Building A Movement In The Non-Profit Industrial Complex

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

Today, democracy in the United States is facing a major challenge: Wealthy elites have immense power to influence election outcomes and policy decisions, while the political participation of low-income people and racial minorities remains relatively low. In this context, non-profit social movement organizations are one of the key vehicles through which ordinary people can exercise influence in our political system and pressure elite decision-makers to take action on matters of concern to ordinary citizens. A crucial fact about social movement organizations is that they often receive significant financial support from elites through philanthropic foundations. However, there is no research that details exactly how non-profit social movement organizations gain resources from elites or that analyzes how relationships with elite donors impact grassroots organizations’ efforts to mobilize people to fight for racial and economic justice.

My dissertation aims to fill that gap. It is an ethnographic case study of a multiracial statewide organization called the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) that coordinates progressive social movement organizations in Ohio. Member organizations work on a variety of issues, including ending mass incarceration, environmental justice, improving access to early childhood education, and raising the minimum wage. In 2016, the OOC registered over 155,000 people to vote in Ohio. I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with staff members of OOC and allied organizations, including funders. I also
observed 330 hours of OOC meetings and events and collected over 1300 documents pertaining to OOC’s history and fundraising.

Using funds from foundations, the OOC has made progress toward their goal of building social movement infrastructure in Ohio. However, the OOC faces tension between the demands of its elite funding sources on one hand and its mission to organize communities on the other. This work illuminates the mechanisms through which elites impact efforts to organize poor people and people of color. Non-profit organizational fields, often referred to by social movement leaders as the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), are governed by a technocratic political logic wherein elite experts determine strategy and decide what issues to prioritize. The Ohio Organizing Collaborative, on the other hand, is governed by a populist political logic, which holds that political leaders should prioritize the demands of ordinary people.

I find that the NPIC limits nonprofit organization leaders’ ability to build trust and authentically engage ordinary citizens in the political process. The structure of the NPIC distorts accountability, making organizers beholden to elite funders instead of grassroots leaders. Issue-based funding and short-term grants make it difficult for organizers to focus on their primary mission, which involves recruiting and mentoring community members and building relationships across race, class and geography to strengthen social movement infrastructure.
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Finally, none of this would be possible without my family: my parents, Cindy and Steve Oyakawa and my husband, Todd Callais.
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Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Sociology
## Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. iv

Vita ........................................................................................................................................ vi

Fields of Study ...................................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables ......................................................................................................................... xi

List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... xii

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

Elite Power, “Ordinary People,” and Community Organizing .............................................. 8

What is the Ohio Organizing Collaborative? ....................................................................... 12

Competing Political Logics: Populist Versus Technocratic .................................................. 20

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 27

Chapter 1: Social Movements and Non-Profit Organizations ............................................ 30

The Non-Profit Industrial Complex ....................................................................................... 34

Nonprofit Social Movement Organizations and Social Movement Infrastructures .......... 36

Nonprofit Social Movement Organizations and Organizational Fields ............................. 45

Funding Arenas, Social Movement Infrastructure, and the OOC ......................................... 48
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 78

Chapter 2: The Structure of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex .............................. 81
The Contested Role of Elite Funding in Social Movements ........................................ 83
The Structure of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) .......................................... 89
How Social Movement Organizations Get Funding in the NPIC .............................. 100
Issue-based Funding and Short-term Grants ................................................................. 104
How the Non-profit Industrial Complex Impacts Social Movement Organizations ...... 108
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 135

Chapter 3: Issue-based Funding and Leadership Development ............................ 138
Neoliberalism, Intersectionality and the Battle for Hearts and Minds ..................... 139
Issue Campaigns ..................................................................................................................... 148
Leadership Development ........................................................................................................ 157
How the NPIC Undermines Leadership Development .............................................. 173
Organizer Burnout: A Side Effect of Building Movement in the NPIC .................. 180
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 183

Chapter 4: The OOC and Elections ............................................................................. 186
Managed Democracy .............................................................................................................. 189
Organizing and Elections: A Paradox in the NPIC ....................................................... 192
The Structure of the Electoral Industry ........................................................................... 209
Data Use: Likely Voters and Self-fulfilling Prophecy .................................................. 220
2016 Minimum Wage Ballot Initiative: The Limits of Building Power in the NPIC ..... 231
Why the 2016 Minimum Wage Ballot Initiative Did Not Happen in Ohio .............. 246
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 254
List of Tables

Table 1: Ohio Organizing Collaborative Core Members (2014-2015).......................... 15
Table 2: Members of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative Core Team (2014-2015) ........ 16
Table 3: Populist Versus Technocratic Political Logic........................................... 22
Table 4: Social Movement Infrastructure and Organizational Fields......................... 53
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Non-Profit Industrial Complex ............................................................... 91
Introduction

“A People’s Organization is not a philanthropic plaything nor a social service’s ameliorative gesture. It is a deep hard-driving force, striking and cutting at the very roots of all the evils which beset the people. It recognizes the existence of the vicious circle in which most human beings are caught and strives viciously to break this circle. It thinks and acts in terms of social surgery and not cosmetic cover-ups.”

- Saul Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, 1946

In August 2014, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative hosted a gathering for grassroots leaders from all over the state. It took place in a slightly dingy church basement in Columbus, which is typical for community organizing events. About 100 people were there; slightly more than half were black, most of the rest were white. During the meeting, white environmental activists from rural Ohio shared their stories alongside black criminal justice reform activists from inner city Cincinnati, Youngstown, and Akron. Also present were Walmart workers organizing for better pay and conditions, student activists coordinating protests against police shootings of black people, faith leaders speaking out against voter suppression, retirees fighting for greater benefits, union leaders from UFCW, and representatives from progressive policy and legal
advocacy organizations. The purpose of the convening was for grassroots leaders and organization staff working on a wide variety of social and racial justice issues across the state to build relationships with each other and become grounded in a shared analysis and strategy.

Kirk Noden, the executive director of the OOC, convened the gathering with a reflection. Kirk is a white man in his 40s who has an unusual breadth of organizing experience, having worked for several organizing networks including National People’s Action (NPA), Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the Gamaliel Foundation. He is an understated, yet engaging speaker who often uses humor to put people at ease. Kirk is exceptionally talented at raising money for community organizing. His straightforward, ‘tell it like it is’ style, along with a demonstrated commitment to delivering on his promises have helped him earn a good reputation among many funders in the non-profit world. Kirk does, with some chagrin, acknowledge that there is a bit of truth to his reputation as a ‘hustler’ among his critics. He is constantly coming up with schemes and making proposals and pitches to try to raise money for organizing. One of the reasons that Kirk is successful at fundraising is that he has an impressive ability to cast a vision that is at once ambitious and realistic.

Kirk’s statements at the August 2014 convening reveal how OOC leaders understand the organization’s identity and role. I paraphrase his remarks here:\textsuperscript{1}:

\textsuperscript{1} Extended quotes from observations are not exact. However, I am confident that I was able to capture much of what people said in my notes, including many direct phrases and quotes. I attempt to reproduce what was said as accurately as possible.
I want to start by grounding us in the seriousness of the task at hand. Reverend Nelson Pierce (an OOC organizer) is in Ferguson, Missouri right now helping to organize clergy... The story of what happened to Michael Brown is not an isolated story. What is at stake here is people’s lives. There have been moments where these stories become flashpoints of national attention. But we know, day in and day out the cost of mass incarceration, the cost of foreclosure, the cost of downsizing and eliminating jobs. We know that the cost is people’s lives².

Kirk starts by connecting the multi-issue activism of the Ohioans in the room to events on the national stage. In particular, he is referencing the protests in Ferguson, MO after the shooting of Michael Brown; those protests were occurring at the same time as the August gathering. Kirk argues that the issues coming to a head in Ferguson are “not an isolated story,” but instead represent issues that people in Ohio face every day. He connects the racial justice issue of police shootings to mass incarceration, foreclosure, and elimination of jobs. These social problems cause ordinary people suffer and even lose their lives. Kirk asserts that the people in the room “know” this.

This idea that ordinary people have intimate and therefore legitimate knowledge about the issues that impact their lives is a central part of the community organizing thesis that people should intervene in political institutions. The emphasis on empowering ordinary people also helps community organizers draw connections among various

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² When using quotes from interviews or observations in text, I attempt to make the quote read as clearly as it came across in person. That generally means removing some verbal pauses (like, you know, I mean, um, etc.) and repeated phrases (“I mean, like, I think, I think” becomes “I think”) and also occasionally adding words like “the” or “a” to sentences.
progressive causes; encouraging people to view them not as separate issues but symptoms of the same underlying problems. Kirk continues by saying:

“The OOC, we are technically a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, but that’s not really what this is about. This is about building a movement in Ohio for social, racial and economic justice. What we are up against is no small task: the rise of corporate power in this country and Ohio. In the past 40 years, they’ve been winning. They’ve been structuring this country so that half of country will soon be low wage workers. (Several people in the room shout: “That ain’t right!”). They have stopped immigration reform, replaced good factory jobs with a private prison industry and an economy around sending people to prison.

We don’t have an easy fight in front of us to change this state and this country. The place where change is going to happen is in rooms like this. It’s not going to happen in a fancy consultant’s office. It sure isn’t going to happen in DC. It’s always been on the backs of regular, everyday people. That’s who the OOC is, what we are and what we’re trying to build. The OOC is an alliance of 17 organizations from across Ohio. It’s a mix of faith-based, neighborhood and issue-based, unions and labor organizing, and policy organizations who provide a lot of capacity and help us think through strategy. Our mission is to create a vehicle for everyday Ohioans to build power to address racial, economic and social justice issues at a structural level. Who are we trying to protect and whose opportunity are we fighting for? It’s our families, neighbors, fellow union members.”
These introductory statements reveal how the OOC’s leadership views the organization’s mission and purpose. Kirk distances the OOC from its identity as a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, saying “that’s not really what this is about.” Instead, he frames the OOC as working to build a broad-based social movement aimed at fighting corporate power on many fronts.

Kirk Noden asserts that the current status quo will only be changed through grassroots community organizing efforts; that “fancy consultants” do not have the answers, and neither do the public officials currently in office. Rather, it is “everyday Ohioans” who are fighting for their families and communities that will address these issues through organizations like the OOC. His words echo those of the man widely cited as the father of modern community organizing, Saul Alinsky. Alinsky states, “The hope for the future life is in working with the substance of the world, its people, rather than continued concentration upon its structure. The substance of society is not to be found in a few scattered, rarefied seminars, but in the tremendous masses of struggling, sweating men and women who make up the billions of workers of the world” (65). The implication is clear: elites and intellectuals discussing the sources of social problems in detached academic settings are not the ones who will take up the mantle of creating transformative social change. That burden rests with ordinary people fighting for better lives for themselves and for their families and friends.

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3 Saul Alinsky studied sociology at the University of Chicago and thus likely sat in many seminars discussing social structure.
However, there is a contradiction at the center of the OOC. The organization receives the vast majority of its funding from philanthropic foundations. The community organizing vision is of robust participatory democracy where ordinary people are involved in their communities and have influence in government. One of the most important components of this vision is that people should lead from the grassroots, or ‘bottom-up,’ as opposed to relying on ‘top-down’ directives from central leaders and elites. But, while the OOC’s mission is to challenge corporate and elite dominance in politics, their funding comes from elites. And, given their ties to the corporate world, foundations do not want to fundamentally challenge the existing order. Foundation boards tend to be composed of individuals who profit heavily off of the status quo. How do OOC leaders navigate this tension?

Race is central to the internal contradictions within the OOC. The OOC is attempting to organize ordinary people in a country that is deeply divided along racial lines, with power and resources concentrated among white people and communities. The funding arenas that the OOC works in are controlled by predominantly white professional elites. Foundation boards are filled with corporate executives, and foundation staff members are mostly white upper middle class professionals with academic credentials. Conversely, many of the member organizations of the OOC are predominantly black and working class. The standpoint from which a wealthy or middle class white person views the social world is very different from the perspective of a poor or working class person of color (DuBois 1903; Fanon 1967; Collins 1986). Race and class differences contribute to a disconnect between the priorities of funders and the interests of the OOC’s base.
Because the OOC is dependent on foundations for resources, they must tailor their organizational priorities and tactics to appeal to wealthy and white funders. This causes tension in many aspects of the OOC’s work.

A cynical interpretation of what the OOC is and who it represents could be derived from looking at how they are funded. Because the vast majority of the funding for the OOC comes from philanthropic foundations, one way to view the OOC would be to see it as an agent of the philanthropic sector. If a foundation wants a campaign to be organized around a particular social issue of interest to their board and staff, the OOC is an organization that can be called upon to drum up public interest and mobilize people for the issue that the foundation has decided is important. Again, most of the leaders in foundations are upper-middle class and wealthy white people and most of the people that the OOC organizes are black and/or low income. In this interpretation, the OOC must strongly assert its connection to ordinary and marginalized people in order to represent itself as something it fundamentally is not (a grassroots organization) rather than as a vendor that sells issue advocacy and mobilization services to wealthy funders.

A close examination of the OOC renders this cynical interpretation largely inaccurate, however the spectre of becoming what I have just described hovers over organizational leadership in every decision they make. In order to be an organization that is by and for marginalized people the OOC has to struggle against the strong isomorphic forces that it faces as a nonprofit organization trying to maintain legitimacy within a highly competitive nonprofit organizational field. These forces encourage the OOC to be an organization whose actual constituency is foundations and philanthropy professionals
instead of ordinary people. Repeated assertions that the OOC is an organization by and for ordinary people and not just another nonprofit organization reflect the fact that OOC leaders are experiencing and actively contesting forces that encourage them to view elite funders as their primary constituency.

In this account, I draw on extensive observation, interview, and archival data to interrogate the relationship between social movement organizations and their funders. I draw upon a case study of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC), to answer the following questions:

1) What are the structural and cultural characteristics of key funding arenas for nonprofit social movement organizations?
2) What are the processes through which nonprofit social movement organizations gain funding for their work?
3) What impact do funding structures and processes have on organizations that are building political capacity for marginalized people?

I find that the OOC is committed to a populist political logic that prioritizes the leadership and agenda of ordinary people rather than educated experts. However, this commitment is regularly challenged by the structures and practices of key funding arenas that the OOC must navigate. These funding arenas are governed by a technocratic political logic that prioritizes the perspectives and opinions of professionals and experts.

