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A study finds that the most effective
grantmaking is ...

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**funding community organizing
that builds coalitions.**

Introduction

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Communities across the United States face serious challenges of economic, political and social inequality. During the past 20 years the United States, and the world, has undergone dramatic structural changes, both economic and political. The 1990's saw record economic growth in the U.S. and elsewhere, but the majority of the benefits of this growth went to large corporations and wealthy families. Growing numbers of people experienced an ongoing decline in benefits, economic and social opportunities, as well as barriers to meaningful and effective civic participation.



Now the effects of economic decline in the U.S., along with the post-9/11 re-ordering of national priorities, bring into stark detail that the communities of people who were left out of the “growth” of the 90's are suffering the severest consequences:

- Growing degrees of poverty and a declining quality of life, due to high unemployment, underemployment, and the declining real value of wages. The Congressional Budget Office reported that income inequality among households, both before and after Federal taxes, grew more quickly from 2003 to 2005 than over any other two-year period on record, back to 1979. Over those two years, the growth of inequality transferred \$400 billion from the bottom 95% of households to the top 5%.
- The median hourly wage has been flat since 2001 in real terms, up just 1.3% (and down 1.3% for men), and the median family income is up only slightly from the levels reached in 1999 despite five years of GDP growth.
- Diversion of public dollars away from human and social services, in a period when the need for services is expanding dramatically.



“We don’t leave the table until every partner in our coalition is satisfied. We will not give the other side a chance to pick us off. We can all walk away from the table victorious.”

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- Tax cuts, loopholes and tax breaks for wealthy corporations have not provided the economic benefits to those in need these breaks were supposed to benefit.
- Government outlays on physical infrastructure (roads, bridges, schools) have declined to 2.7% of the gross domestic product, from 3.6% four decades earlier.

Inner city young people, people of color and the working poor are the hardest hit by these problems, leading to frustration, alienation, disease and a sense of powerlessness about their future.

The challenge facing all of us is how to create the community infrastructures, institutions, economic development strategies and policies that can reverse the growing gap of wealth and power.

Funding and Measuring Community Organizing

The story of the work Solidago supports, and the groups that are doing that work at a grassroots level, is the substance of a report "Measuring the Impact of Community Organizing", drawing on Solidago's grantmaking assessment study of 2004. It is the story of how funding strategically, and working together, can have exponential impact to build a strong, unified movement for social change that is connected across issues. It is the story of building a healthy, sustainable movement that fosters social change, human rights and the re-distribution of resources.

This study found that for every dollar Solidago invested in grantees doing community organizing for social change, these communities received an additional \$59 in benefits as a result of this work. It also found that when grantees worked together, the benefits to communities are even greater.

Grantees reported that they:

- *Cleaned up, closed or prevented polluting facilities.*

Alternatives for Community and Environment

forced the City of Boston to monitor air quality in the Dudley Square neighborhood, clean up toxic sites in Roxbury and get the medical waste disposal company, Stericycle, to close its incinerator.

- *Preserved and expanded affordable housing through public housing preservation, community land trusts, inclusive zoning policies, and tenant protections.*

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy organized the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice to ensure that big plans to redevelop the Los Angeles area included the values and vision of local residents. An agreement with the Staples Center required local hiring for thousands of living wage jobs. It also required hundreds of affordable housing units to be incorporated into a 4-million-square-foot addition to the Center. The Figueroa Corridor Community Land Trust was established as a long-term owner and steward of housing within the Corridor.



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- *Prevented or improved proposed developments with negative community impacts. Solidago grantees took credit for preventing or improving over 11 such developments.*

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Communities for a Better Environment in San Francisco helped residents block a 550-megawatt power plant, won the closure of a CENCO refinery, and helped residents stop the proposed massive expansion of a Potrero Hill power plant.



- *Secured millions of federal dollars to help toxics victims, cleaned up contaminated sites, conducted air quality research, and engaged in environmental health and environmental justice training.*

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Diné CARE got Congress to amend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act to include more radiation victims and to provide \$655 million for victims, \$10 million to study health impacts, and \$20 million a year to support community health initiatives.

- *Compelled lawmakers to amend local and federal laws and standards to better protect the environmental health of communities.*

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The Environmental Health Coalition worked with the EPA to help the City of San Diego secure \$1.9 million to control lead contamination.

- *Induced corporations and other stakeholders to modify their practices to reduce environmental harm.*

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The **Southwest Organizing Project** has used innovative tactics to fight corporate polluters, including filing a shareholder resolution calling on Intel Corporation to change its production process to a clean, less water-intensive method.

