

National Study of Community Organizing Organizations

Brad R. Fulton
Duke University

Richard L. Wood
University of New Mexico

Interfaith Funders

Abstract

The organizations in the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations (NSCOO) are located throughout the country and share a similar structure and mission. They operate as community-based organizations that bring together individuals from their member institutions to address social, economic, and political issues that affect poor, low-income, and middle-class sectors of U.S. society. Each organization has a board of directors consisting of representatives from its member institutions, which include religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, schools, unions, and other civic associations. The board members function as the organization's core leaders and meet together on a regular basis to lead the organization. These commonalities enable the analyses to hold the organizations' form relatively constant, while allowing their social composition, internal dynamics, and organizational outcomes to vary.

The sampling frame for the NSCOO included every community organizing organization in the U.S. that has an office address, at least one paid employee, and institutional members (note: the sampling frame did not include community organizing organizations that have only individual members). Based on these criteria, the study identified 189 active organizations by using databases from every national and regional community organizing network (e.g., Industrial Areas Foundation, PICO National Network, National People's Action, Gamaliel Foundation, and Direct Action Research Training), databases from fourteen foundations that fund community organizing, and archived IRS 990 Forms.

I surveyed the entire field of these organizations by distributing a two-part survey to the director of each organization. Part one was an online survey that gathered extensive data on each organization's history, interactions, and activities. Part two consisted of customized spreadsheets that directors used to provide detailed demographic information about their institutional members, board members, and paid staff. This multi-level study achieved a response rate of 94%—gathering data on 178 of the 189 organizations in the U.S. and demographic information on the 4,145 member institutions, 2,939 board members, and 628 paid staff affiliated with these organizations.

I supplemented the NSCOO survey data with qualitative data collected from several organizations that participated in the survey. These organizations are located in California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., and they vary in their size, social composition, internal dynamics, and organizational outcomes. The data contain ethnographic observations of multiple organizational meetings, which involved discussions on topics

including forming alliances, developing organizing strategies, recruiting new members, and planning large-scale events. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the directors of 12 organizations. The interview questions focused on the organizations' history, internal dynamics, and organizational practices. I collected additional data through several informal conversations and correspondence with the organizations' directors, leadership team members, and paid staff.

Reference to use when citing this dataset:

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Corresponding author: bradrfulton@gmail.com