**Elite Power, “Ordinary People,” and Community Organizing**

When community organizers refer to ordinary people, they are talking about people who do not have any extraordinary claims to power in culture, government or the private sector. “Ordinary people” are not celebrities, academics, politicians, military
leaders, or CEOs who have institutional platforms to exercise voice and influence. They spend most of their lives in private pursuits such as work, family, and recreation. Their primary aims revolve around building comfortable, rewarding, and enjoyable lives for themselves and their families. Community organizers encourage ordinary people who are dissatisfied with their living or working conditions to enter the political arena to advocate for their interests through organizing and activism. Organizers generally focus on mobilizing people who are politically marginalized or disempowered, such as working class people, poor people, and people of color.

Ordinary people in this sense can be contrasted with elites, who do claim extraordinary amounts of power in political, economic, and other realms (Mills 1956). This power comes from elites’ ability to bring vast resources to bear to achieve their aims; these resources include financial wealth as well as control over institutions such as government and the media. The existence and controlling influence of a ‘power elite’ in our political and economic systems has been established through sociological research (Domhoff 2005; Lindsay 2008). Elite aims often involve consolidating wealth and/or power and promoting ideologies that enhance their ability to do so. For instance, scholars have argued that political elites and business leaders work together to cast ideological agendas that concentrate power and wealth at the top as benign attempts to strengthen the economy or restore public order (Duggan 2003; Alexander 2010).

Community organizers view elite power as problematic for several reasons. Elites may or may not have the best interests of ordinary people in mind when making decisions that affect a large number of people. Also, elites are likely to have at least some interests
that are directly in opposition to the objective interests of many people. Even if elites do govern with the intent to benefit ordinary people, they may be blind or indifferent to the ways in which policies and practices impact varying sectors of society (e.g. a legislator may not recognize or care how policies impact African Americans in different ways than whites). Community organizing is, at its heart, driven by an uncompromising distrust of elite control of society.

Another reason that elite control of social and political institutions is problematic is because the ‘power elite’ is mostly composed of wealthy white men. Members of one privileged demographic group control the vast majority of available resources and make decisions that affect all people. This has had severe implications for the legal, economic, social, and cultural status of people of color throughout US history (Massey and Denton 1993; Lopez 1996; Collins 2005; Alexander 2010). While there is some racial and gender diversity among elites, the dominant culture in elite institutions is white, upper class, and (often) male (Domhoff 2005; Lindsay 2008). Also, white people who have the proper academic and professional credentials have much easier access to elite social networks, resources and influence than people from marginalized racial groups and poorer social classes. It is not a coincidence that nonprofit executive directors who are successful at fundraising tend to be educated white people (King and Osayande 2007).

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4 Some examples include: 1) Cutting social services and reducing taxes for the rich directs resources away from a lot of ordinary people and benefits an elite few; 2) Consolidating and creating monopolies allows corporations and their owners to gain economic benefits while prices are driven up and quality of goods and services are driven down because of a lack of competition; 3) Privatization of public goods and institutions increases wealth generating opportunities for capitalists while reducing public accountability.
Theoretically, the degree to which elites control society can be checked by a strong democracy where political officeholders are accountable to ordinary people as their main constituency. This democratic ideal can be contrasted with a situation where decision-makers are primarily accountable to economic elites that make large financial contributions to campaigns and use considerable resources to monitor their interests, write policies, and lobby for their adoption. Many scholars argue that the latter describes the US today (Chomsky 1999; Domhoff 2006; Piven 2006; Wolin 2008). The control of democratic institutions by moneyed interests is reflected in policy decisions supported by members of both political parties that prioritize tax cuts for the rich and corporations while cutting social services and public goods that benefit ordinary Americans.

Popular disgust with this state of affairs is growing, as evidenced by the 2016 presidential election. Republican voters soundly rejected ‘establishment’ candidates in favor of billionaire and reality TV star Donald Trump who paired economic populism with race-based nationalism. On the Democratic side, a self-identified democratic socialist, Bernie Sanders, presented a much stronger-than-expected challenge to Hillary Clinton and won by large margins among young voters. While their overall messages and goals are starkly different, Sanders and Trump both tap into a similar populist anger and dissatisfaction with elites. And the ultimate triumph of Donald Trump over quintessential ‘establishment’ candidate Hillary Clinton was hailed by many of his supporters as a victory of ‘the people’ over an entrenched and corrupt elite political class.

These events have shocked the political establishment, which is made up of political parties, major donors (including wealthy individuals and foundations), lobbyists,
operatives, media pundits; the known ‘movers and shakers’ of US politics. This political establishment is a fairly closed system of economic and political elites, inaccessible to ordinary people and, by and large, unresponsive to their concerns. The 2016 election made apparent a growing amount of discontent among ordinary people with the political status quo.

Community organizing organizations like the OOC do not aim to become part of the existing political establishment. Organizers’ goal is to build alternative political institutions that are responsive to ordinary and marginalized people, not corporations or elites. They utilize both institutional and disruptive methods to achieve their goal. This necessarily positions community organizers outside of insular elite social networks and thus organizers are often perceived as dangerous by elites. Many elites are ambivalent or hostile to community organizers and attempt to ignore or discredit them. Others, including some liberal and progressive foundations, support community organizing efforts. However, this support often constrains organizers’ ability to present a destabilizing challenge to elite power and build a broad-based social movement for change. Community organizers view social movements as vehicles for ordinary people to have a strong voice in our political system. In this dissertation, I will examine how one organization is trying to build a social movement for economic and racial justice.

**What is the Ohio Organizing Collaborative?**

The Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) is a statewide coalition of organizations that operate within the community organizing tradition inspired by Saul
Alinsky. Alinsky-style community organizing has evolved over the years into a professional field that attracts passionate and gifted individuals committed to tackling social problems through mobilization. Since the 1970s, there has been a proliferation of “people’s organizations,” or community organizing organizations, that are staffed by professional organizers (Warren and Wood 2001; Wood and Fulton 2015). The OOC is a coalition of organizations of this type. On its official website, the OOC describes itself as “an innovative and experimental statewide organization that unites community organizing groups, labor unions, faith organizations, and policy institutes across the state... We are a 501c(3) non-profit organization with a vision to build a transformative base of power to bring about racial, social and economic equality in Ohio.”

In the OOC and other community organizing organizations, professional organizers mentor and work alongside grassroots leaders to design and implement issue campaigns on a variety of issues. The tactics that they utilize include advocacy, direct action, protest, and large public meetings where they confront public officials with demands from their constituency. OOC organizers build political power by convening grassroots leaders, developing their political and leadership skills, and mobilizing them to take action. The OOC balances short-term issue campaigns with a long-term focus on building strong civic organizations throughout the state. The vision is for these civic organizations to be an institutionalized vehicle for ordinary people to have a voice in the political system.

In the time since its founding in 2008, the OOC has grown in size and influence and is now among the largest community organizing organizations in the country. In
2011, a national survey found that the median annual budget for a community organizing organization was about $175,000, and the majority of these organizations only have one or two paid organizers on staff (Wood, Fulton and Partridge 2013). In contrast, in 2014 the OOC had a budget of nearly 2.25 million dollars and had over 20 paid staff. The size of the OOC indicates that it is a successful organization of this type, at least in terms of size. This quality of the organization is important because I was able to see the strategies that the OOC leadership utilized to achieve this level of organizational growth and stability using funds from foundations, which would not be possible with a smaller, more prototypical organization.

The member organizations of the OOC operate autonomously, each is incorporated as its own 501c(3) organization and has its own executive director and board of directors. One exception to this is the Ohio Student Association, which was financially subsidized by the OOC and is not a separate legal entity. Member organizations, including labor unions, pay dues to the OOC. Each organization has its own mission and runs independent campaigns related to their mission and constituency. For instance, the Amos Project organizes churches to advocate for early-childhood education in Cincinnati while the Ohio Student Association organizes students across the state to work on policies that reduce the burden of student debt. While they work on separate issues, OOC staff and top leaders view their work as interconnected by their shared opposition to corporate interests and alignment with marginalized people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization name</th>
<th>Location(s)</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Issue focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akron Organizing Collaborative</td>
<td>Akron</td>
<td>Akron residents, predominantly black and low income</td>
<td>Criminal justice reform, civic engagement, variety of local issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos Project</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>People of faith, predominantly Christian. 50 member churches. Multiracial (black and white).</td>
<td>Criminal justice reform, early-childhood education, anti-poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities United for Responsible Energy (CURE)</td>
<td>Columbiana County (rural Ohio)</td>
<td>Rural white working class and poor</td>
<td>Fracking impact on communities, energy prices (targeting corporations), waste incinerator in East Liverpool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC)</td>
<td>Youngstown and Warren</td>
<td>Youngstown and Warren residents, predominantly black and low income</td>
<td>Criminal justice reform, Vacant properties, variety of local issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maumee Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC)</td>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>Toledo residents</td>
<td>Immigration reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC)</td>
<td>Dayton</td>
<td>Dayton residents</td>
<td>Civic engagement, Education equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Student Association</td>
<td>Columbus, Dayton, Akron, Cleveland</td>
<td>College students and other young people, multiracial</td>
<td>Student debt, school to prison pipeline, Black Lives Matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUR Walmart (project of UFCW)</td>
<td>Dayton</td>
<td>Walmart workers</td>
<td>Better wages and working conditions for Walmart workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are tiers of membership in the OOC, with some organizations forming the core and others collaborating on a more sporadic basis. The core organizations in the OOC are listed in Table 1 above. For core organizations, operational support is centralized, with finances, grant-writing support and logistics handled by the OOC central office. The staff of core organizations meets quarterly at mandatory OOC all-staff meetings, where they strategize together and undergo training. The top leadership of the OOC is the core team, a group of experienced organizers from across the state who collaborate on strategy and programming for the OOC and coordinate staff development and supervision. The core team members are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Members of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative Core Team (2014-2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Background experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirk Noden</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Ohio Organizing Collaborative</td>
<td>Organizer with National People’s Action (NPA), Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), and Gamaliel Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather McMahon</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative</td>
<td>Community development, Communications director for Congressman Tim Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DaMareo Cooper</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Organizing Director</td>
<td>Ohio Organizing Collaborative/ Akron Organizing Collaborative</td>
<td>ACORN organizer, Gamaliel weeklong training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on next page
Furthermore, OOC core organizations sometimes choose to embark on statewide campaigns together. For instance, civic engagement work during election season is coordinated by the OOC. The OOC runs the largest independent civic engagement program in the state. In 2015 and 2016, the OOC registered 184,339 people to vote in Ohio, focusing on people of color and young people. Another statewide initiative that I observed in 2014 and 2015 was a campaign focused on issues related to mass incarceration, including criminalization of black people, ‘ban the box’ and other issues pertinent to returning citizens (OOC terminology for people re-entering society after prison), who are an important constituency within several member organizations.

OOC organizations that are not core members connect with the collaborative in a variety of ways. For instance, NOAH, an organizing project in East Cleveland, sends trainers and leaders to OOC’s weeklong organizing training but does not work on
statewide OOC campaigns. Policy organizations, such as Policy Matters in Cleveland and Ohio Justice and Policy Center in Cincinnati, provide research and technical support to OOC member organizations. Labor unions send representatives to OOC meetings and events, provide funding for OOC, and collaborate on a variety of campaigns.

In summary, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative aims to be a coordinating center for social movement organizations in the state. The OOC aims to build and strengthen progressive social movements by 1) drawing existing community organizing organizations into long-term alliances with one another, 2) strategically seeding new organizations (including the Ohio Student Association and organizing projects in Akron, Columbus, Toledo and Dayton), and 3) by working with the existing progressive political infrastructure in the state (which includes labor unions, policy think tanks, and issue-based social movement groups).

Importantly, the OOC embraces an Alinsky-style community organizing ethos and methodology while also intentionally rejecting certain traditions in community organizing that OOC leaders believe get in the way of building social movements. For instance, one tenet of community organizing was “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies,” but the OOC seeks to build long-term alliances amongst progressive groups. The OOC also differs from many prior organizing efforts in its attitude and approach toward social movements. Alinsky-inspired community organizers have traditionally

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5 In-depth descriptions of this community organizing methodology can be found in Hart 2001, Warren 2001, Wood 2002, Osterman 2002; Stout 2010
6 The OOC is not the only organization that has changed in the ways described here. Other organizations across the country have also made these shifts to varying extents, while others have not. Many of these changes were laid out in a document called “Organizing 2.0” authored by Kirk Noden and Doran Schrantz,
argued that social movements are transitory and ephemeral, and the small gains that movements achieve are often rolled back by elites after mobilization subsides. Therefore, strong civic organizations are a better and more lasting way for ordinary people to exert power in the public arena. The OOC works to balance building strong civic organizations with participating in and supporting social movements.

Another tradition within community organizing has been fierce competition among similar organizations (Hall and Hall 1996). This is in part because federated community organizing organizations were traditionally affiliated with only one national organizing network, and affiliates of different networks have often had competitive (even hostile) relationships with each other. Differences in organizing methodology were seen as more salient than commonalities of mission and issue focus. Competition over foundation funding played a role in these rivalries. The OOC, on the other hand, is affiliated with multiple national organizing networks, emphasizes cooperation among organizations with similar missions, and deemphasizes the importance of differences in organizing method. The OOC’s core team is made up of people with a variety of backgrounds in organizing (see Table 2).

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g, helping to establish Kirk and Doran as ‘thought leaders’ who are well-regarded by funders. 

In Hall and Hall (1996), one PICO organizer is quoted as saying, “Competition is absolute, and it’s absolutely about money. Especially money from foundations,” and then told a story about a foundation interview where the funder asked them to make a case for why they should get a grant instead of IAF.
Competing Political Logics: Populist Versus Technocratic

One of the central findings of this research is that significant tension arises in social movements from the fact that there are two conflicting political logics at work in nonprofit social movement organizations: a populist political logic and a technocratic political logic.

I define political logic as the way an organization or field understands their political context and the assumptions that underlie their strategic decisions. The political logic of an organization or field can be revealed through patterned characteristics and actions of its members, including: 1) assumptions that they have about how politics works, 2) how institutions are structured, 3) the rules by which they operate, 4) how actors establish legitimacy, 5) moral discourse - what is viewed as morally right and correct behavior. The political logic of an organization or campaign governs how leaders make decisions and what standards they use to evaluate success or failure.