- *Improved workers' wages and conditions through workplace bargaining campaigns. Grantees took credit for gains in 230 campaigns.*

Connecticut Center for a New Economy supported the successful organizing of 4,000 workers in Stamford, and thwarted attempts by Yale University to use Latino workers as strikebreakers.

- *Created or improved local jobs. Grantees' role accounted for 15,799 jobs.*

Community Voices Heard, with help from the National Employment Law Project, got New York City and the State to adopt its transitional jobs program for welfare participants as an alternative to workfare. Altogether, the City provided close to 20,000 jobs at various city agencies.

- *Engaged in significant public policy change at the local and state levels through the enactment of living wage ordinances, improved welfare policies, and stronger protections for contingent and immigrant workers.*

Working Partnerships USA in San Jose led a successful effort to pass a living wage ordinance. The ordinance, as well as collective bargaining, was applied to the new convention center. In 2002 Working Partnerships estimated that 750 workers had higher wages since the living wage ordinance was passed, and 3,020 workers had more job security.

- *Improved access to government services for tens of thousands of immigrants.*

Make the Road by Walking sued to win equal access to welfare benefits in New York City for limited English proficient residents, and won the right to interpreters and bilingual caseworkers at welfare offices.



Solidago found that funding organizing is effective. For every \$1 a community organization received from Solidago, they were able to leverage it for \$59 in community benefits.



- *Secured millions of dollars in job creation subsidies and additional aid for welfare participants, and expanded their access to education and training.*

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Workplace Hollywood, a \$10 million workforce development program promoted by SCOPE in partnership with DreamWorks, eight other major entertainment studios, entertainment industry unions and community-based organizations trained and placed low-income inner city residents in the entertainment industry.

- *Compelled corporations to give back millions of dollars to local communities in exchange for tax breaks.*

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The **Southwest Organizing Project** secured \$35 million from Intel to construct a new high school.

Impressive specific accomplishments in the areas of community land use, planning and transportation were reported by Solidago grantees:

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- **Alternatives for Community and Environment** (ACE) compelled the Metropolitan Boston Transportation Authority to commit \$40 million to gradually replace current diesel buses with clean fuel buses over the next 25 years. ACE also obliged the Metropolitan Planning Organization—which makes regional transportation decisions—to incorporate environmental justice into its planning, as required by federal law, and to address transit inequities in its 25-year plan.

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- **The Southwest Organizing Project** (SWOP) helped residents form a quasi-governmental water users authority and secured \$525,000 from the USDA for emergency water services. As a result of SWOP's efforts, the City of Albuquerque adopted an economic development policy that favors local economic development instead of intensive industrial recruitment.

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➤ **The Center on Policy Initiatives** worked with allies to compel a developer to include community benefits in its plans, and then got the City of San Diego to adopt a community economic impact assessment for all new development.

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➤ **The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy** (LAANE) reframed the debate over future development in the region by using an accountable-development approach. LAANE's approach recognized the overlap among such issues as job retention, affordable housing, a living wage, and the adverse effects of commercial development on a community. Working with the unions—one of its critical new alliances—LAANE organized workers to fight for a job-retention ordinance that was passed by the city in 1995. This campaign opened the activists' eyes to a critical avenue of leverage: anywhere that city contracts were involved, community groups—if they worked strategically—could get their voices heard. That led to the landmark battle for a local living wage almost twice the federal minimum wage, which drew national attention when it passed the city council in 1997. Today the living wage law affects nearly 15,000 workers.



Building the capacity of grassroots organizations through general support, technical assistance, applied research, media, leadership development, training of trainers, and on-site organizational development, is crucial.

Significant achievements in the area of training and jobs were made by AGENDA, when the City of Los Angeles adopted their proposal for welfare reform, and two years later L.A. County adopted their jobs and training program for welfare participants. In 2000, Strategic Alliances for a Just Economy got the L.A. Arena development project to provide permanent housing for those displaced by construction of a new sports arena. They created 2,250 jobs, promoted local hiring and invested \$1 million in parks. Other Solidago grantees successfully supported union organizing, helped day laborers win hundreds of thousands of dollars combined in unpaid wages on Long Island, or won successive living wage ordinances.

Work that may appear diffuse and small-scale actually was shown to have a large-scale impact when the accomplishments of independent organizations that collaborated were added together. The study showed that grassroots organizations, which worked in alliance with other organizations, were able to accomplish significantly more for their communities than those that worked in isolation.



