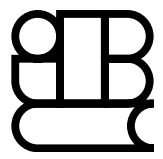




STIR IT UP

Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy

Rinku Sen



STIR IT UP



THE MS. FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

For thirty years, the Ms. Foundation for Women has been a leading advocate for women and girls, naming the issues in their lives, investing in their strengths, and helping them take crucial leadership roles in their lives and communities. Founded in 1972 by Gloria Steinem, Marlo Thomas, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and Patricia Carbine, the Ms. Foundation was the first national, multi-issue women's fund.

Marie C. Wilson has led the foundation as our president since 1985. Under her direction, the Ms. Foundation has created groundbreaking national programs and granted millions of dollars to grassroots organizations working to move women toward economic self-sufficiency, to safeguard reproductive rights, and to support health and safety for women and girls. Executive Director Sara K. Gould joined the Ms. Foundation in 1986 and propelled the Foundation into the public eye as the recognized national leader in the field of women's microenterprise development.

The Ms. Foundation's hallmark is our support of the right idea at the right time, whether it is seen as possible or popular. Our work is guided by our vision of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, or sexual orientation. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person is valued. Our many accomplishments include:

- Creating the award-winning Take Our Daughters To Work[®] Day, a nationwide public education campaign that seventy-one million people have participated in since 1993. Through its new program, Take Our Daughters And Sons To WorkSM Day, the Ms. Foundation is addressing the competing challenges of work and family life.

- Receiving a Presidential Award for Excellence in Microenterprise Development for our long-standing commitment to improving economic prospects for low-income women, their families, and their communities.
- Conducting the national Raise the Floor public education campaign promoting minimum wage, child care, health-care, and tax policies that would ensure that low-income families in this country can meet their basic needs.
- Being one of the first national organizations to acknowledge that the real battleground for reproductive rights is at the state level, and supporting groups that combat the hundreds of antichoice measures introduced every year in state legislatures.
- Becoming one of the first national funders to address violence against women by funding shelters and crisis hotlines, and helping to create a movement to end all violence.
- Creating the Women and AIDS Fund, the only project in the country that identifies and supports community-based organizations run by and for women living with HIV/AIDS.

The Ms. Foundation's work is guided by our mission to support the efforts of women and girls to govern their own lives and to influence the world around them. We believe that economic security is key to women's choices and their ability to make their voices heard. Women's wages and working conditions affect not only their family's livelihood but also their access to health care and quality child care and their ability to escape abusive relationships. Since our inception, therefore, the Ms. Foundation has supported women's efforts to organize for better wages, benefits, and improved working conditions and to mobilize their collective power to influence government policy.

Women can affect crucial issues by taking charge and organizing for change. The Ms. Foundation grantees profiled in this book offer lessons and insights not only for other groups mobilizing low-income women but for any effort aimed at creating lasting social change.



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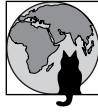
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THE CHARDON PRESS SERIES

Fundamental social change happens when people come together to organize, advocate, and create solutions to injustice. Chardon Press recognizes that communities working for social justice need tools to create and sustain healthy organizations. In an effort to support these organizations, Chardon Press produces materials on fundraising, community organizing, and organizational development. These resources are specifically designed to meet the needs of grassroots nonprofits—organizations that face the unique challenge of promoting change with limited staff, funding, and other resources. We at Chardon Press have adapted traditional techniques to the circumstances of grassroots nonprofits. Chardon Press and Jossey-Bass hope these works help people committed to social justice to build mission-driven organizations that are strong, financially secure, and effective.

Kim Klein, Series Editor

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PREFACE

Like some young people of the mid-1980s, I experienced organizing for the first time on my college campus. In a year that included efforts to fight race discrimination, prevent violence against women, win the university's divestment from South Africa, take a stand against nuclear weapons, and expand the rights of gay and lesbian students, I got a firsthand look at a process that has obsessed me since. I watched, then participated, as people got together, analyzed their conditions, confronted an institution, and, win or lose, came back to fight another day. I didn't fall immediately—friends had to push me to move from observer to activist—but I became increasingly hooked after the first four-hour strategy meeting, the first action, the first victory. Nearly two years later, while I was working for the United States Student Association training students in the principles of community organizing, I met two African American women from a Tennessee organization called Just Organized Neighborhoods Area Headquarters who described their struggle to win running water and electricity for their community. That same weekend, I learned it was possible to make a living in organizing. I had found my sense of purpose.