The Ohio Organizing Collaborative operates according to a populist political logic, which dictates that political agendas should arise from the needs and desires of ordinary people. According to populist political logic, political leaders should, first and foremost, represent the interests and desires of the people. In this framework, a leader’s legitimacy is based on 1) their familiarity with and connection to their base, 2) their loyalty and commitment to fight for ordinary people, and 3) their ability to deliver on promises against opposition from entrenched interests. Political institutions should be

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8 Populism and technocracy are both terms that have been used in pejorative ways. Populism is often associated with nationalism and racism. Technocracy is associated with elitism. I do not intend to evoke those connotations; the terms are meant to be descriptive.
structured in ways that allow the voices of ordinary people to be heard, both to determine the agenda and to inform strategic decisions. The OOC attempts to hold political leaders accountable to this ideal. They also try to use their influence to shape liberal and progressive political institutions (e.g. the Democratic Party) according to a populist political logic. The organization tries to embody this logic in its own processes, but they struggle to do so because their funders operate with a different set of assumptions about how politics should work.

The OOC participates in two main funding arenas: the nonprofit organizational field, or “non-profit industrial complex” (Chapter 2) and the electoral industry (Chapter 4). These funding arenas are connected to one another and both operate according to a technocratic political logic. A technocratic political logic entails that credentialed experts and insiders should determine political priorities and strategy. Decisions should be based on research and analysis that uses the best available methods. For instance, in the electoral industry, scientific techniques such as data targeting are used to identify likely constituents and polling is used to determine effective messaging. Political leaders establish legitimacy by demonstrating 1) merit according to established moral and educational standards, 2) scientific, policy, and/or business expertise, and 3) loyalty to established political institutions. For instance, if you “pay your dues” and are loyal to the Democratic Party, you should advance more quickly within the party than an outsider.

According to a technocratic political logic, people should prioritize selecting leaders who are qualified, who will make good decisions and be able to execute their plans using their
insider knowledge and connections. Table 3 below provides a summary of the two political logics.

Table 3: Populist Versus Technocratic Political Logic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Populist political logic</th>
<th>Technocratic political logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Political agendas and strategies should arise from the needs and desires of the people in your base. Political leaders should represent the peoples’ interests and address concerns that they have.</td>
<td>Educated experts should determine political agendas and strategies based on best available scientific research and methods. Political leaders should establish legitimacy and demonstrate competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential strengths</td>
<td>• Responsive to people’s evolving needs and wants</td>
<td>• Experts can come up with effective and efficient ways to coordinate action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being grounded in base of ordinary people is important for strong social movement infrastructure.</td>
<td>• To be part of the elite, need to prove knowledge and skill in competitive contexts. This is likely to lead to having capable people in leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential pitfalls</td>
<td>• People can be misinformed and misled.</td>
<td>• Disconnection from the grassroots base can make it difficult to garner support for a political agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A populist political logic can be used in racist and nationalist campaigns.</td>
<td>• Organizations and institutions become entrenched and inflexible. Technocrats don’t want to give up their own power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be difficult to get diverse constituencies to agree on a political agenda.</td>
<td>• Lack of social class and racial diversity in the political elite can lead to blind spots and bad decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key words/phrases</td>
<td>Bottom-up; grassroots; solidarity; “the people”</td>
<td>Top-down; “floating world”; elites; experts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the 2016 US presidential election, the two major candidates that most embodied a populist political logic were Bernie Sanders, an independent who ran for the Democratic nomination, and businessman and reality TV star Donald Trump. Both of these candidates held large, energetic rallies that drew thousands of people. They both constructed an outsider identity and repeatedly emphasized their alignment with ordinary people instead of established political institutions. Trump called his base the “forgotten people,” and pledged that he would make America great again, a message that resonated deeply with his base. Bernie Sanders called for a “political revolution” and spoke about his commitment to fight for working people. In the general election, Donald Trump did not run his campaign according to the conventional wisdom of political operatives; many experts were baffled by his strategic decisions. Furthermore, he did not offer many details about his plans or specifics about how he would achieve his campaign promises. But, Trump spoke to his base, they trusted him to deliver, and they showed up to vote on Election Day, resulting in his unexpected victory over his Democratic opponent.

Conversely, Hillary Clinton’s campaign embodied a technocratic political logic. She emphasized her qualifications, experience, and fitness for the job. Her campaign used scientific techniques such as polling to help determine what messages would resonate with majorities of people. Clinton’s website contained pages of detailed policy plans on every imaginable topic. There was not a large amount of grassroots enthusiasm behind Clinton’s campaign, as there was for Sanders and Trump. Instead, Clinton was a political insider and a measured politician. She emphasized her long history of public service and her qualifications for the role of President. Donald Trump had made many
offensive and racist statements during his campaign, and in the weeks leading up to Election Day a videotape was released where he was heard boasting about sexually assaulting women. Because of these gaffes, Trump’s seeming lack of support among more traditional Republicans, and polling data showing Clinton in the lead, Clinton was expected to easily win the election. However, while Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, she lost the Electoral College and the presidency to Donald Trump.

As can be seen from the examples above, political logic does not necessarily correspond to any one ideology or set of political goals. A populist political logic can be used to further political causes on the right and the left. Donald Trump employs a populist political logic to advance a nationalist agenda that purports to represent people by expressing their real attitudes toward racial and religious minorities. Bernie Sanders used a populist political logic to argue for his Democratic Socialist platform. Likewise, a technocratic political logic could be deployed in service of many different goals. Policy agendas are determined by the opinions and analyses of influential experts in think tanks on both the right (e.g. Heritage Foundation) and the left (e.g. Center for American Progress).

My purpose here is not to argue that one political logic is always more effective for achieving social change. Which approach is most strategic depends on leadership, the political context, and a myriad of factors that cannot be adequately addressed in this account. In 2016, there was a strong anti-establishment sentiment in the US, which helps account for the unexpected success of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary and the startling victory of Donald Trump in the general election. However, situations arise
where utilizing a populist logic may be less effective. For instance, populist narratives are often quite simple and light on details. A political agenda designed according to a technocratic political logic may result in policy solutions that are more realistic and more effective than those posed by populist leaders.

While it is difficult to make general statements about the **efficacy** of technocratic versus populist political logics, it is clear that they empower different constituencies. A populist logic is responsive to the concerns of ordinary people whereas a technocratic logic is responsive to the knowledge and expertise of elites. One of the central tensions in US democracy today is the growing divide between elites and ordinary people. There is tremendous and growing wealth inequality and the middle and working classes increasingly face economic insecurity and lack of opportunity (Massey 2007; Standing 2011; Western et al 2012). Using a technocratic political logic in this political climate may exacerbate this divide. Influential political operatives and policy wonks tend to be white, highly educated and part of the upper-middle or upper class. It can be difficult for a relatively homogenous group of technocrats to understand what will resonate with ordinary people from diverse economic and racial backgrounds. The concerns of people of color, in particular, are often underemphasized by elites who design studies, mobilization strategies, and policy solutions.

In general, poor and working class people do not have significant voice and political representation, particularly when compared to wealthy individuals (Piven 2006) and minority racial groups struggle to be heard by politicians who are primarily concerned with appealing to the white electorate. Organizations and campaigns that
operate according to a populist political logic can try to change this by encouraging greater participation by ordinary people. Therefore, a populist political logic can be more amenable to lifting up the concerns of marginalized people, particularly when the technocratic elite is largely disconnected from their experiences and concerns.

The OOC marries populist political logic with an ideology that emphasizes the interconnectedness of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy as forces that oppress the majority of people. In this framework, to empower ‘the people,’ organizers need to name and fight these social structures and teach people how to recognize and understand how social and political forces operate. In a sense, organizers cultivate a sociological imagination (Mills 1959) in the leaders they work with. Then, they equip those leaders with political skills and agitate them to organize their communities and take action. Community organizers are committed to running their organizations and campaigns based on a populist political logic connected to a progressive political philosophy.

However, because organizers are dependent upon funding arenas that employ a technocratic political logic, nonprofit community organizing organizations face pressure to operate according to a technocratic logic as well (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). For instance, intense and hostile debates over minutiae of organizing methodology among organizers from different national networks characterized the field for a long time (Hall and Hall 1996; Wood and Warren 2001). This can be problematic because the types of methodological concepts and debates that are core to a technocratic political logic are not salient to marginalized people. Ordinary people are more concerned about whether a policy campaign is successful and addresses the problems their communities face than
they are about what specific organizing methodology is used to achieve social change. Mobilization based on a technocratic political logic is thus likely to be incomprehensible or obtuse to many marginalized people.

**Conclusion**

There are two ways to look at the OOC, both of which contain a measure of truth. One is to view it as an organization funded and therefore controlled by white elites. Thus, organizing and mobilization in poor and black communities is being monitored and controlled by elite entities far removed from the concerns of ordinary people. Another way to look at the OOC is to recognize that Kirk Noden and sympathetic elite funders have found a way to invest significant resources in organizing communities that were not being invested in prior to the OOC. Kirk and other OOC organizers have orchestrated an influx of resources into low-income, predominantly black communities with the intention of giving them some space and autonomy to build organizations and political power. While the organization is not perfect, it is an attempt to create change through navigating the world as it is.

Both of the views above are supported by theory and data. For the OOC, many contradictions stem from the disconnect between the populist political logic of the social movements they are trying to build and the technocratic political logic of the funding arenas they depend on for survival. This clash of political logics adds to the already formidable hurdles community organizations face in contesting corporate power and wealthy elites. Many of their obstacles result from the overarching power structures in
society, including lack of trust across racial groups, low levels of education and political efficacy, and economic hardship making it hard for people to spend their limited time and energy on political action. Nonprofit organizations are embedded in a society that distributes resources and status unequally by race, class and gender (Massey 2007). It is difficult for the OOC to avoid reproducing the very dynamics that they are fighting against in their own organizational structures and practices.

In the following chapters, I will describe how the Ohio Organizing Collaborative and its member organizations are impacted by their reliance on funding from foundations.

In Chapter 1, drawing on the social movements literature and neoinstitutionalist theory, I argue that the central tension that the OOC and many other social movement organizations face is that they are trying to build social movement infrastructure while also being embedded in a non-profit organizational field. The OOC relies on funding arenas that operate according to a different political logic and thus have standards and expectations that make it difficult for the organization to maintain its focus on empowering ordinary people.

In Chapter 2, I outline the structure of the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) and describe several ways that this structure impacts non-profit social movement organizations.

In Chapter 3, I focus on one of the core tensions brought about by the OOC’s reliance on issue-specific short-term grants: the tension between issue campaigns and leadership development. I show how leadership development is important for the OOC’s challenge to neoliberalism.
In Chapter 4, I look at one way that the OOC works to build social movement infrastructure in the NPIC: elections. I also draw on the story of how the OOC attempted to put a minimum wage increase on the ballot in 2016 to illustrate the clash between the differing political logics of community organizing and the electoral industry.
Chapter 1: Social Movements and Non-Profit Organizations

Progressive social movement leaders face an uphill battle in their quest to ameliorate inequality. Not only do they have to confront and defeat powerful actors that can bring vast resources to bear to achieve their aims, they must do so in a context that makes it difficult to educate and mobilize people. One particularly pernicious issue that progressives must deal with is race. Race is deeply embedded in our social, legal political, economic institutions (Omi and Winant 2014). Structural racism is present in law (Lopez 1996), persistent wealth inequality (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Shapiro, Meschede, and Sullivan 2010), segregation (Denton and Massey 1993; Johnson and Shapiro 2003; Lichter et al 2012), and our racially biased criminal justice system (Alexander 2010). Race has been used by elites as a wedge to divide the working class against itself (Alexander 2010), so that white working class people often vote in racial solidarity with white capitalists rather than in economic solidarity with nonwhite working class people.

It is clear that progressives have their work cut out for them. One of the most pressing difficulties is that social movements are often little better than the rest of society when it comes to dealing with racial issues. Racial tension is a core problem for
progressive social movement organizations (Lichterman 1995; Srivastava 2006), which makes building a broad multiracial coalition difficult. Indeed, social transformation driven by the political left may be impossible until a coalition can be built across race and other types of social difference to challenge the capitalist elite (Duggan 2003; Roelofs 2003). However, some characteristics of contemporary social movements in the US make this already difficult task even more formidable. In particular, the fact that non-profit organizations are a significant part of social movements makes structural racism and elite dominance more difficult to combat. This chapter will explore why that is the case.

Liberals and progressives have invested heavily in non-profit organizations to create the social changes they seek. Non-profit organizations usually ameliorate the symptoms of social problems through the provision of social services; organizing only makes up a tiny proportion of the nonprofit sector (Jenkins and Halci 1999). Social service nonprofits often view their constituents as clients to be served rather than partners in solving community issues (Bierria 2007; Kivel 2007). In this framework, nonprofit professionals design programs that best serve their clients’ needs. Nonprofit organizations that work for policy change often do so through advocacy and lobbying by policy experts; these tactics usually do not meaningfully engage the populations most impacted by social problems. Therefore, most nonprofit organizations operate according to a technocratic political logic, where experts determine the best course of action. In a society characterized by structural racism, this leads to a scenario where members of the
dominant racial group tend to be in charge of deciding how to deal with dysfunction in minority communities.

Community organizers, on the other hand, do not approach poor people as clients who need help but rather as potential community leaders who should be given a platform to speak out about injustice. Organizers are often skeptical of the long-term social change capabilities of social service and advocacy nonprofits and the philanthropic structures that support them. Foundations are made possible by an economic and political system that allows for and facilitates the concentration of wealth and influence in the hands of a few. Critics of philanthropy and nonprofits point out that it is highly unlikely that these institutions will challenge the forces that have given them influence and power (Roelofs 2003; King and Osayande 2007). It is ironic, therefore, that community organizers participate in this system to sustain their organizations.

In addition to foundations, community organizers also receive funding from political allies. These allies include labor unions, progressive interest groups, and individual political donors. These allies tend to operate according to a technocratic political logic. They focus on targeted messaging and marketing, rely on the expertise of established (and highly-paid) political consultants, and emphasize on appealing to the white middle class electorate instead of engaging with “low-propensity voters” such as people of color, poor people, and youth. These tactics do not emphasize the empowerment of ordinary people and marginalized groups, but they are widely viewed as effective for winning elections and policy victories. Community organizing organizations are thus forced to confront this tension when they collaborate with these
groups, which generally have access to significantly greater financial resources than they do.

Community organizers who wish to truly challenge the status quo find themselves in a difficult position. They are working within a nonprofit field that is set up to reinforce the status quo rather than challenge existing power arrangements. Organizers are also marginalized by more well-resourced allies whose existing technocratic methods often contrast with a commitment to empower ordinary people. How do community organizing organizations build social movements in this context?