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All grantees reported building new partnerships and alliances over the grant period, ranging from two to 50. ACE’s transportation victories in Boston were largely won through local community organizing and coalitions. AGENDA, through its work with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Alliance, secured millions in public and entertainment industry dollars for workforce development programs.

Alliances are powerful tools for social change, and not always easy to formulate. “The challenge for us is to build bridges that connect people’s real concerns and daily struggles with opportunities to connect to a larger effort for change,” ACE wrote in its grant report. “We must find ways to complement, not compete with, other local organizing efforts.” Their campaign against a proposed bioterrorism lab, supported by the Bush administration and Boston University Medical Center, was a good example of building a broad coalition led by ACE’s primary constituency—the affected neighborhood—which also included groups working on peace, genetic engineering, gentrification, jobs and public health. “Uniting this powerful diversity of interests towards a common agenda is both the reward and the challenge of much of our work,” said ACE

Solidago grantees saw community, faith and labor coalitions as potent weapons for achieving worker benefits. These critical findings on the efficacy of funding coalition building have informed Solidago’s subsequent grantmaking priorities and activities.



As an outcome of the 2004 grantmaking assessment, Solidago's current grantees are now primarily in metropolitan areas. In these metropolitan areas, a critical mass of community organizations offers greater access to alliances and partners. Over time, some of these alliances become statewide and national in scope, forging larger and stronger coalitions.

The Solidago Foundation now looks for opportunities for grassroots organizations to intersect, through meetings, alliances or partnerships. It funds democratic models of sustainable community development that are linked to organizing. Solidago funds democratic, community-based organizations creating the building blocks for effective electoral participation. The Foundation believes that general support—building the capacity of grassroots organizations through applied research, media, leadership development, base building, and organizational development—is crucial. Such infrastructure support, rather than program support, is the hardest funding for a grantee to find. It can be the riskiest funding a foundation can make, but to the right organizations, including many small ones with limited access, the 2004 study showed that this can be the most successful type of grantmaking.

“All of us have to be part of resolving these problems. We have to respect other organizations and activists equally so we approach it as a movement.”

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About Solidago

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Solidago is the Latin term for the goldenrod plant, whose name means, “to strengthen or make whole”. Inspired by this widespread and strong-rooted plant, the Foundation seeks non-traditional and creative approaches to deep-rooted social problems that address the institutionalized disparities of wealth, resources, power and opportunity. Solidago supports building progressive organizations and alliances for lasting structural change of unjust systems.

The Foundation funds work less likely to receive support from traditional sources in four program areas:

- Economic Justice: the creation of new policies that more equitably share the benefits of economic prosperity with all;
- Environmental Justice: to remedy and prevent the harmful health impacts of environmental degradation and toxic pollution of disadvantaged communities;
- Electoral Justice: to make the electoral process more responsive to the needs of all people, and particularly more accessible to the traditionally disenfranchised; and
- Global Justice: to develop a grassroots movement that directly supports and empowers those people most impacted by globalization.

Solidago funds anchor organizations within networks, infrastructure support providers and clusters of organizations using a movement-building approach to funding. The Foundation funds community based organizations that work with partners to effect change at a larger scale. This might include campaigns, convenings, travel as well as emerging and existing networks, alliances and coalitions.

On January 1, 2007 Solidago Foundation, a new Delaware corporation, took over the staff and programs of Solidago Foundation, Inc., a distinct New York corporation, which has suspended operations. All activities prior to that date were those of Solidago New York; those since of Solidago Delaware.

In Solidago’s role as a foundation, it is building a set of alliances with foundations and individual donors who share Solidago’s values and interests but do not take the same risks with their grantmaking. These values include being **strategic** by funding groups that can have an impact on a



Solidago has found that organizing and coalition building is an effective way to invest in social services.

scale greater than themselves; being **effective** in producing social benefits from the dollars invested; and getting resources to those who have the least so they can **help themselves**. In short, like many other foundations and donors, Solidago believes in the common good.

The Foundation has found that “doing good” always requires taking some risks. Taking a perspective—through economic justice, environmental justice, electoral justice and global justice—offers a keen insight into the needs of grassroots organizations. Solidago has found that organizing and coalition building is an effective way to invest in social services. As a public foundation, Solidago can help donors to fund organizing rather than direct services, to fund the people who need such benefits and services to organize on their own behalf to get them, and to be more effective.