What, after all, could be more important than making sure women could be safe and a community could have electricity? While there are other ways to ensure those kinds of gains, organizing appealed to me as much for the process of building a group as for the product of winning concrete changes. I remember wanting to laugh all the time, even when I was so mad I could spit, feeling

energetic even on little sleep, and enjoying the freedom of preoccupation with something other than my postadolescent self. In groups I found more pleasure than frustration, and more humor than bitterness. In collective power and sharp politics, I found both identity and solution.

After graduation, I went to work at the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), a national network and training center for organizers of color based in Oakland, California. I stayed there twelve years, two as a staff person and ten as co-director. In that time, I worked on dozens of grassroots issue campaigns across the country, ranging from welfare rights to affordable housing, from health care to police brutality. I did all the jobs required of organizers in the United States today: recruiting members, training leaders and organizing staff, planning campaigns, conducting actions, raising money, and more. I was extremely fortunate to find a place in an organization owned and operated by economically progressive people of color and open to feminist ideas and leadership. One benefit of working in such an organization was that I learned not just the basic principles of organizing but also the many ways in which people adapt and add to those principles to suit their own situations. I got to be at the center of critical debates about organizing practice, and I met thousands of compassionate and courageous activists.

Origins and Goals

The idea for this book was generated in a conversation with the Ms. Foundation for Women, which asked me to write a best-practices manual about the fourteen economic justice grantees it funded from 1997 to 2001 under its New Voices, Proactive Strategies Initiative. Throughout its thirty-year history, the Ms. Foundation has seeded and assisted the efforts of hundreds of grassroots, local, regional, and national organizations to mobilize community residents and workers to create progressive change in economic and workplace policies. In 1995, several of these grantees were part of the Foundation's delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. After the delegation returned home, the Foundation worked with these organizations to create the New Voices, Proactive Strategies Initiative in order to bring the voices of low-income women workers to bear on policies that affect their lives, their families, and their communities. The initiative aimed at shifting public and corporate policy away from a narrow "private responsibility" framework toward recognition of the need for the public and private sectors to play stronger roles in lifting women and families out of poverty. Grants supported grassroots and national organizing and coalition-building activities, such as living-wage campaigns, community/labor coalitions, regional

economic networks, and efforts to organize workers in specific sectors and situations such as child care, new immigrants, and contingent workers.

The book's core is occupied by these grantees, all of which are working to re-frame economic debates, win new policies, and build power for disenfranchised communities, particularly for people of color, immigrants, and women. From March 2000 to the end of 2001, I visited each organization, rifled through their documents, interviewed their staffs, and, to the extent possible, interviewed their constituents. I also reviewed the literature about organizing for social and economic justice, both contemporary and historic. The Ms. Foundation grantees provide the bulk of the book's illustrations, and the Profiles section provides a general overview of their unique and often stunning accomplishments. To the extent that I use other examples in the book, they come from organizations with which I became familiar through my past work as co-director of CTWO and my current work on the staff of the Applied Research Center. Unless otherwise credited, the quotes in the book were gathered by me through in-person or telephone interviews between March 2000 and August 2002.

The Ms. Foundation fortuitously asked me to write this book at a point in my career when I was ready to share the best practices I had seen and experienced in fifteen years in the field. History has taught me that long-lasting social change is made by large-scale movements led by the people most affected by particular systems and that movements emerge from organizations that work to build something larger than themselves. The lessons the book highlights are largely about how to build and activate a constituency, then change the dynamic of an issue by working in ways that lay the groundwork for future social movements. My experience reflects that of the Ms. Foundation: many of these lessons are drawn by women living and working in poor communities, but their experience is rarely featured in social-change literature.