While a number of studies in the literature on nonprofit organizations have examined processes related to philanthropic funding of nonprofit organizations (Hager et al 2002), the social movements literature has been curiously quiet on this issue. This research analyzes the dynamics between funding structures and community organizing organizations from a social movements perspective. Previous accounts of community organizing emphasize their culture, basebuilding and leadership development capacities. This study adds to the literature by examining the strategic decisionmaking that takes place among organization leaders and how these decisions are both enabled and constrained by the funding structures of progressive political mobilization in the US today.

Below, I introduce a framework for thinking about nonprofit organizations and funding structures. Then, I draw on the social movements literature, in particular the

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concept of social movement infrastructure, to provide a theoretical frame for how social movements create change. I contrast that with neoinstitutionalist theories about how organizations survive and interact with other organizations. Then, I will use an example from the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) to illustrate the concepts in action. The story of the Ohio Student Association, a member organization of the OOC, shows how the nonprofit organizational field constrains social movement organizations but also how organization leaders can work through those constraints to build social movement infrastructure and agitate for transformational change.

**The Non-Profit Industrial Complex**

Some activists argue that liberal foundations and the nonprofits they support reinforce the status quo of elite dominance. These critics refer to foundations and nonprofit organizations as the “non-profit industrial complex.” I will use this terminology and the abbreviation NPIC to refer to this relationship between liberal foundations and nonprofit organizations. The NPIC perspective highlights the fact that non-profit organization staffs are dependent upon wealthy white elites for their salaries and are therefore accountable to those elites instead of marginalized people. Ultimately, non-profit organizations serve as a ‘buffer zone’ that shields elites from accountability for the consequences of extreme wealth inequality and structural racism while legitimizing and preserving the mechanisms lead to concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few (Kivel 2007).
The NPIC encourages organizations to put forth moderate agendas that do not fundamentally challenge the existing economic and racial hierarchy. Rodriguez (2007) states:

“The overall bureaucratic formality and hierarchical (frequently elitist) structuring of the NPIC has institutionalized more than just a series of hoops through which aspiring social change activists must jump—these institutional characteristics, in fact, dicta*te* the political vistas of NPIC organizations themselves.”

In order to garner and maintain resources to support a non-profit organization, people interested in social change must jump through a series of legal and procedural hoops to become legitimate recipients of foundation funding. These practices are embedded in formal bureaucracy, which makes the NPIC more accessible for people with the human and cultural capital to navigate institutions; in other words, white upper-middle and upper-class professionals dominate this sector. Furthermore, the structure of the NPIC entails that organization goals and standards for success and failure are determined by elites in foundations.

The NPIC perspective asserts that nonprofits do not exist to fix social problems. In fact, foundations and nonprofit organizations actually benefit from the existence of marginalized and racially pathologized communities because serving those communities provides many white middle class individuals with a livelihood and purpose (Gans 1971; Kivel 2007). The NPIC promotes a perspective that identifies poor people and people of color as dysfunctional while wealthy people who benefit from the existing economic systems are framed as good and generous. What poor communities need, in the NPIC
framework, is help from professional experts who can use their knowledge and skills to lift poor people out of poverty. Importantly, non-profit organizations are directed toward helping and fixing the poor rather than asking difficult questions about why so many people are poor in the first place.

Rodriguez (2007) argues that liberal foundations that fund social movement organizations are complicit in and benefit from a status quo that legitimizes the use of state violence against people of color. This assertion is supported by the fact that liberal foundations, think tanks and nonprofit organizations are not fostering a strong political challenge to issues that deeply impact people of color, like police brutality and mass incarceration. The nonprofit sector instead tends to absorb dissent, channeling energy toward non-antagonistic social service programs instead of social movements for transformative change. This preserves economic and racial inequality, while appearing to do the opposite.

**Nonprofit Social Movement Organizations and Social Movement Infrastructures**

In the two sections below, I draw on the social movements literature and neoinstitutional theorists’ insights about organizations to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how nonprofit social movement organizations are impacted by their funders and their nonprofit status.

**Social Movement Infrastructure.** Sidney Tarrow (1998) states that politics become contentious “when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents.” Social
movements are contentious because they involve political organizing and mobilization that is separate from and often opposes the political ‘establishment’ and entrenched powers-that-be. Given massive wealth inequality and elite control of core political and economic institutions, social movements are often the only option that marginalized people have to exercise power in society (Tarrow 1998; Piven 2006). Social movement scholars have found that social movements are composed of networks of individuals and organizations that are united by a collective identity (Diani 1992; Polletta and Jasper 2001).

Andrews (2001) proposes a movement infrastructure model for understanding social movements and examining their impacts. A strong social movement infrastructure includes “diverse leaders and a complex leadership structure, multiple organizations, informal ties that cross geographic and social boundaries, and a resource base that draws substantially on contributions from their members for both labor and money” (2001: 76). To boil it down, then, the components of a social movement infrastructure are 1) leaders; 2) organizations; 3) informal networks; and 4) indigenous resources. Social movement infrastructure is a useful concept for understanding the structure of social movements because it is based on understanding how ordinary people use movements to build and exert power. Empirical research has supported the use of a movement infrastructure model for understanding how social movements affect change (Johnson, Agnone and McCarthy 2010). I will discuss each of these components in turn below, focusing in particular on what sociological research has shown about what contributes to movement success.
Leaders. Leaders are a crucial, yet understudied, part of social movements (Morris 2000; Morris and Staggenborg 2004; Ganz 2010). Leaders make key decisions that shape how movements form as well as their goals, frames, tactics and strategies. Leaders in social movements can be professionals employed by nonprofit social movement organizations (Staggenborg 1988) or leaders without a formal paid position. Prior research has demonstrated the importance of individual leaders in mobilization, including ‘bridge leaders’ who use their positions in the community to organize informal networks (Robnett 1997) as well as leaders of leaders who can activate and mobilize large and complex networks through hierarchical leadership structures (Edwards and Oyakawa unpublished draft). Community organizing tactics emphasize identifying and training people who will be committed and effective leaders.

Social movement scholars have found that certain qualities of leaders and leadership teams contribute to success. Marshall Ganz (2009), in his account of the farm workers’ movement, found that when leaders were limited to pre-existing tactics developed within a field (in this case, labor unions), they were unable to effectively organize farm workers. Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and other Latino organizers who had a deep understanding of farm worker communities were able to work with other union and faith-based organizers to craft effective strategies to organize and mobilize farm workers and achieve organizing victories. Ganz concludes that leadership teams that are diverse and connected to grassroots bases are more likely to develop the strategic capacity necessary to defeat more powerful opponents. It is also important for leaders to
be willing to listen to new ideas, to have deliberative practices that allow for reflection, and an organizational structure that stimulates interaction among the rank-and-file. Developing strategic capacity is particularly important for movements of poor and marginalized people because they do not have nearly as many financial resources to draw upon as corporations and other opponents.

**Organizations and networks.** The resource mobilization perspective (McCarthy and Zald 1977) identifies social movement organizations as a key vehicle through which resources are collected and mobilized for social change. Resource mobilization scholars address a wide variety of questions related to social movement organizations. They have examined how resources are gathered and strategically deployed by organizations (McCarthy and Wolfson 2004; Martin 2008), and how social movement organizations change over time (Minkoff 1999).

While financial resources are clearly important, resource mobilization scholars have also identified other kinds of resources that are crucial for social movement organizations. Cress and Snow (1996) identify the following resources as important for social movement organizations to survive and succeed: 1) moral backing of other organizations; 2) material resources including basic supplies, meeting space, and office space; 3) knowledge of social movement tactics and how to maintain an organization; 4)

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10 In the OOC, leaders place emphasis on “double-loop learning” which requires people to reflect on their assumptions. Staff members are required to demonstrate that they are able to reflect honestly upon their personal role in any success or failure. Thus, the OOC attempts to cultivate a culture of reflection among organizers. However, the organization emphasizes the need for weekly written reports. Organizers from working class or poor backgrounds experience often this as burdensome and awkward, while organizers from middle class backgrounds tend to be more comfortable expressing themselves in this way.
connections to external organizations for resources and; 5) strong leaders. The resource mobilization literature makes it clear that resources are important for social movement organizations to survive and achieve their social change goals (McCarthy and Zald 2002).

Notably, human capital, social capital and cultural capital can be just as important as financial capital in social movement organizations. Organizations depend on leaders’ administrative skills (e.g. how to file the correct tax forms to establish nonprofit status), knowledge about social movement tactics, and connections to other organizations that can provide financial and moral support. Racial segregation and inequality mean that white people are more likely to have access to human, social and cultural capital than people of color (Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999; Rothstein 2014). Moreover, people with a college education are also more likely to have access to these resources; this makes it difficult for organizations led by working-class and poor people to compete (King and Osayande 2007).

**Indigenous resources.** In addition to formal organizations, social movements are also made up of informal networks. This is corroborated by research on social movement communities (Staggenborg 1998) and emergent grassroots groups (Blee 2012). This work establishes the importance of friendship networks, physical spaces that serve as hubs for activists to gather, and informal organizations (i.e. organizations that are not officially registered as 501c(3) or 501c(4) tax exempt organizations).\(^{11}\) Informal

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\(^{11}\) Others have described the varying configurations of networks and organizations that make up social movements using other terms such as “multiorganizational field” (Curtis and Zurcher 1973) and “social movement industry” (SMI) which is all social movement organizations that have as their goal the attainment of the broadest preferences of a social movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977). These concepts, however, overemphasize the extent to which formal organizations are constitutive of movements.
networks keep social movements alive in between protest cycles and provide connective tissue among activists across geographic and social boundaries (Polletta 1999).

Social movement infrastructure stresses the importance of being embedded in communities and drawing on resources from the people. Leaders and organizations in a social movement infrastructure must be connected to indigenous, informal networks. One example of this is the Civil Rights Movement, where black communities pooled their resources to support organizations and ongoing actions (Morris 1984). Social movement scholars argue that dependence on external resources is problematic for movements (Piven and Cloward 1977; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1986).

The importance of movements being grounded in indigenous networks becomes clear when considering how social movement infrastructures build and exercise power to create change. In order to truly challenge existing power configurations, social movements must be meaningfully independent from the institutions and elite actors that

The concept of social movement infrastructure can also be closely paralleled with the concept of local movement center put forth by Aldon Morris, who writes of mobilization in the Civil Rights Movement: “A movement center exists in a subordinate community when that community has developed an interrelated set of protest leaders, organizations, and followers who collectively define the common ends of the group, devise necessary tactics and strategies along with training for their implementation, and engage in actions designed to attain the goals of the group” (1984: 40). Many of the elements of the local movement center concept are similar to social movement infrastructure. Local movement center is still a useful concept in many circumstances, but social movement infrastructure is more flexible and expansive. While Morris (1984) captures mobilization patterns in the Civil Rights Movement, there are a few problems with extending the local movement center concept beyond the Civil Rights context. First is that the term itself, movement center, implies centralization. Movements vary in the extent to which they are centrally controlled; the Civil Rights Movement was perhaps particularly centralized in local communities because of its roots in the black church. Also, Morris describes local movement centers during their development and at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Social movement infrastructures play a key role in protest, but are also posited to be particularly crucial for implementing movement gains after the height of the movement has passed. Finally, social movement infrastructures are often locally based, but can also have statewide and national components. Also, with the Internet and social media becoming an increasingly important component of mobilization, the extent to which movements are coordinated locally may vary across movements.
they are challenging. Leaders must be able to credibly claim that they represent a constituency of ordinary people, and consistent feedback from the grassroots base is important for strategic capacity (Ganz 2009). When a social movement draws on financial and other resources from the people it is mobilizing, that allows those people to have control over the goals and tactics of the movement. Financing from outside sources distorts that relationship, as this account will show.

**How social movements make change.** Elites make changes in response to the perceived threat of a social movement, a threat that “rests on the belief that a movement has the capacity to institute more substantial change through parallel, autonomous organizations” (Andrews 2001: 76). In order to be believed, this threat has to have some credibility. Social movements must demonstrate an ability to mobilize people and bring resources to bear to make life difficult for elites and opponents. Andrews (2001) discusses three main approaches: 1) disruption, 2) persuasion, and 3) access to polity through institutionalized tactics.

Disruption is anything that prevents ‘business as usual’ from occurring. This can involve civil disobedience (such as blocking a key entryway to a business), a strike or boycott that prevents a firm from producing goods or providing services, or riots that produce violence against property or people. Piven (2006, 2008) argues that the main source of power for ordinary people is ‘interdependent power,’ which is power inherent in the cooperative relationships that make society work. For instance, workers have some leverage over employers because employers are dependent on workers. The only way to force elites to make changes is by withdrawing cooperation from social systems.
Breaking rules is fundamental to disruption and the exercise of interdependent power. Piven states, “rule-making is a strategy by which dominant groups, drawing on the full range of power resources available to them, inhibit subordinate groups from activating the distinctive power rooted in interdependence” (2008: 9). Rule-making to silence unruly voices includes right-to-work laws and other laws that make it difficult for labor unions to exist and use effective tactics. Institutionalized actions that play by the rules (e.g. lobbying) do not fundamentally disrupt the power balance because they do not activate interdependent power. Sympathetic elites may be responsive to institutional appeals, however they still make decisions about where resources go and what rules to make. Piven argues that it is only by disrupting social systems, by withdrawing cooperation, that ordinary people can force elites to make significant concessions.

The second way that movements build power is through persuasion; or convincing those in power and the public that the social movement is right (e.g. that black people should have equal rights, that women should be allowed to vote, etc). While disruption exerts power through flaunting rules in ways that make life difficult for targets, persuasion exerts power through influencing how people think and (by extension) how they act. There is a robust literature on framing in social movements that examines how social movements make moral claims and attempt to shape how people view existing social and economic realities (Snow et al 1986; Zald 1996; Benford and Snow 2000).

The third method that Andrews (2001) identifies is gaining access to the polity and employing institutionalized tactics. Meyer and Tarrow (1998) argue that institutionalization involves “the routinization of collective action, such that challengers
and authorities can both adhere to a common script, recognizing familiar patterns as well as potentially dangerous deviations” (21). Formal organizations are the most likely to be able to use institutionalized tactics, which include legal action, lobbying public officials, petitions and letter writing campaigns. Institutionalized tactics are often not an option for poor people and racial minorities who do not have access to the social, cultural, and human capital necessary to effectively navigate the political system and communicate with elites.

