

Congregation Based Community Organizing

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Congregation Based Community Organizing (sometimes called Faith-Based or Broad-Based) is a movement that seeks to establish inter-faith, cross-class, multi-ethnic and multi-racial grassroots organizations for purposes of increasing social integration and power in civil society and for making civic, regional and state-wide changes for social improvement. By "civil society," we mean the voluntary sector, including religious institutions.

CBCO groups see their "primary role to develop participants' leadership skills, build a strong web of relationships through congregations and other institutions, and turn those relationships into civic power capable of making changes to promote the public good." (Interfaith Funders, 2001).

The Scope of CBCO Activity

In 2001, there were a total of 133 CBCOs active in 33 states and the District of Columbia with a total of some 4000 member institutions, of which 87% were religious institutions. The remaining member organizations were primarily labor unions and public schools. Catholics make up 33% of the membership in CBCOs, followed by Baptists (including Missionary) who contribute 16%. Another third is made up of United Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and the United Church of Christ. The Church of God in Christ, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist congregations make up the remaining 3 percent. (Warren and Wood, Interfaith Funders, 2001).

At last count, 93 UU congregations are members of CBCOs. These CBCOs are supported by "Networks" which provide training leaders and organizers, support and consultation to organizers who do the day-to-day work of organizing and provide organizers to the local CBCOs. Forty-five of our congregations are involved with CBCOs supported by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), 18 by the Gamaliel Foundation, 9 by the InterValley Project, 7 by Direct Action Research and Training (DART), 7 by Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO) and 7 are independent, and not affiliated with a national network. About 11.3 percent of our congregations are CBCO members. UU Churches involved in CBCO activities are comprised of 25,882 members or 11.9% of our total certified membership. Comparative figures with other religions groups are not available.

Congregational size of involved congregations ranges from 1300 to two congregations that have 10 members each. Mean size is 575 certified members.

Structure and Process

While there is variation between networks and sites within networks, CBCOs are typically composed of 20-40 congregations, sometime with other organizations, sometimes not. Each organization (church) maintains an organizing committee for that church, and there is an overall governing board for the CBCO itself composed of representative of the respective congregations and the organizer(s). Larger CBCOs will divide into sections around problem areas such as education, health care, housing, carry out the necessary research and consider strategies for change. The CBCOs membership determines the priority of alternative projects, strategies are developed and "actions," public meetings involving decision makers and as many people as the CBCO can turn out, are held. Timeframes for action and accountability to CBCO membership is established and followed-up. The key concepts that guide CBCO work are self interest, power, agitation, and accountability.

Effectiveness

There seems no doubt that congregation based community organizing is an effective strategy for a wide range of civic problems, from securing a stop sign to increasing the state budget for education. Other forms of community action (legal advocacy, community education (media), simple protest, self-help action groups, negotiations and lobbying and action research) while effective for many problems do not provide the diversity (cross-class, multi-faith, multi-ethnic) contact and potential for integration as does congregation based community organizing.

Financial Costs of Participation

Financial costs (dues) are required of congregations involved in CBCO activities as member organizations. The amount of dues is dependent on the network and the decisions of the local CBCO. Following are the basic orientations of the major networks on the dues issue:

Direct Action and Training (DART) No firm DART policy for all churches in DART CBCOs. Typically, dues are \$400-\$600 per church, plus \$1 to \$2 per church member. Some include a percentage of the operating budget. No church is paying over \$5,000 per year.

Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) said that there is no national policy on dues, rather that IAF staff will work with local organization through relational organizing and help them to develop a structure that serves the local organization. An informal guideline is \$10 per parishioner per year. I was told that there is no policy or practice that supports the 1-2% of budget idea.

The Intervalley Project (IVP) has recently gone through a dues determination process. They began with three criteria as follows: active membership numbers ("regular givers"), the size of the operating budget (excluding capital campaigns, schools, pass-throughs and individual member organizations ability to pay (self assessment). As it developed, criteria 1 and 3 were used and a tiered structure based on membership proposed. Annual dues, based on membership are as follows: 10-49= \$250, 50-99= \$500, 100-224=\$750, 225-374=\$1,000 325-549=\$1,500, over 550=\$2,000.

Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO) CBCO determine dues locally, typically 1-2 percent of operating (church only) budget, with a cap of \$5,000. While some CBCOs use church membership (size) as a basis, this is unusual.

CBCOs not affiliated with national networks determine dues for their member congregations.

More Information and Resources

The five CBCO networks active with UU congregations are:

Direct Action Research and Training,

P.O. Box 370791, Miami, FL 33137-0791, 305-576-8020, www.thedartcenter.org

Gamaliel Foundation

203 N. Wabash Ave., Ste. 808, Chicago, IL 60601, 312-375-2639, www.gamaliel.org

Industrial Areas Foundation

220 W. Kinzie St., 5th Floor, Chicago, IL 60610, 312-245-9211, www.industrialareasfoundation.org

InterValley Project

2 York Drive, Durham, NH, 03824, 603-397-5015, www.intervalleyproject.org

Pacific Institute for Community Organization,

71 Santa Rosa Ave., Oakland, CA 94910. 510-655-2801, www.piconetwork.org

UUA Office for Congregational Advocacy and Witness

The UUA Office for Congregational Advocacy and Witness is supporting congregational and faith-based community organizing in a variety of ways.

There is now a UUA e-mail list for UUs about congregation based community organizing. **CBCO-L** provides a forum for members and ministers of UU congregations participating in or interested in congregation based community organizing. The information exchanged also helps staff learn how to best support these efforts through identifying needs and resources, providing information and workshops, and creating networking opportunities.

Fred Seidl, a UU volunteer and former college Dean of Social Work, is working with the UUA Advocacy and Witness Staff Group to promote and enhance congregation based community organizing. Fred conducted a survey of UU congregations to learn more about UU involvement in this movement. He is available for consultation and connecting UUs who have an interest in or are currently active in Congregation Based Community Organizing. You can contact him at Fseidl@uua.org. You may also contact Susan Leslie, Director of the Office for Congregational Advocacy and Witness, at sleslie@uua.org.