The book is organized to provide an overview of organizing and then to explore specific aspects of current practice. The tools presented here can help communities transform the institutions and ideas that shape our lives. I make two essential arguments. First, I argue that today's social, political, and economic context, characterized by global capitalism, a resurgent conservative movement, and the continued role of racism and sexism in world society, requires a deeper strategic capacity than most organizations have today. Second, I argue that although organizing among the people suffering from these systems is more important than ever, the range of political skills required of us goes far beyond recruiting members and planning creative actions. Minimally, effective peoples' organizations need to have not just the people but also a system for internal leadership development and consciousness raising, strong factual research, and the ability to generate media attention. Simply put, today's movements for social and

economic justice need people who are clear about the problems with the current systems, who rely on solid evidence for their critique, and who are able to reach large numbers of other people with both analysis and proposals. To help groups develop these capacities, I have included chapters on the analytic basis for our work as well as on specific arenas for building sophisticated organizations and alliances. Most chapters also include exercises designed to ease practical application of the material.

In the Introduction I review in broad strokes the history of community organizing in the United States after World War II, exploring in particular the strengths and limitations of the organizing ideas espoused by Saul Alinsky, who is acknowledged in many circles, though certainly not all, as the father of modern-day community organizing. I describe the growth of community organizing networks loosely based on the Alinsky model, their relationship to the social movements of the latter half of twentieth century, the key contemporary debates about what constitutes good organizing, critiques by feminists and people of color, and the points of inspiration that dot today's political landscape. In part, the Introduction is designed to help a group place itself in the continuum of organizing and to show how people are constantly experimenting with new and old forms of organization.

I then move into chapters that define and list the principles effective organizers use today. In Chapter One, I analyze the social and economic context in which we work—a context that includes a renewed and unprecedentedly strong right wing, a new global economy, and the continued importance of racism and sexism in defining the winners and losers in economic and social life. I argue that these shifts require new progressive responses, specifically the willingness to organize the most marginal people in our society, to choose issues that speak to those people, and to build organizations that can advance progressive ideas as well as mobilize a group. In Chapter Two, I look at the importance of recruiting people from among those most affected by social and economic problems, and I present questions that every organization needs to answer about structure, culture, outreach methods, and the dilemmas of combining organizing with service. In Chapter Three, I lay out the principles of progressive issue development, reinforcing the need to design explicit criteria to guide our issue choices. Chapter Four is about the critical role of direct action in our work and about how to design and conduct actions that further our campaign goals. Chapter Five explores the principles of leadership development, which I distinguish from leadership identification, and argues for systematic leadership programs that are rooted in popular education models and include large amounts of fieldwork. In Chapter Six, I examine the need for excellent research and ways of generating and using it. In

Chapter Seven, I consider the principles of building effective alliances and networks, ones that combine the strengths of organized constituencies rather than the weaknesses of unorganized communities. Chapter Eight helps readers design an effective media strategy, a task that is increasingly important in reframing social-policy debates and increasingly difficult to carry out in an era of media consolidation that greatly limits the dissemination of community-oriented and diverse content. Finally, Chapter Nine addresses the transformative power of internal political education and consciousness raising, an arena I consider to be one of the most important additions to community organizing practice.

Audience, or Who Should Read This Book

I have written this book for two primary audiences—people who are currently engaged in organizing and people who are thinking about getting involved. To the extent possible without making the book unwieldy or overly prescriptive, I have tried to address the different needs of both audiences. I have also written the book for progressives, people whose vision of a better world includes folks in warm homes with enough to eat, dignity and fair pay attached to every job, the freedom to express love without boundaries, resistance to war and violence at all levels—a world in which we can all be who we really are, without having punishments and rewards handed out on the basis of those identities. Certainly, many of the tools here can be and have been used to realize other visions, but I believe that the kinds of organizations committed to all the elements in this book are more likely to ascribe to the vision above.

While I present what I hope will be useful tools, I have tried also to describe the dilemmas and questions facing organizers and community leaders. In the end, readers will have to pick and choose among these tools and others to design a winning strategy that works for their communities. While all the organizations highlighted in the book do not incorporate every one of the principles I discuss, and it would be a rare organization indeed that did all these things well, I believe that these are the most promising portions of organizing practice.