Piven (2008) argues that institutionalized tactics can only be effective when they are backed up by a threat of disruption (Andrews 2001) or by persuasion of the population or of elites themselves. In short, simply “asking nicely” will not force change upon unwilling elite actors; elites must be put in a position where they view capitulating to demands as either 1) in their self-interest to avoid disruption or 2) their own choice (i.e. they have internalized the movement’s frames as their own version of reality). To have power means to be able to make something happen despite opposition (Weber 1925). Social movements build power to push for desired social changes against the opposition of elites. Because they lack financial resources or control of institutions, social movement leaders must use disruption and persuasion in addition to institutional tactics to achieve their goals.

Strong social movement infrastructures are vehicles for ordinary people to build and exercise political power because they include diverse organizations, groups and leaders who pursue all three of the tactics above, often simultaneously, to achieve social
change. Now, I will move to a discussion of neoinstitutionalist theory and its implications for nonprofit social movement organizations.

**Nonprofit Social Movement Organizations and Organizational Fields**

Most social movement organizations are 501c(3) nonprofit organizations. 501c(3) is a tax categorization meaning that an organization is classified as a charitable organization. These organizations are not able to engage in partisan activities, such as endorsing political candidates. Some social movement organizations are 501c(4) organizations, which are able to engage in partisan political campaigning. One key distinction is that donations to 501c(3) organizations are tax-deductible, whereas donations to 501c(4) organizations are not. Because of this financial incentive, most foundations donate to 501c(3) organizations.

Because of legal constraints, nonprofit organizations must follow a set of formal and informal rules that limit the extent to which they can do politics. For instance, most funding from philanthropic foundations must be used for tasks that can be classified as nonpartisan, which limits the ability of nonprofit social movement organizations to engage in electoral politics. For organizations hoping to build political power, this constraint can be problematic. It is difficult to hold elected officials accountable for implementing movement gains without a demonstrated ability to impact elections.

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12 The OOC is a 501c(3) organization; it has a sister organization called Stand Up for Ohio that is classified as a 501c(4) organization. The staff leadership team of Stand Up for Ohio is almost the same as the staff leadership team of the OOC. Stand Up for Ohio is thus a way for OOC leaders to legally engage in partisan activities.
There are different types of nonprofit social movement organizations. Jenkins and Halci (1999) distinguish between four types of social movement organizations and track funding allocated to each type over time. The four types of organizations they identify are: 1) *Indigenous movement groups* that mobilize populations directly impacted by social problems; 2) *Professional advocacy organizations* that have paid staff that advocate for issues on behalf of beneficiaries; 3) *Technical support organizations* that provide technical services such as fundraising, communications, community organizing training, and assistance in gaining 501c(3) tax status; and 4) *Institutionalized organizations* that include churches and universities that are supporting social movements. Within this classification, the OOC would be considered primarily an indigenous movement group, however it also functions as a technical support organization for some of its members.

As nonprofit organizations, social movement organizations are part of an *organizational field* made up of nonprofit organizations and the philanthropic foundations that support them. An organizational field is “those organizations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products.” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Thus, a field is an arena with established relationships and patterns of action. In an organizational field, actors take each other into account when they carry out interrelated and/or similar activities (McAdam and Scott 2012).
Neoinstitutionalist scholars assert that organizational fields are characterized by “institutional isomorphism,” which means that over time, institutional forces cause organizations to become more similar to one another. This happens in part through coercive processes. For instance the 501c(3) tax classification is a legal barrier to certain types of actions; if a social movement organization breaks those laws, they risk facing sanctions, losing funding and legitimacy. Isomorphism also occurs through mimetic processes wherein organizations mimic other organizations in their field that are particularly successful. Social movement organizations often feel pressure to ensure that they are demonstrating “success” to their funders, and so they look to other organizations that are well-regarded in their field for a sense of what success looks like and how to communicate that. A third way that isomorphism happens is when organization leaders go through a similar professionalization process that causes them to view problems and approach decisionmaking in similar ways (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). This is certainly the case with community organizing, which is a professionalized discipline. Organizers are trained to make similar assumptions and have similar tactics for building and exerting power.

Conforming to prescribed rules does not necessarily make organizations more efficient or effective. In one of the foundational pieces of neoinstitutionalist theory, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organizations often depend on institutional ‘myths’ to determine what structures and practices are most effective. However, these myths tend to have little to do with improving efficiency or results. Instead, institutional myths arise
as people in organizations search for ways to demonstrate (particularly to funders) that they are legitimate and worthy of investment.

In order to obtain resources, organizations must conform to established standards of legitimacy in the organizational field. But, establishing an organization as legitimate may have little to do with how effective or efficient the organization is. Because of this, organizations that innovate may bear considerable costs to legitimacy, which can endanger their ability to garner resources (Meyer and Rowan 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that organizations will change to resemble the organizations upon which they depend for resources. In the nonprofit organizational field, this means that nonprofit organizations adopt the assumptions, practices, and structures of the foundations that fund them.

**Funding Arenas, Social Movement Infrastructure, and the OOC**

The Ohio Organizing Collaborative is a nonprofit social movement organization that is attempting to build social movement infrastructure. This infrastructure includes the individuals and organizations that are members of the OOC, allied individuals and organizations, policy think-tanks, and labor unions. What the OOC is building fits the description of social movement infrastructure. The collaborative includes multiple organizations, informal networks, and leaders from different racial backgrounds and different regions of Ohio.

The funding arenas that OOC participates in are organizational fields: 1) the “nonprofit industrial complex” (NPIC) which includes nonprofit organizations and the
foundations that fund them, and 2) the electoral industry. Obtaining resources within these organizational fields requires establishing legitimacy. In order to be a legitimate recipient of funds, organizations must follow rules and “best practices” that are informed by nonprofit organizations and funders that are successful and well-regarded by the field as a whole. Nonprofit social movement organizations are in a bind because the strategies they must pursue to gain resources are not always the same strategies that build strong social movement infrastructures.

In order to accomplish their goals, the OOC must do two things at once: 1) respond to isomorphic pressures and establish legitimacy according to the standards of the nonprofit organizational field and 2) train leaders and build formal and informal networks that unite social movement organizations across social and geographic boundaries. This is a juggling act, as the stories throughout the rest of this account will demonstrate. One of the most consistent themes in the data is that organizers and social movement leaders feel torn between the demands of funding sources on one hand and their mission to build power in local communities on the other. One reason for this tension is the fact that the social structures that undergird successful social movements are different from and in some ways incompatible with the organizational fields that make up the OOC’s funding arenas.

Table 1 provides a guide to some of the key differences between social movement infrastructures and organizational fields. They are distinct from each other in terms of their composition, the main sites where decisions are made and action takes place, operating logics, and key decisionmakers. Perhaps the most important difference to
highlight, though, is the fact that social movement infrastructures are accountable to ordinary people and organizational fields are primarily accountable to elites who set standards of legitimacy for the field because of their control over resources. In social movement infrastructures, the key decisionmakers are leaders who understand and are connected to grassroots constituencies, whereas in the NPIC and electoral industry the key decisionmakers are experts.

The NPIC and electoral industry are similar to one another in terms of relevant players, assumptions, and best practices. One of the most striking similarities is the fact that both of these fields operate according to a technocratic political logic and have some similar ideas about how social change should occur. In the NPIC, highly educated experts at foundations and nonprofit professionals determine the strategies that will be pursued. Professionals select which social issues they would like to invest in solving, the change they want to achieve, and which strategies they think will be most effective in achieving their goal. In the electoral industry, it is political operatives, pollsters, and consultants that wield the primary decision-making power. In both of these spheres, experts and consultants are predominantly white and upper-class or upper-middle class.

Furthermore, both the NPIC and electoral industry tend to operate under the assumption that American democracy is a pluralist system where minority constituencies can have significant voice (Roelofs 2003). Neither field offers a strong critique of capitalism, structural racism, or patriarchy. In fact, elites in these fields are likely to subscribe to neoliberal assumptions about the economy (Wolin 2008) and a benign view of racial diversity that elides power differentials between white people and people of
color (Ward 2008). Thus, the ideas and strategies that experts in these organizational fields have about how to solve social problems tend to be moderate and encourage action through institutional channels. Poor people and people of color who have a more radical perspective because of their lived experiences with poverty and racial oppression (Collins 1986) are unlikely to find resources within these organizational fields.

Thus, while organizations are an important part of social movements, there is often tension between what is best for an organization versus what is best for a movement. Organizations need to differentiate and compete with one another for supporters, volunteers and resources (Barman 2002; Soule and King 2008). Social movements need multiple organizations and networks of individuals to cooperate and unite under one collective identity to push forward an agenda together. When social movement organizations compete with one another for funding, this can lead to hostility and unwillingness to collaborate (Hall and Hall 1996). Coalitions are very important for movements (Staggenborg 1986; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010), and being embedded in competitive organizational fields can be detrimental to efforts to build social movement infrastructure.

Also, in order to obtain legitimacy within an organizational field, an organization must follow rules wherein it adopts similar language and tactics to organizations that are perceived as successful according to institutional myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). In order to be successful in a social movement, an organization must come up with creative tactics that allow it to outmaneuver more well-resourced opponents (Ganz 2009). Building organization and building movement are thus
not always completely complimentary efforts. If a social movement organization’s ability to defeat more powerful opponents hinges on their ability to innovate (Ganz 2009), then isomorphic forces that encourage organizations to adhere to common standards could limit the strategic capacity of social movement organizations. This is compounded by the high level of dependence many nonprofit social movement organizations have on philanthropic foundations, thus heightening the pressure they are under to conform (DiMaggio and Powell 1991).

There are also areas of overlap that provide the basis for resource exchange and collaboration. For instance, social movement organizations’ planned campaigns sometimes coincide with the social change agenda of a philanthropic foundation. When that occurs, if a social movement organization is able to establish legitimacy, they can gain funding from the foundation to further their campaign. Also, social movements may ally with public officials or candidates for office to move policy changes forward. Movements and movement leaders may support a candidate in either official or unofficial capacities when the candidate presents him or herself as an ally to the movement’s cause. Table 4 below compares and contrasts social movement infrastructure with the non-profit industrial complex and electoral industry.
Table 4: Social Movement Infrastructure and Organizational Fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Movement Infrastructure</th>
<th>Org Field: Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC)</th>
<th>Org Field: Electoral Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nonprofit social movement organizations</td>
<td>• Philanthropic foundations</td>
<td>• Political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Labor unions</td>
<td>• National Intermediary (technical support) organizations (i.e. Center for Community Change)</td>
<td>• Campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Policy think tanks and advocacy organizations</td>
<td>• Local and statewide nonprofit organizations</td>
<td>• State tables/VAN administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaders (includes clergy, union leaders, organizers, activists)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Consultants and pollsters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Informal networks of activists and community members</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Vendor programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal coalitions of organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Donors (includes individuals, labor unions, foundations, corporations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indigenous resources (financial and labor)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• PACs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supporting institutions (churches, universities)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Nonprofit interest groups and social movement organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build power and influence to make desired social change</td>
<td>Improve society</td>
<td>Get desired election results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where does the action take place?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Where does the action take place?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Where does the action take place?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Campaigns about issues of concern conducted by organizations, coalitions, and/or informal groups.</td>
<td>• Philanthropy conferences</td>
<td>• State tables (America Votes and State Voices) where labor unions, nonprofit interest groups, and social movement organizations coordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protests</td>
<td>• Day-to-day operation of nonprofit organizations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Public meetings</td>
<td>• Communication between funders and nonprofits (includes meetings and site visits)</td>
<td>• Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Movement centers (Staggenborg 1998), Free spaces (Polletta 1999)</td>
<td>• Grant applications and reports</td>
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Continued on next page
My interview with Heather McMahon, managing director of the OOC, illuminated some of these dynamics and how the OOC deals with them. Heather is in charge of the operations team and oversees the day-to-day necessities of running a complex 501c(3) organization, including communications, data, human resources, finances, and logistics. She is a white woman in her 40s who is very intelligent and competent; she is bubbly and laughs a lot but also gives off the impression that she would be a formidable opponent in a debate. Heather was Congressman Tim Ryan’s communications director when Kirk Noden asked her to work for the OOC. At the time,
Heather was very frustrated with Congressman Ryan’s vote in favor of the Bush tax cuts because the vast majority of people in his district would not benefit. This made the decision to work for the OOC easy for Heather; she had decided that Washington was broken and that politicians there, even ones she liked, would not “fight for the people who need to be fought for.”

Heather describes how she helps the OOC meet the expectations they face as part of a nonprofit organizational field:

“I think the reason that Kirk and I work together really well is that I’m a very structured person. Kirk is a very fluid person. But we both understand and appreciate what the other brings to the table. And so I think there’s something to be said for making sure that the structure of our organization doesn’t change much [so] that the organizing is able as fluid as possible, because it needs to be if we’re gonna build our movement. If we’re going to stay in the political moment, if we’re going to take advantage of everything that organizing allows us to take advantage of, it’s got to be fluid. It will not operate any other way.

But, at the same time, especially as we grow in power and we come under scrutiny from groups who do not want us to grow in power, we have to make sure that our tax documents are submitted correctly. All of these little pieces – like did you fax in that Ohio new hire form? There’s so many little pieces of how we operate that need to be really regimented so that the work doesn’t need to be. I certainly don’t want any organizer to think the way that I do. But, I don’t want anyone on the operations team necessarily thinking like an organizer (laughs).”
Heather recognizes that it is important for organizers to be ‘fluid’ in their work so that they can take advantage of political opportunities, go in unexpected directions based on leaders’ interests, and develop creative and bold strategies. She sees her role as ensuring that the structure of the organization is in place so that organizers can focus on organizing. For instance, she needs to make sure that tax and other legal documents are filed properly so that the OOC is not vulnerable to legal or political attacks based on their operations. Heather identifies a significant difference between how organizers and operations staff approach their work. In conversations with members of the operations team, they often expressed frustration with the fact that organizers often do not prioritize the part of their work that is necessary for establishing legitimacy, which includes reports and paperwork and grant applications.

In summary, the OOC is working to build a strong progressive social movement in Ohio that shifts power away from elites to ordinary people. However, the OOC struggles in a system that is oriented to the creation and maintenance of organizations that reflect the priorities of the elites that fund them. Below, I will use an example to examine several key topics: 1) How nonprofit organizations, community organizing, and social movements are connected; 2) How the OOC builds social movement infrastructure in Ohio; and 3) How expectations from the NPIC and electoral industry impact organizers’ work.

