by recognizing their work and expertise, compensating them for their time, and respecting their lives and stories.
• Deepen understanding of the circumstances around and demands upon organizations’ capacity and take responsibility for building relationships.
• Make an intentional effort to reach out to and connect with organizations and community members, including traveling to meet them where they live and work.
• Challenge the reproduction of intersectional privilege by prioritizing the leadership of persons of color in philanthropy and fundraising to reflect the communities with whom you partner.