

## *McKenzie River Gathering Foundation (MRG)*

### Models of Social Change

**Advocacy:** Characterized by a core of activists working on behalf of a larger constituency, generally as its representatives or publicly identified leaders. Often, though by no means always, this core utilizes highly specialized and/or professional skills (i.e., legal or media training) to benefit a community or advance an issue. Most advocacy work includes an educational component for its constituency, adversarial powers and/or the general public. Some organizations whose work is principally characterized by advocacy may at times activate their constituencies for direct action, mobilization or other kinds of social change tactics.

**Community Development:** An approach to social change that focuses on developing self-reliant cultural, political and economic institutions within disenfranchised communities, as well as raising the material standard of living for members of those communities. Examples include mutual aid associations, community development corporations, coops, and cultural preservation projects.

**Cultural Work:** Cultural workers recognize that people are cultural (as well as political, social, etc.) beings and that culture is a tremendously powerful force in people's lives. Cultural work seeks to advance social change struggles through cultural "media," such as theater, painting, music, art, dance, film/video, radio, etc.

**Direct Action:** Direct action is a tactic that involves direct, and often militant, confrontation with "authorities" to demand concessions. Direct action deliberately disrupts "business as usual" (sometimes, though by no means always, employing civil disobedience), partly to protest the injustices of the status quo. Frequently a series of "escalating" direct action events are employed as part of a larger campaign. After each rejection by "authorities" of activists' requests/demands for justice, the next action escalates in level of disruption and militancy. The purpose is both to demonstrate that authorities were given the opportunity to respond to "calm and reasonable" requests for justice before activists became "militant and unreasonable," and to radicalize constituents by having them experience the unwillingness of power to concede anything, however just or reasonable, without a contest. Direct action activities may include sit-ins, rallies, strikes, blockades.

**Mobilization:** A model of social change work where "hot" issues determine the activities and agenda, often in response to a crisis. Agenda and action are generally planned by staff and leaders, who mobilize a large member/donor base for mass demonstrations, smaller actions or educational/fundraising events. Often this kind of work is single-issue. Examples include CAUSMIME's opposition to the Gulf War and NARRAL's mobilization against anti-choice Supreme Court rulings.

**Movement Research:** Research that is either directly applicable to a campaign (e.g., identifying targets, handles, constituencies) or furthers the analytical capacity of social change organizations. Involves well-developed relationships between researchers and other social change activists so that research is well-grounded in the needs of the community.

**Organizing:** An approach to social change that makes demands on authorities and social institutions through the collective action of a constituency. Organizing builds power in disenfranchised communities to contest the forces that keep them disenfranchised. Emphasis is on building democratic organizations of the formerly unorganized to wage campaigns that win concrete changes. Organizing is constituency oriented, i.e., issues/agenda are arrived at by organizers with their constituency.

**Public Education:** Work that informs the general public, or strategic sectors of that public, about injustices and offers information, analysis, and strategies for action. Examples include alternative media (radio, film/video, newspapers, magazines, etc.), speaking tours, newsletters, books, television, classes, seminars, workshops, conferences, and leafletting.

**Resources for Social Change:** Projects or programs that build the capacity of social change groups. Examples include technical assistance, providing facilities to social change groups, etc. Often this work is done by what are called "intermediary organizations," social change groups whose primary constituency is other social change groups, rather than any particular community. MRG is such an organization.

**Social Service with a Social Change Component:** MRG recognizes the value and importance of much social service work, but has chosen for a variety of reasons to limit its funding to social change projects. However, it is sometimes unclear where to draw the line between what is social service and what is social change. In addition, some projects traditionally defined as social service have a clear, identifiable and important social change component. Such projects qualify for funding under MRG's guidelines.

The following definitions of social change are from the book *Robin Hood was Right*, and can be found on the Funding Exchange web site at [www.fex.org](http://www.fex.org).

## **1. What is progressive social change?**

While traditional charities generally respond to the symptoms of entrenched social problems, the Funding Exchange network supports those who identify underlying causes and are working to change these conditions. This is a core value of progressive social change as reflected in the phrase, "Change, not Charity." Social change organizing:

- Builds community-based responses, not solutions that affect just a few individuals and leave the underlying social problems intact.
- Changes attitudes, behaviors, laws, policies and institutions to better reflect the values of inclusion, fairness, diversity and opportunity.
- Insists on accountability and responsiveness among institutions, including the government, large corporations, universities and other entities whose policies and actions profoundly affect the living conditions of individuals and communities, whether locally, nationally, or internationally.
- Expands the meaning and practice of "democracy" by involving those closest to social problems in determining their solutions.

Because progressive social change involves making significant changes on a systemic level, conflict with those who hold power is often inevitable. The power that social change organizations bring to the table is their ability to organize, to educate and to mobilize.

Progressive social change is a profoundly democratic undertaking. At its best, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, abilities and ages join together in developing and implementing creative solutions to social problems. Organizing amplifies the voices of those whose interests are too often overlooked.

Money alone does not bring about change; nor do individuals. But when people band together and form organizations to focus their collective power, social change can happen. When a large number of organizations work together toward a common goal, that's a movement. Movements make change.

On the surface, social change movements appear to be spontaneous bursts of energy, a sweep of people, outraged and energized, rising forth to demand some form of change. But in truth, social change movements flow from careful organizing, massive public education, sustained agitation, and, at times, inspired collaboration across the divides of race, gender and class. These movements are driven by human energy, intelligence, courage -- as well as money.

## **2. Social Change: A Working Definition**

The goal of social change is systemic, institutional change, change that will live on beyond the participation of the current group. It is a change in the fabric of society. Social change can...

- \* change attitudes, behavior, laws, and public policy
- \* expand democracy by amplifying the voices of those who have been left out
- \* alter power relationships
- \* address the root causes of inequality
- \* involve conflict
- \* create alternative institutions
- \* level the playing field
- \* have a greater degree of uncertainty about the outcome of the work, unlike traditional charity

Personal transformation and enhanced self-esteem of individuals are powerful outcomes of people's involvement in social justice activities, but the goal of social change is to make the world better for everyone.