**From Collective Bargaining to Black Lives Matter: The Ohio Student Association.**

In the early days of community organizing, organizers were critical of social movements. They observed that social movement gains tend to be diminished or lost
when entrenched power structures reassert themselves. Organizers promoted people’s organizations as a solution to the problem of the seemingly permanent disempowerment of poor and middle-class people. People’s organizations were envisioned as a vehicle for ordinary people to hold elected officials accountable to working for the people. These organizations would train community leaders and encourage them to organize and advocate for desired policies. In this way, decision-making power in communities could be redistributed away from elites and toward “the people.” Through building formal organizations, organizers hoped to ensure that ordinary and marginalized people would be able to make government and other institutions work for them.

Today, most organizers have abandoned outright disdain for social movements and are trying to use social movements to advance organization building and vice versa. In this emerging framework, a people’s organization trains organizers and leaders that go on to spur and lead social movements. Social movement work raises the organization’s profile and increases their credibility with their constituents. Organizations’ involvement and leadership in social movements can also be used to strengthen the organization, bringing in members and money. People’s organizations are important within social movement infrastructure because they identify and train potential movement leaders and draw connections among multiple social issues affecting the poor and people of color. Nonprofit organizations like the OOC provide a vehicle for building social networks among progressive activists. The OOC, for instance, convenes gatherings of activists from all over Ohio and encourages them to build relationships with one another and work together. This is best illustrated through an example.
The Ohio Student Association (OSA) is a core member of the OOC. OSA leaders were connected with young leaders of color from across the US, and they were deeply involved in the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer and fall of 2014. The story of the OSA provides insight into how nonprofit community organizing organizations and social movements are interconnected. In reconstructing the history of the OSA, I draw on participant observation as well as interviews with Kirk Noden and three OSA staff organizers: Stuart McIntyre, James Hayes, and Molly Shack.

The Ohio Student Association emerged in 2011 out of a campaign to preserve collective bargaining rights for public sector unions in Ohio. In 2011, the Ohio state legislature passed Senate Bill 5 (SB5), which would have crippled public sector unions. The campaign to repeal SB5 was coordinated by We Are Ohio, a coalition of labor unions and community groups. The OOC ran the allied outreach work for the SB5 campaign, and as part of that they had a student organizing program with 11 students working part-time on 11 different college campuses. A network of student activists across the state organized events to support the repeal of SB5.

During the SB5 campaign, Occupy Wall Street was in the national spotlight, which inspired local activism. An enthusiastic core of student activists formed at several universities in Ohio, including a group called Occupy OSU at Ohio State. The Occupy OSU group, in particular, organized demonstrations to protest the privatization of parking at OSU and raise awareness about student loan debt.

In January 2012, the network of student activists from SB5 organizing came together with the Occupy groups for an event they called the Ohio Youth Congress.
There, the students decided to form the Ohio Student Association to work on educational justice issues and charted out an agenda of mobilizations for spring 2012. Following a community organizing ethos, the students wanted to ensure that the OSA would be run and controlled by young people fighting for their own interests.

While the OSA was forming, the campaign to repeal SB5 was successful; the law was overturned with a 10-point margin of victory. Kirk Noden describes what happened with the labor coalition We Are Ohio after they were successful in leading the effort. He says,

“After SB5 was over, the labor table We Are Ohio... had made a set of promises about continuing the community/labor partnership. And they had about a million dollars left in the bank account... So I went to them and said, ‘Look, the one thing that we’re asking for money for, the one thing I think you should continue is this student organizing work. This has a ton of potential, it could be really good. We haven’t seen anything like this before, having a real foothold on college campuses.’ I think we asked for $50,000 or $75,000. They said no. They didn’t give us any money. They instead gave a donation to Toys for Tots and then they proceeded to spend the million dollars over the next 2 years on consultants...

And then we were like well fuck, we need to figure [something] out. So we came up with some money to pay someone full time to keep the OSA together. And then in 2012, that person left and then James and Stuart were hired and we got them some voter registration money... but we essentially funded it, subsidized it for 3 or 4 years.”

59
Kirk and other OOC leaders were excited about the potential value of student organizing for building progressive social movement infrastructure in the state. However, the labor unions that controlled resources did not want to financially subsidize the organization after the SB5 campaign was successful. It is common for 501c(3) nonprofit organizations like the OOC to receive financial resources from labor unions, usually in exchange for their work on a campaign led and controlled by labor leaders. As this example demonstrates, organizations like the OOC are often in a position where they must ask more well-resourced allies for support. Those allies do not always view community organizations as equal partners; there is often a funder/grantee relationship between unions and 501c(3) community organizations. In this instance, the unions were not interested in making a long-term investment in an independent social movement organization.

So, in the absence of allied support, OOC leaders made the decision to continue raising money for the student organization. The political director of the OOC at the time, Karen Gasper, helped to garner funding for the OSA and mentor the young organizers. Karen Gasper eventually left the OOC to become the national field director for AFL-CIO.

One of the first OSA staff members was Stuart McIntyre. Stuart is a measured, thoughtful, and articulate young white man in his mid-20s who grew up in Columbus and attended Ohio State. He was the executive director of the OSA from 2012-2017. He describes the relationship between the OSA and the OOC:

“\textit{In the fall of 2012, the OOC helped to move a grant that allowed us to do voter registration and voter engagement. It was negotiated by Karen Gasper who}
was the civic engagement director at the time... We were new to voter registration and Karen was a high level statewide field manager and someone that had a lot of experience running large campaigns. She was really able to provide a lot of mentorship for James and I as we took on that challenge...

Part of the real benefit of the alignment with the OOC is the back end administrative support. All the sort of stuff that you’re required to have to be an official organization is provided for by the whole so that the parts can really focus on organizing, and developing their vision, and organizing people and money. So that’s been really helpful for us because we haven’t had to develop those harsh realities of being a 501 c(3) organization recognized by the federal government that does a financial audit and has a lawyer.”

There are several interesting points here. First, the OOC was able to subsidize student organizing by using funding for voter mobilization. Funding organizing through civic engagement and elections work is a common strategy employed by the OOC, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Second, seasoned OOC staff provided mentorship and training for young and inexperienced student organizers, a trend that continued during my observations. Finally, Stuart discusses how the OOC removes some of the burden of navigating the legal and financial issues associated with being a non-profit organization. This is especially helpful given that the OSA is intentional about ensuring that the organization is led by young people; this is in keeping with a populist political logic that an organization’s constituency should determine its agenda. However, young people right out of college are not likely to have experience with and mastery over...
all the administrative tasks necessary to maintain 501c(3) nonprofit status and establish legitimacy with funders. Being financially subsidized by and legally part of the OOC significantly mitigates that problem and helps OSA organizers to spend more of their time organizing.

Being part of the OOC was also helpful for the OSA because they were embedded in a network of more experienced organizers working on a variety of issues. Molly Shack was part of the Occupy Wall Street-inspired student group that organized protests at Ohio State University. Molly is a charismatic and intelligent white woman in her mid-20s who was on the OOC’s core team of top leaders when I started observing the OOC in 2014. She describes how she first got involved with the OOC through an organizing communications fellowship in 2012:

“So I sort of came onto the OOC staff ranks, not officially as OSA originally. I actually think that was the best thing that could have happened for me... Really the best part of it was getting to travel around the state and meet with all of the different OOC affiliates and see all their actions... I got to go to Care Congress in Northeast Ohio that was focused on retirement security and caregiver credit. I got to hear first-hand stories from people who were taking care of their moms or aunts and were not getting Social Security credit for it and who were losing retirement security because of it. And I got to go East Cleveland and hear people who are really struggling in the community there due to violence and poverty... I got to see, okay, this is how this stuff works in the sort of more formal community organizing realm. And I got to build relationships with different
organizers and wrote little blog posts about them. So I got a sort of crash course in fall of 2012 on the OOC.”

One of the potential advantages of being part of a statewide coalition like the Ohio Organizing Collaborative is the ability to collaborate with and learn from professional organizers working on a wide variety of issues with different constituencies. Seeing different organizers in action across the state was a helpful learning experience for Molly and allowed her to gain understanding of the “how stuff works” in the “formal community organizing realm.” Relationships among organizers working on different issues are important in social movement infrastructure, which relies on social networks that cross geographic and social boundaries. Furthermore, when organizers observe and take notes on each others’ strategies, that can build strategic capacity by increasing the amount and diversity of experiences that social movement leaders can draw on to construct strategy.

One key event in the OSA’s development was Trayvon Martin shooting the national uproar in response to George Zimmerman’s acquittal. It was a tense time on Ohio State’s campus. There was significant student mobilization in solidarity with Trayvon Martin and his family, but also pushback as “Long Live George Zimmerman” was spray painted on the black cultural center. OSA organized large actions with hundreds of people against a proposed Stand Your Ground law in Ohio in Spring 2012 and Fall 2013. The law was never passed, likely because of the protests and public
outcry. In the wake of their Stand Your Ground campaign, OSA leaders decided to shift their focus to racial justice.

OSA organizer James Hayes described this shift to me in his interview. James is a biracial African-American man in his mid-20s who also grew up in Columbus and attended Ohio State. James is a very thoughtful person, a leader who commands significant respect in his community and among young leaders of color nationally. He is particularly gifted at casting a vision for how to achieve social change. James described the shift that OSA made in 2013:

“In 2012 when we got together it was mostly Occupy kids, and by that I mean white radicals from the University...Stuart, Molly, and I grew up Columbus, went to Columbus City schools, and so the urban issue is really what we were thinking about. Not just fracking, or campus based student/administrator issues, which a lot of student organizing is based around. We wanted to be in the world doing work around racial justice, issues that really mattered... And so a lot of our organizing kind of switched from being very campus based to being more community based...

We’re really trying to work with people that were actually affected by the things we were talking about versus the year before where everybody was theorizing about this revolution against capitalism and stuff, but they weren’t people that actually had skin in the game in a lot of these things. ...When we were talking about school to prison pipeline, it couldn’t just be the liberal white education majors that were going to be teachers doing the work, it had to be
actual young people who had been suspended in school, arrested in school, expelled from school, and for the most part those are young people of color, or young people from poor neighborhoods, kind of like the neighborhood I grew up in.”

The OSA shifted from being composed primarily of anti-capitalist white radicals energized by Occupy, to an organization focused on racial justice issues. They also expanded from a focus on campus issues to include urban and community issues. As part of this change, OSA organizers emphasized recruiting and training leaders that are directly impacted by racial justice issues; this led to an influx of young black leaders from low-income backgrounds into the organization. Not all of the new OSA leaders were college students, some were young people from the community who had not attended college or dropped out for financial reasons. James mentioned that DaMareo Cooper, the organizing director of the OOC, was present during this process and helped the leaders craft a new vision for the OSA. DaMareo is the lead organizer of the OOC, and he was an important mentor for the young OSA organizers.

The focus on recruiting and training leaders that are directly impacted by poverty and racism, people with “skin in the game” as James says, reflects an important tenet of community organizing: the people most suited to creating change are the ones most impacted by the problem. Importantly, the impetus to make this shift came from OSA organizers and leaders based on their lived experiences. Funding agencies and political experts did not identify police brutality in black communities or the criminalization of black youth as a priority. However, it seems clear in retrospect that OSA leaders were
identifying and tapping into issues that deeply resonated and were highly salient in low-income communities of color.

From 2013 to 2015, the OSA built and expanded its base, training student activist leaders across the state. When I started observing them in 2014, the OSA had 4 organizers on staff and teams of dedicated trained leaders at several colleges across the state. They had made significant progress in building networks for student activism in Ohio. In addition to ongoing racial justice work, the OSA anchored a coalition of organizations called the Ohio Higher Education Commission to fight for student debt relief and increased funding for higher education. This coalition included the Ohio branch of the American Association of University Professors union and the Ohio Education Association. Throughout all of this, the OSA remained a part of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative. OSA organizers and leaders went to OOC trainings and participated in the OOC’s work on mass incarceration and reentry.

Over time, OSA organizers developed strong relationships with young leaders of color in similar youth-led organizations across the country. In the summer of 2014, OSA joined young activists from all around the US to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer in Mississippi. At this national convening, young activists and leaders of color envisioned how young people would lead social movements in the coming years. James Hayes described the events leading up to this:

“Last August [2013], a bunch of us were in D.C. for the 50th Anniversary of the March of Washington. And, we all left that weekend feeling like the event was rather hollow, and we spent too much time talking about the last 50 years
and not enough time talking about the next 50. And, at the same time, at the main event that Wednesday, there were three young people scheduled to speak at the big event. President Obama, President Clinton, people like that were speaking at this event, right. So Phil from the Dream Defenders, Sophia from United We Dream, and a young Native American woman... were supposed to talk, and they all got cut from the agenda... We realized the voices of young people are not being respected in these spaces, even though the work 50 years ago was being led by young people.

So we wanted to create our own youth-led stuff in preparation for this summer, which is the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer, which was led by SNCC... We came together really to continue on that legacy and that tradition of organizing from the Civil Rights Movement in a new way. And really to spark a new era of Civil Rights activism. So, that’s why we came together you know, to pick up the torch and push the struggle forward. Also, I think to bring together a cadre of these organizers. There’s probably like 30 people I would say make up the real bulk of what the Freedom Side is... I think we’ll continue working together throughout our lives.”

James and OSA organizer Malaya Davis were part of a collaborative of young organizers of color called the Freedom Side who envisioned “a new era of Civil Rights activism.” These organizers felt disrespected and marginalized by political elites at the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. They decided they wanted to have an event that was youth-led for the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer. James saw the
relationships he was building with fellow organizers in the Freedom Side as working relationships that he would carry throughout his life.13

On July 12, 2014, about one month before Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Freedom Side members staged a protest outside of the National Governor’s association meeting. When leaders tried to lay a banner down on the ground that read “Our Lives Matter,” they were arrested. James Hayes and Malaya Davis were among those arrested.

In late summer and fall of 2014, the OSA was one of the most prominent organizations involved in the emerging mobilization that eventually came to be known as the Black Lives Matter movement. When John Crawford III was shot and killed in Beavercreek, OH because he picked up a BB gun off of a shelf at Walmart, the OSA’s cadre of leaders and organizers were prepared to jump into action. Through a series of protest actions in August, the OSA was able to pressure the Ohio attorney general to release the tape showing how John Crawford III was killed after a 911 caller greatly exaggerated the threat he posed.