The book, however, is not meant to be comprehensive; I did not have the space to explore many topics. For example, I do not address the various ways in which all these groups raise money, a subject of critical importance. Nor do I discuss in detail the principles of campaign planning. Much more can be written about outreach methods and how to design a recruitment plan. Rather than considering this book a comprehensive resource, I see it as a complement to older, still relevant texts. For a primer on the basics of organizing, there is nothing better

than the Midwest Academy's *Organizing for Social Change*, by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max (1990). Another excellent primer specifically for workplace and union activists is *The Troublemakers' Handbook* (LaBotz, 1991). Randy Shaw's *The Activists' Handbook* (1996) provides many interesting lessons from Shaw's work fighting homelessness in San Francisco. On fundraising, readers would do well to look at Andy Robinson's *Grassroots Grants: An Activist's Guide to Proposal Writing* (1996) and *Selling Social Change (Without Selling Out): Earned Income Strategies for Nonprofits* (2002), as well as Kim Klein's classic, *Fundraising for Social Change* (2000). To guide interested readers to other resources, particularly analyses of the right wing, economic globalization, and racial, gender, and sexual politics, I have included a recommended reading list in the Resources. Finally, I have not been able to include here many organizations that do excellent work. Readers will find many of them listed in the Resources.

Even as *Stir It Up* goes into production, people are in the streets all over the world disrupting the systems that cause so much division, heartache, and premature death. Although two decades have passed since my own introduction to progressive organizing, I am still moved to see that so many of us find faith, power, creativity, and humor in each other. Even as an accurate analysis of our situations threatens to paralyze us, I know that by using our own extraordinary talents and visions we will turn the tide.

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men is not to be found! Soyinka Rahim, Jo Su, and Chaiti Sen provided outstanding research and clerical support. The book was written in several places around the world, and I would especially like to acknowledge the care shown to me by the staff of the Blue Marlin Hotel in Scottburgh, South Africa, where I wrote and worked on the United Nations World Conference Against Racism. Dave Beckwith, Scot Nakagawa, Helen Kim, Chaiti Sen, Ellen Bravo, and Kim Fellner gave me important feedback on drafts. Special thanks to Kim Klein and Stephanie Roth for their friendship and encouragement. Without Johanna Vondeling, my editor at Jossey-Bass, the book would still be in the “nice idea” stage. Thanks also to Allison Brunner, Pamela Fischer, and Xenia Lisanevich, who worked on the manuscript. On behalf of the Ms. Foundation and the organizations profiled, I would especially like to thank the Ford Foundation—and particularly Barbara Phillips and Helen Neuborne—whose generous support underwrote the New Voices Initiative and this book. Finally, none of our successes would be possible without the work of all those who have gone before us, laughing in the face of sacrifice. I thank our ancestors and borrow their strength all the time.

New York, New York
January 2003

Rinku Sen

Dedicated to the memory of
Timothy J. Sampson.
Onward!

THE AUTHOR

RINKU SEN started her career in social-justice work as a student organizer in 1984, fighting race, gender, and class discrimination on campuses. From 1988 to 2000, she worked with the Center for Third World Organizing, a national network of organizations of color. As a staff member, then co-director, Rinku trained new organizers of color and crafted grassroots public policy campaigns around poverty, education, transportation, racial and gender equity, health care, and immigration issues. Currently she is the publisher of *ColorLines*, the national quarterly magazine on race, culture, and action, and the director of the New York office of the Applied Research Center, which conducts research on race and public policy. She has written extensively about the race and gender dimensions of community organizing and has advised many foundations and community organizations about how to support and evaluate organizing. She is a 1996 recipient of the Ms. Foundation for Women's Gloria Steinem Women of Vision award.

PROFILES

The organizations profiled here are used as the core examples in the chapters that follow. They were all Ms. Foundation for Women economic justice grantees from 1999 to 2001. This general overview of their history and accomplishments provides background information readers will find useful as they encounter the detailed descriptions of these organizations' work throughout the book.

Campaign on Contingent Work

Founded in 1996, the Campaign on Contingent Work is a Boston-based network of activists and organizations seeking to end discrimination against part-time, temporary, and contract workers in Massachusetts. CCW was founded by long-time truck driver, Teamster member, and staff person of the Service Employees International Union Tim Costello. While working at the regional organizing and training group Northeast Action, Costello traveled the state talking with activists to determine the focus of a campaign around workers' rights. "The changing nature of work came up over and over again," recalls Costello, who launched an investigation into contingent-work patterns in Massachusetts, as well as in the economy at large. CCW became an independent entity in 1998.

