THE RELEVANCE OF THE TILLING THE SOIL REPORT FOR FUNDERS

Community organizers are vital to many of the programs and projects that progressive funders strive to support. They are the key to building the power of communities to secure material needs, change policies and systems, and stand up to injustice. However, what organizers do and how they do it is often misunderstood by funders, and organizers often lack the long-term support and development that they need to increase their leadership, impact, and ability to stay in the field.

Unlike recent research and reports that focus on organizing groups and the organizing field, the **Organizer Learning Project** report, "**Tilling the Soil: Cultivating Organizer Growth and Learning**," focuses on organizers. It provides a closer look at what organizers do in their day to day work and how they learn, grow, and develop their organizing practice. Understanding the process of organizer development is critical for funders that want to construct funding strategies, grant applications and reporting requirements, and learning and evaluation activities that support the recruitment, development, and retention of organizers.

This document outlines three concrete ways that funders can use and learn from the Tilling the Soil report. At the end, we offer questions funders can use to reflect on what they take away from the report and how they may apply it to their funding strategy.

THREE WAYS FUNDERS CAN USE THE REPORT...

1. If you want to understand the work of organizers and how the practice of organizing is intertwined with organizer development, this report:

Describes how the practice of organizing is dependent on the development of organizers that are committed to and skilled in building community power.

Challenges funding practices and assumptions that overlook the central role of organizers in community power building.

Explains how organizers develop their organizing practice and career over time. The report outlines the long arc of organizer development and the five phases of growth that organizers move through throughout their career.

2. If you are looking for new ideas about how to strengthen grassroots organizing organizations and the organizing field to better develop organizer staff, this report:

Describes the experiences, relationships, and reflective practices that make a difference in organizer development.

Challenges the idea that training is the critical or sole support that organizers need to develop their skills and practice. Training is one of a range of supports that organizations and the field need to provide organizers over the course of their careers.

Explains the connection between phases of organizer development and the types of experiences and relationships that make a difference in their growth. Our findings underscore and delineate how organizers need a range of diverse supports to grow their skills, capacity, and impact.

3. If you want to improve learning partnerships with organizers, this report:

Describes how organizers learn about themselves, the practice of organizing, and the world around them through experiential, relational, and reflective learning practices.

Challenges the dominant modes of learning that are common in the philanthropic sector that emphasize the written word and empirical data gathering and analysis in learning and evaluation projects.

Explains how organizers gather, intuit, and interpret information on an ongoing basis through the use of various practices, tools and storytelling.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

How has the report helped you understand the responsibilities and practices of community organizers? In what ways do the lessons from the report challenge or affirm your assumptions about the role and work of community organizers?

In what ways has the report helped you understand how organizers develop? What changes can you make to how you support organizations and the field to better support the experiences and relationships that facilitate organizer development?

How does your current funding strategy support diverse, ongoing, and long-term organizer staff development?

How does your existing approach to learning partnerships with organizers include experiential, relational, and reflective learning?

The Organizer Learning Project is led by Katie Fox, Gigi Barsoum, and Margaret Post