On September 22, 2014, the OSA led an 11-mile pilgrimage of about 100 people from the Walmart where John Crawford was shot to the courthouse in Xenia, OH where the decision about whether to prosecute the police officer responsible was made. These events were happening at the same time as the more nationally publicized unrest in Ferguson. Ashley Yates, a prominent Ferguson activist, attended the OSA’s John

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13 Many members of the Freedom Side are with different organizations in 2017 than they were in 2014, but they are still part of social movement organizations. For instance, Malaya Davis, who was an OSA organizer, is now working for Color of Change. James Hayes currently works for the Ayni Institute, which provides innovative training for organizers and social movement leaders.
Crawford pilgrimage. At the gathering that night at a church in Xenia, she said that what was happening in Ohio was very similar to what was happening in Ferguson, saying “You have something beautiful here, and we have something beautiful there.” The OSA followed up on their pilgrimage with an occupation of the Beavercreek police department and multiple actions and rallies in Columbus.

Because of their work in Ohio, as well as their leadership in national gatherings of young leaders of color, OSA organizers and leaders are recognized as prominent activists in the Black Lives Matter movement. For instance, James Hayes was among the young activists invited to meet with President Obama in the wake of the Ferguson riots. MTV included Malaya Davis in a profile of young activists of color leading the new Civil Rights Movement. When a prominent OSA leader tragically committed suicide in 2016, national news outlets reported on his death referring to him as a Black Lives Matter activist. However, this obfuscated the fact that his leadership was developed and nurtured by the Ohio Student Association and that he identified strongly with that organization. Multiple activists made this point on Facebook in the wake of his death. While the public viewed him as a Black Lives Matter activist, the OSA was the primary vehicle through which he and other leaders organized protests and actions. This is similar to how Civil Rights activists worked through organizations, like SCLC and SNCC.

This is a people’s organization in action; building social movement infrastructure by accumulating resources, politicizing and training leaders, developing social networks, and collaborating with other organizations. A strong argument could be made that without the Ohio Student Association, Black Lives Matter mobilization would not have...
happened in Ohio to the extent that it did in fall 2014 and beyond. The work that was done over the course of 3 years to train a cadre of organizers and leaders prepared them to jump into action immediately using their established networks and repertoire. The OSA was embedded in and helped to develop social movement infrastructure both within Ohio and nationally. OSA leaders were connected to activists in Ferguson, United We Dream, and other youth led activist groups, they were able to collaborate and share ideas and tactics. Then, in times when the movement fades from the spotlight, OSA organizers and leaders continue to build, recruiting more people and training them in organizing tactics.

While the OSA provided a protest vehicle for young leaders of color, the OSA’s status as a nonprofit organization did not always make that easy. The OSA’s involvement in the emerging Black Lives Matter movement caused some tension with regards to their ongoing responsibilities within the OOC. Protests sometimes caused OSA organizers to miss important OOC meetings. For example, OSA organizers were late to OOC’s weeklong training when they were arrested at the National Governor’s Association meetings in summer 2014. Weeklong training is one of the most important and mandatory events for organizers on the OOC calendar. The unpredictability of protest sometimes also made it difficult for OSA organizers to attend scheduled OOC staff meetings. This is one example of how social movements and nonprofit organizations sometimes clash in practice.

Organizing protests and actions in the wake of events such as police shootings can make it difficult for leaders to meet their commitments to funders. When the John
Crawford protests were at their height in fall 2014, the OSA was also running a civic engagement program where they were beholden to funders to hit certain numbers of voter contacts and registrations. That work took a hit because a significant proportion of OSA organizers’ and leaders’ time and energy was devoted to work on the John Crawford campaign.

The OOC core team viewed the OSA’s protest activities as both a learning experience and a challenge in terms of how to translate social movement momentum into organization building. Molly Shack, who represents OSA on the core team, expressed these difficulties in a conference call that took place in the midst of the John Crawford protests. She said,

"[The John Crawford protests] have been helpful for organization building. People are asking me how they can be involved and there are people who have been drawn in... [But] sometimes we don’t have the structure to handle the huge intake. We don’t have a lot of people thinking strategically about how to bring in all these new, interested folks. We have 6 people thinking like organizers and 50 thinking like activists."  

Molly notes that while the OSA is able to mobilize people through protest, they do not have the ability to bring all of the people they are engaging into the organization. This is in part because of a lack of procedures to translate movement energy into long-term

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14 In organizing circles, referring to someone an ‘activist’ is meant as a critique meaning that the person shows up and participates in meetings and events but does not try to engage and develop the leadership of other people. In other words, an activist works on issues but does not build power through developing leaders and building grassroots bases. Activists see their issue as the end in itself, whereas organizers see issues as means to the end of building power in marginalized communities.
engagement. The OSA does not have ready-made ways for people to become OSA leaders outside of their already existing strategies, most of which rely heavily on the time intensive strategy of building one-on-one relationships. Thus, while the OSA was able to build name recognition, trust, and notoriety through their leadership in protest, they struggled to translate that into building organizational capacity.

Kirk Noden echoed some of Molly’s concerns on the call; he worried that the OSA was not taking full advantage of the opportunity they had created with the John Crawford mobilization.

“I have an orientation and a bias toward organization building so I have to really push myself around not being a narrow Alinsky-style organizer. It’s almost an anti-movement orientation the way those folks think about the world. I need to push myself to not get set in that thinking. I really agree with what Baldemar [Velásquez] said [when he spoke at an August 2014 OOC staff meeting], that incidents can be used to build institutions. I feel like with some of the movement work... we’re missing a core set of systems that would help us capture this stuff to build institution. The John Crawford organizing, what have we actually built? Is it 10 more leaders, is it 100? How many dedicated funders?”

Community organizers want to build long-lasting institutions that can help ordinary people hold public officials and other elites accountable to serving the public interest and marginalized communities. Organizers believe that this is necessary because when the energy of a social movement fades, entrenched elite powers often work against and undo
gains achieved by the movement. Kirk wanted OSA leaders to think about using protests to develop leaders and bring in resources to build organization.

While Kirk Noden did express concerns about whether the John Crawford protests were helping the OSA build their organization, he and the other top leaders within the OOC consistently supported and lifted up the OSA’s protest actions as core to the OOC’s mission. They permitted the use of organizational resources, such as staff time, to be used in leading the emerging Black Lives Matter movement, even though they knew that this work carried the risk of alienating some funders. And although his work for the John Crawford protests caused some of the OSA’s funded work to suffer, James Hayes was honored at the annual OOC staff retreat in January 2015 with many awards for his leadership and organizing accomplishments. However, the relationship between the OOC and the OSA is not without tension, as the following incident reveals.

In November 2014, about 30 OSA leaders from around the state gathered at Summit United Methodist Church in Columbus for a 2-day meeting to discuss and make decisions about the future of the OSA. Many OSA and OOC meetings that I attended took place at Summit UMC in a meeting room called the Freedom Hub. The Freedom Hub looks like it was once a chapel. It is lined with stained glass windows and there is a raised area in the back of the room that looks like it may have once held an alter. OSA leaders decorated the Freedom Hub with images and art depicting resistance to racial oppression. This included black and white photographs of escaped enslaved people, segregated bathrooms, the ‘Scottsboro boys”, the 16th St Baptist church bombing, and Rosa Parks being fingerprinted. On another wall, there was a poster depicting a woman
wearing a head covering and some text in Spanish; Molly Shack said the words meant “women with rebellious dignity.” One particularly striking piece of art was a large and colorful painting of a protest against police brutality. In the painting, one black man has his hands up while wearing a shirt that says “Don’t shoot,” another black man is throwing a Molotov cocktail while wearing an American flag t-shirt. A sniper on top of a police vehicle points a gun at the viewer. Meetings in the Freedom Hub generally took place with everyone sitting in chairs in a circle. Most of the young leaders attending the OSA meeting in November 2014 were black, only 4 were white including OSA staff organizers Stuart McIntyre and Molly Shack.

On the first afternoon, the organizers did a presentation about organizations that the OSA collaborates with. Molly Shack asked the room, “Who here has a relationship with someone in the Ohio Organizing Collaborative?” Over two-thirds of the people present raised their hands. One black leader talked about how he worked on campaigns with OOC organizers DaMareo Cooper and Jennifer Toles in Akron. He testified about going to OOC’s weeklong training, saying, “Weeklong changed my whole direction, it allowed me to clear my mind and have an actual vision. It allowed me to center myself and create.” Thus, some grassroots leaders in the OSA had relationships with OOC organizers and positive experiences with the OOC, including leadership development and working with other OOC organizations on campaigns.

Later, several OSA leaders raised questions about the OOC in a tense conversation that was rooted in ongoing racial tensions within the OSA. One young black woman gave voice to feelings of mistrust that others had hinted at, saying, “What is the
OOC’s goal for the OSA?” James Hayes responded by saying, “First of all, the OOC did not birth us, the OSA was organized by young people and the OOC raised money to support that.” James acknowledged that he had gone through “phases” in his level of trust with the OOC, but he continued, “Kirk hasn’t come to me, Malaya and Stu and told us, ‘You are going to work on this,’ that is not how that relationship works.” He added that OSA staff does not operate under their titles. So even though Stuart is executive director, for instance, he is not the ‘boss’ of the OSA.

Black people have good reason to distrust organizations that are run by white people, including liberal organizations that purport to work for social justice (Slocum 2006; King and Osayande 2007; Rodriguez 2007; McCorkel and Rodriguez 2009). The exchange above indicates that part of the underlying issue that OSA members had with the OOC was a question about whether they were being manipulated or controlled by white leaders. James reassured the OSA leaders that the origins of the organization were grassroots and authentic. Furthermore, perhaps sensing underlying hostility toward white leaders, James made clear that he was not being pressured by white men to work on particular issues. My observations and interviews generally confirm what James says here. Kirk Noden prefers a hands-off approach, especially with organizers like James who are demonstrably building grassroots bases and contributing to social movements. This lack of strict top-down management is in keeping with the community organizing ethos of letting “the people” guide action.

However, this approach does not change the fact that the OOC and the OSA often have a funder/grantee relationship. There is pressure placed on OSA organizers to meet
funders’ expectations. Stuart McIntyre told me that he intentionally tries to absorb the pressure from funders so that OSA organizers and leaders do not have to worry about that aspect of the work. There is only so much he can do though, because the OSA makes commitments to funders (e.g. a certain number of voter registrations on college campuses), and ultimately organizers must ask OSA leaders to carry out much of that work. This leads to a dynamic where black people from low-income communities are asked to carry out initiatives conceived of and designed by predominantly white elites. White leaders within the OOC are often closer to funders or in positions like executive director where they are tasked with ensuring that the organization’s reputation is preserved. White leaders, particularly those from middle class backgrounds, are much more likely than poor people of color to have the cultural, social and human capital necessary to navigate the nonprofit industrial complex and electoral industry. Being able to garner resources from elite sources gives white leaders a lot of influence in the OOC, even in initiatives primarily led by and impacting people of color.

The stress that this dynamic creates for the OSA was evident in another exchange that took place during the same racially charged conversation at the November 2014 meeting. After James offered his defense of the OOC, the conversation turned to the relationship more generally between the organization and “the people.” Referring to block parties that OSA leaders had hosted over the summer, one young black woman said, “I feel like you can host an event and be part of the community in the hood… Now instead we try to diagnose them, we try to talk to them around an issue.” Another young black woman said that she saw the “political work” and “community work” as “2
different things” and that the voter registration part of their work (i.e. the funded part of their work) is less authentic. One of the OSA’s most influential leaders, MarShawn McCarrel, said that people in poor neighborhoods do not trust organizations because “they have a lot of organizations that want things” from them. There was a lot of tension in the room during this conversation. And although leaders sometimes used evasive language or talked around it, it was clear that race was at the heart of the issue.

The OSA is supported by grants that require organizers to meet expectations regarding what they will deliver, for instance registering a certain number of voters, or doing measurable advocacy on a certain issue. Organizers sometimes struggle to connect the work they are being funded to do with what their leaders want to pursue. The OSA leader above was having a difficult time understanding why they were working on voter registrations, and how that was connected to their other work. She perceived that the OSA’s funded programs encourage leaders to “diagnose” people, and that made her feel less like a part of the community and more like an outside agent. The diagnosis of issues by nonprofit professionals can feel disrespectful, especially when people who are not part of the community try to tell community members what their problems are. MarShawn’s point about people not trusting organizations identifies what the problem is: Even though the OSA does impactful work for racial justice, in some ways, the OSA behaves just like elite-controlled organizations that people mistrust.
Conclusion

The story of the OSA and its role in the emergence of Black Lives Matter demonstrates that nonprofit organizations can be a crucial part of social movement infrastructure. The OOC trained organizers that went on to lead emerging social movements; it provided a vehicle for young people and people of color to nurture leaders and build social networks. However, the OSA and the OOC are not only part of social movement infrastructure, they are also embedded in organizational fields where they are dependent on other organizations for resources. Because of this, they face isomorphic pressures to be similar to other nonprofit organizations, which tend to operate according to a technocratic political logic that is anathema to the goals and ethos of community organizing.

In most nonprofit organizations, professional staff determine the agenda, design the strategic plan and carry it out in targeted communities. When this framework is translated to community organizing, organizers are responsible for carrying out funders’ agendas, and this puts them in a difficult position where they must ask volunteer leaders to help them with funded work. This work can accomplish important political goals; for instance, the OSA’s voter registration program has registered thousands of young people to vote in Ohio. However, while the goals may be laudable, often they do not emerge directly from the needs of community members. This creates a disconnect within the OOC between empowering leaders by operating according to a populist political logic and carrying out programs designed according to a technocratic political logic.
The racial tension within the OSA shows how their reliance on foundation funding can create problems and distortions within the organization. Foundation funding makes the organization opaque to volunteer leaders and people in the community because they are not aware of or part of the process of applying for grants. They often do not understand (or care) about the work that organization leaders must do to ensure they maintain a good reputation within the nonprofit organizational field. Poor people are confronted with life and death issues on a regular basis, including police brutality, hunger, homelessness, lack of access to healthcare, just to name a few. They do not necessarily see spending time and energy on elite-designed campaigns as directly helping their community. Marginalized people often have a different perspective on power and institutions than people in dominant groups (Lareau 2002). For instance, black people view mechanisms of racial oppression more clearly than white people (Fanon 1967; Collins 1986). People recognize that nonprofit organizations and electoral operatives are not ‘of’ the community.