Although there was a great deal of pressure to build a traditional membership organization, CCW activists chose instead the innovative network form for its flexibility and ability to move quickly. Contingent workers lack characteristics

that enable the organizing of traditional workers; in particular the contingent workforce is diverse, by occupation as well as by race, gender, and class, and contingent workers are not covered by many labor laws, such as the rights to be considered employees, to join unions, and to fight the employer practice of denying health benefits and pensions.

Like other parts of the country, Massachusetts has its share of contingent workers. Contingent work is a major factor in the state economy; it is prevalent in the academic and publishing industries, in human services and social work, and in health care and all kinds of assembly work, and it has a disproportionate impact on women. In its first five years, CCW contributed to the fights of tugboat workers, museum guards, and temporary workers. Although some of these workers were members of unions, their contingent status hindered their ability to use traditional union resources.

In spite of the limitations in labor law, CCW used existing legal standards to end some of the most egregious abuses at Labor Ready, a national temp agency that Gail Nicholson, former CCW administrator and current board member, says is “corporatizing day labor.” CCW activists who worked for Labor Ready reported poor working conditions, discrimination in job assignments, especially against women, and lax health and safety monitoring on the job. Working with Labor Ready temps, CCW pressured the company to stop its illegal charging of ATM and other fees, and CCW combined with groups nationally to track the company’s health and safety practices.

Nicholson, a former member of the flight attendants’ union, notes that CCW provides everything from “first-strike media assistance, to helping [workers] strategize, to writing . . . press releases.” All this assistance encourages self-organization among workers. Costello says, “We want the workers to make all the decisions on a specific battle. We bring the big frame—poor people getting abused by a wealthy institution. Now they’re part of a social struggle. We’re the go-to enablers.”

Center for the Child Care Workforce

The Center for the Child Care Workforce was formed as a national organization to promote the interests of child care workers through research, leadership development, advocacy, and activism. The Center was started by child care workers in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1978 and has evolved into an influential voice in child care debates by bringing child care workers’ needs to national attention.

Child care workers own and operate few political or workers’ organizations of their own, particularly beyond the local level. There is a large, well-resourced professional organization, the National Association for Educators of Young Children (NAEYC), that is devoted to meeting the needs of kids, but draws members from

many sectors and does not focus on those actually working with children. The largest portion of NAEYC's membership is center directors, academics, and for-profit administrators and other employers rather than workers. The Center was started by a small group of child care workers to address compensation issues directly.

For more than ten years, the Center has enabled workers to identify their collective issues and problems and to raise the workforce's visibility to the public and policymakers through the Worthy Wage movement. The Center has identified one day of the year during which child care workers nationwide apply their creativity to educating the public about their conditions and highlighting specific policy options. Worthy Wage Day has become the umbrella under which child care workers organize rallies, public-awareness projects, and mobilizations for specific policy and organizing goals. Through Worthy Wage Day, providers and teachers have contributed greatly to the tool kit of tactics available to child care workers who want to influence compensation and working conditions. For example, the organizing manual teaches workers how to convey policy messages by using popular theater based on familiar stories and fairy tales such as "The Teeny Tiny Teacher" and "The Child Care Provider Meets the Worthy Wage Dragon."

To support the local leaders who emerged out of the Worthy Wage campaign and to help shape the consciousness and increase the organizing skills of all child care workers, the Center created the Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP). LEAP sessions reflect the Center's awareness of the diversity of the workforce; they are always conducted by a team that includes one woman of color and one white woman. The Center has adjusted the LEAP curriculum for use in college-level early-childhood-education courses; it integrates policy analysis and the economic dimensions of child care employment into what is considered basic education for the workforce. Finally, the Center prioritized a research strategy. Its first National Child Care Staffing Study led to the Worthy Wage campaign. Every year on Worthy Wage Day, the Center releases new information about the workforce, its wages, conditions, and aspirations. The Center is merging with the American Federation of Teachers Education Fund, where it will continue its commitment to improving child care jobs.

Center for Third World Organizing

The Center for Third World Organizing was founded in 1980 as a training center for organizers of color. Since then, it has evolved into a racial justice network working with a wide variety of communities of color around the country. CTWO's flagship training program, the Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program, was started to disrupt the trend of communities of color relying on white organizers to build their community organizations. In 1985, MAAP's pilot year, community