We can accomplish much by assuming non-traditional roles as grantmakers when we:

- Foster and support a new generation of grassroots leaders
- Listen to forward thinkers in the field who envision a social justice movement
- Push the progressive edge in philanthropy, including engaging funders in learning new ways to move their agendas
- Become the conveners and facilitators of processes to bring grantees and other key stakeholders together, working in strategic collaboration to develop new models of self governance and redistribution of power

Together with our funding partners and our grantees, Solidago looks for opportunities to work for fundamental, transformational change, where people’s shared experiences and collective power will result in a better world for all.

“We get so much further in a coalition when we work out issues like trust, building infrastructure, thinking realistically about what we can accomplish.”

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Solidago's Program Assessment Methodology

When Solidago undertook an assessment of the effectiveness of its grantmaking in 2004, there was widespread skepticism that positive returns from funding community organizing were measurable. Many foundations had sought ways to quantify the results of their grantmaking, with varying degrees of success. But such quantification is an important component of making strategic decisions about funding effectiveness, to measure social benefits with dollars invested.

After a decade of funding social justice work, Solidago too wanted to measure the performance of its grantmaking in relation to the dollars invested. Realizing that this would be a self-selective measure in terms of which grantees would respond to a survey, Solidago undertook both a quantitative and well as qualitative analysis. Solidago sent surveys to 59 grantees and received 34 completed surveys. It followed up with interviews of grantees working in environmental and economic justice by an outside consultant. Additionally the consultant interviewed other economic and environmental justice funders, academics, policymakers, stakeholders and others, conducting 20 interviews in all. Admittedly, this was a small sample, but it was enough to give a general portrait of community organizing relative to Solidago's grantmaking.

In a survey, organizations were asked to list their internal and external accomplishments. Internal accomplishments might include an increase in the size of their membership base, growth in the size of coalitions they participated in, or new and diverse leadership. External accomplishments were characterized as victories the organization achieved that benefited the constituency they represented, such as the number and dollar value of new jobs created or protected, number of pollution permits denied, number of constituents mobilized for demonstrations, the amount of government funding acquired

for new and improved community services, among many others. The survey also asked respondents to report on which issues and strategies they felt contributed most to their success.

Organizations were asked to note whether they acted alone in achieving these benefits, acted with supporters or allies, or provided technical or political support for the accomplishments. With that information, their accomplishments were "discounted" from 10% to 66% when the group was not acting alone.

The accomplishments were also discounted in light of population and dollar impacts based on Solidago staff's knowledge of grantees, and by the amount of funding provided by Solidago in the grantee's overall budget.

In order to determine which grantees were the "most accomplished," Solidago created a simple formula to quantify the results based on the number of group accomplishments reported in the survey, the dollar value of its accomplishments, and the number of people impacted, all discounted by the average role the group played. The formula was:

$$\frac{\left(\left(\frac{\text{Dollar Value}}{100,000} \right) + \left(\frac{\text{Number Impacted}}{1,000} \right) + \frac{\text{Number of Accomplishments}}{\text{Role Allowance}} \right)}{\text{Role Allowance}}$$

This formula produced an "accomplishment ranking" for each grantee.

Finally, in an effort to gauge Solidago's impact on grantees' outcomes, Solidago discounted the dollar value of all reported accomplishments by the actual proportion of a Solidago grant in the grantee's budget. The ultimate figure is \$59—for every dollar Solidago invested, the Foundation saw a \$59 return in benefits to grantee communities.

Profile of Respondents

Solidago sent surveys to 59 of its grantees, and more than half responded.

	Average age of organization	Average size budget	Average years Solidago funded	Average size of grant	Solidago grant as percent of average budget
All respondents	15 years	\$671,281	4	\$27,765	4.1%
All Economic Justice Groups	14 years	\$748,443	4	\$31,606	4.2%
All Environmental Justice Groups	16 years	\$573,542	4	\$22,905	4.0%



Grassroots organizations that worked in alliance with other organizations were able to accomplish significantly more for their communities than those that worked in isolation.

Solidago's mission

is to promote justice, equity, sustainability and enfranchisement for all through charitable grantmaking to, and work with, progressive, empowering, community-based organizations and collaborations.

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For a copy of Solidago's 10-year grantmaking assessment study, "*Measuring the Impact of Community Organizing*", and more information on its grantees, call (413) 487-0174 or email solidagofoundation@solidago.org.