Working within the nonprofit industrial complex, OOC leaders are often conscripted into representing a system that they sincerely do not want any part of and are actively trying to undermine. The whole situation contributes to distrust and racial tension within the organization. It is not helpful for the OOC’s goal of building social movement infrastructure, because it is important for social movement leaders to be trusted and authentic representatives of a grassroots base. Racial tension caused by this issue drains leaders’ energy and can make it difficult for them to be open and honest with one another. All of this can negatively impact the OOC’s ability to build strategic capacity.
Ultimately, there is a fundamental difference between 1) a top-down imposition of a political agenda by wielding power that one already possesses (through control of capital and institutions) and 2) building power among people that are generally excluded from political institutions and generating collective challenges for the purpose of social change. The OOC is in an interesting position because they are working within a system designed to do the former while trying to build the latter. The OOC’s reliance on elite funders and the isomorphic pressures they face as a nonprofit organization make it difficult for organization leaders to not act out the very forces of racial and economic inequality that they are attempting to overcome.
Chapter 2: The Structure of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

The “non-profit industrial complex” is a term used by activists and organizers to describe the funding structures they are embedded in as executive directors and employees of nonprofit organizations. The non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) is composed of nonprofit organizations and the philanthropic foundations that support them. For the activists and leaders who use the term, its parallel with constructs like the military-industrial complex and prison-industrial complex is intentional. In an anthology of essays by activists entitled *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, Dylan Rodriguez (2007) characterizes the NPIC as a, “state facilitated and fundamentally punitive bureaucratization of social change and dissent, which tends to create an institutionalized inside/outside to aspiring social movements by funneling activists into the hierarchical rituals and restrictive professionalism of discrete campaigns, think tanks, and organizations” (26). These activists argue that by committing themselves to this structure, nonprofit organizations submit to state discipline (e.g. legal constraints on 501c(3) nonprofit organizations), restrictive structures (e.g. funded issue campaigns) and rituals (e.g. applying for grants and reporting outcomes) that constrain possibilities for radical change.
I argue that the NPIC is a “floating world” of elite actors and institutions. In order to obtain funds, social movement organizations must tailor their agendas to the goals set out by elite institutions. The floating world of the NPIC is populated by well-intentioned experts who want to solve social problems like poverty and inequality. Many within the NPIC are highly intelligent, capable, well-informed, and impressively credentialed. However, they are disconnected from the people who are impacted by the social problems philanthropists are working to solve. Most philanthropic and nonprofit professionals are white and middle or upper-class and their ideas about how to solve poverty are influenced by this fact. There is a disconnect between the perspectives of professionals in the NPIC and the perspectives of poor people, which creates significant tension for nonprofit organizations. Community organizing organizations are therefore often pulled in different directions by their obligations to funders and their commitment to organizing marginalized people.

The NPIC encourages social movement leaders to focus on issues that funders have decided to invest in. For organizations, this pits ‘top-down’ elite-planned and driven campaigns against the ‘bottom-up’ issues that are important to people in marginalized communities. Also, the emphasis on funded issue campaigns also distracts many organizers from their primary goals: developing grassroots leaders in marginalized communities and building strong social movement infrastructures. Furthermore, the NPIC provides a ‘promotion ladder’ of sorts for ambitious organizers who can gain prestigious positions at national organizations. This creates a general structural problem within social movements where talented leaders leave local organizations and become
one step removed from efforts to organize marginalized people. Finally, the NPIC impacts the formation and development of social movements by encouraging competition among organizations working on the same issue and discouraging organizations from working on multiple issues.

In this chapter, data from interviews with OOC organizers, staff members of allied organizations, and funders as well as observations and documents will be used to 1) outline the structure of the non-profit industrial complex, 2) discuss how leaders of community organizing coalitions gain resources within this structure, and 3) describe how the non-profit industrial complex limits and constrains organizations’ efforts to build social movement infrastructure.

The Contested Role of Elite Funding in Social Movements

Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that the source of social movements’ power is mass defiance and disruption. In their analysis, people who wish to nurture social movements should avoid prioritizing organization-building. They state, “Organizers tended to work against disruption because, in their search for resources to maintain their organizations, they were driven inexorably to elites... Elites conferred resources because they understood that it was organization-building, not disruption, that organizers were about” (xxii). In this view, non-profit organizations are corrupting forces within social movements because they are subject to elite control, while disruptive action by angry people is not.
However, a substantial body of research has generally supported the assertion that organizations are good for movements. Organizations are important sites for mobilizing people (Morris 1984), developing movement culture (Lichterman 1995) and collective identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001), as well as facilitating coalition work (Staggenborg 1988). Organizations train people in organizing and direct action skills (Morris 1981; Han 2014), and they keep movements alive during periods where the environment is not conducive to mobilizing (Taylor 1989). However, a key point about this research is that it looks at the content of what organizations do, but it does not interrogate the funding structures that support them.

Given the emphasis on resource mobilization in the social movement literature (McCarthy and Zald 2002), it is striking how little attention has been paid to exactly how social movement organizations obtain resources from elite funders and how the strings attached to these resources impact movement organizations. Scholars have expressed concern about the potential coopting or channeling influence of state-sponsored nonprofit organizational structures and elite support (Piven and Cloward 1977; McAdam 1982; McCarthy, Britt and Wolfson 1991), but few have looked in-depth at possible mechanisms through which this influence can take place.

While the literature on this topic is surprisingly thin, some scholars have attended to the question of how elite support influences social movements. For instance, Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that one of the main ways that elite support of organizations distorts social movements is by influencing them to pursue less disruptive tactics and instead work through more institutional means. Jenkins and Eckert (1986) find that
foundations’ support of professional SMOs serves to ‘channel’ social movements in a more moderate direction. In the case of black insurgency during the Civil Rights Movement, this channeling entailed professionalization of movement organizations and leaders and diverting attention away from grassroots organizing and disruptive protest. Following these influential works, many scholars have operationalized the way that elite support distorts movements as whether or not movement organizations pursue ‘disruptive tactics.’ These tactics, which include sit-ins, protests, and civil disobedience, are meant to exert leverage by disrupting ‘the way things are normally done,’ which is argued to be anathema to elites (McAdam 1982).

Following this literature, Cress and Snow (1996) observed that organizations in their study that received foundation grants employed disruptive tactics, and they conclude based on that that elite support does not seem to co-opt or channel the movement organizations they study. However, whether engaging in protest is truly disruptive can be called into question, given that protest tactics have become a routine part of how politics are done in a ‘movement society’ (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Bartley (2007) finds that foundations can exert influence by coordinating their efforts alongside social movement organizations; in one case, this led to the establishment of an organizational field of forest certification. In Bartley’s study, protest was only one part of a larger strategy spearheaded by foundations through strategically funding various organizations to advance their agenda. Indeed, Bartley (2007) points out that scholars’ emphasis on the distinction between moderate, professional organizations and indigenous protest organizations is not necessarily reflective of a real division. There is significant overlap
between social movement and advocacy organizations (Andrews and Edwards 2004) and
the divide between members and challengers of political institutions is not always clear
or stable (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008).

Jenkins and Halci (1999) found that between 1950 and 1990, funding for
grassroots protest groups decreased relative to funding for advocacy and technical
support groups. Funding for racial minority groups decreased relative to funding for
middle class reform movements. They state, “Overall, social movement philanthropy has
been guided by a general ‘rights’ framework that emphasizes the importance of political
representation and the extension of civil, political, and social rights to all groups. In a
sense, it has attempted to realize the model of a pluralistic democracy where all groups
and interests are politically represented” (254). This is a benign interpretation of
foundations’ motives and impact on social change efforts. It is true that an advocacy
model would be suited to a pluralist system where various groups can have their concerns
heard and acted upon. Unfortunately, elite control of political institutions in the US
means that the pluralist vision of US democracy is more of an aspirational fantasy than
reality.

Other scholars have espoused a more critical perspective of the intentions and
impact of elite funders. Barkan (2013) describes how foundations used their resources to
push for the privatization of schools in low-income minority communities. They funded
‘trigger drives’ where parents were encouraged to sign petitions that would enable a
particular company to take over the school. The term ‘astroturfing’ would be appropriate
here. Astroturfing is when foundations stir up local political activity that is designed to
appear as though it emerged organically from the community. This is one way that elites can manipulate the levers of democracy to serve their own interests. Non-profit organizations walk a fine line when accepting funding to run issue campaigns; at what point does an issue campaign cross the line into astroturfing? It is clear that communities have good reason to be suspicious of nonprofit organizations that aggressively promote a particular issue.

Ultimately, the NPIC makes it difficult for social movement leaders to build a broad-based multiracial coalition to combat elite power. This may be by design. Joan Roelofs states,

“’It is to the elite’s advantage to be countered by a ‘mass movement’ consisting of fragmented, segmented, local, and nonideological bureaucracies doing good works and, furthermore, being dependent on foundations for support. Diverse organizations emphasize differences among the disadvantaged: ethnic, racial, sexual, rural-urban, or age, and they discourage a broad left recognizing common interests’” (124)

In this view, elites hope to prevent a broad-based movement that unites marginalized constituencies to contest corporate power and wealth concentration. The NPIC ensures that social movement organizations are small, narrowly focused, and competitive with one another for funding and political influence. This makes it difficult for marginalized groups to see their common interests because they are focused on small organizations that must fight for survival, which requires staying in elites’ good graces. Roelofs points out that the entire system of the NPIC is set up to serve elite interests.
Roelofs further argues that the NPIC is a system where “potential troublemakers” are lured into cooperative relationships with foundations by the promise of steady work with a middle-class salary and standard of living as long as they adhere to funders’ expectations. Organizers’ efforts are then directed toward continuously raising funds to maintain their organizations rather than organizing and building radical movements. The funding trends identified by Jenkins and Halci (1999) support Roelofs’ claims. Funding for grassroots protest and racial minority groups has decreased while funding for advocacy organizations and middle class reform movements has increased. Thus, organizations that are more likely to present fundamental challenges and call for radical change (e.g. eradication of structural racism) are less likely to be funded than organizations that are less confrontational and more reform-oriented. This leads to a scenario where potentially radical activists and organizers end up working for moderate reform-oriented organizations in order to make a decent living. Their time and energy is then spent catering to organizational demands instead of building social movement infrastructure.

Thus far, the limited amount of empirical research by social movement scholars on elite support of social movement organizations has shown that foundations ‘channel’ movements by supporting moderate organizations and diverting attention away from grassroots organizing (Jenkins and Eckert 1986; McAdam 1982; Jenkins and Halci 1999). This supports Piven and Cloward’s thesis about the impact of elite funding on movements. Research has also found that foundations play a key role in directing strategy, coordinating organizations to create and strengthen new institutional forms.
(Bartley 2007). However, there have been no in-depth case studies examining the question of how elite funding impacts social movement organizations. My data allow me to delineate the nonprofit funding structures social movement organizations are embedded in and the identification of mechanisms and processes through which elite funders exert influence on social movement organizations.

**The Structure of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC)**

Leaders of social movement organizations spend much of their time and energy trying to gain financial support for their work within the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC). The NPIC includes philanthropic foundations, national intermediary organizations, and the local and state-level\(^\text{15}\) nonprofit organizations that are competing with one another for financial support.

In this section, I will describe the structure of the non-profit industrial complex, drawing on data from interviews, observations and archival data as well as the existing literature on philanthropy and social change organizations. It is important to note that I will primarily be describing this structure as it is experienced by social movement organizations\(^\text{16}\) that receive foundation funding rather than focusing primarily on the perspective of grantmakers. However, I also draw on five interviews with funders and

\(^\text{15}\) For now, I will consider local organizations and state based infrastructure as being in the same category based on their similar levels of proximity to grassroots leaders and their common desire to build social movement infrastructure. Local organizations work to build movement infrastructure in one neighborhood, city or metro area whereas state-level organizations build statewide infrastructure.

\(^\text{16}\) A similar diagram could be mapped out for how funders interact with various sectors of society, including scholars who depend on grants to fund their research, social service organizations, and museums and other ‘high culture’ institutions. This study focuses on the NPIC from the perspective of social movement organizations.
eight interviews with staff from national intermediary organizations to corroborate and expand upon the observations of leaders of local/state social movement organizations. Furthermore, my data includes over 1300 relevant documents, including grant applications and reports. I also observed several meetings where funders and staff of national intermediary organizations were present.

Figure 1 is a diagram of the structure of the non-profit industrial complex. I separate organizations into three basic types: 1) foundations; 2) national intermediary organizations; and 3) local/state social movement organizations (SMOS).
Foundations are nonprofit organizations where wealthy families and corporations can hold wealth mostly tax-free as long as they give 5% of their assets each year to charitable organizations. There are two segments of the philanthropic sector from the perspective of social movement organizations: large progressive foundations and social
justice funders. Examples of large progressive foundations include the Ford Foundation (2013 assets: $12.26 billion dollars), Robert Woods Johnson Foundation (2013 assets: $10.17 billion dollars), and George Soros’ Open Society Foundations (2013 assets: $3.33 billion dollars). Many of these foundations fund a variety of social change initiatives, including research, advocacy, and organizing. These foundations do not usually provide grants directly to local/state SMOs; they generally make grants to national intermediary organizations. The national intermediaries keep a significant proportion of that money and then distribute the rest of the funds through smaller grants to local and state social movement organizations. Often, local and state organizations must participate in a national issue campaign centrally planned by the intermediary organization to receive those funds.

There is a small subset of foundations that fund grassroots organizing; these funders are called “social justice funders” (Ostrander 2005). In contrast to large progressive foundations, social justice funders often directly fund the work of local and state level social movement organizations; this is represented in Figure 1. Social justice funders include both national- and local-level foundations that have a particular commitment to funding grassroots organizing and social change work. Examples of social justice funders include the Needmor Fund (2014 assets: $27 million17), Marguerite Casey Foundation (2014 assets: $714 million), and Headwaters Foundation (2014 assets: $5.5 million). These funders generally fund organizing due to the political views and

commitments of their founders, boards and staff. These funders make up a very small segment of the overall philanthropic sector.

When foundations fund advocacy, they tend to focus on policy change with regard to specific issues. The issues of interest are determined by the foundation’s board and staff. The majority of funding goes to policy think tanks and advocacy organizations staffed by professional experts and lobbyists; only a small proportion of the funds goes toward organizing ordinary people. When these foundations fund the work of local/state organizations, they usually do so through national intermediary organizations.

National intermediary organizations are organizations that plan and coordinate national-level issue campaigns and provide funding and technical support to local/state organizations. Examples of organizations of this type include Center for Community Change (2013 assets $45 million), National Employment Law Project (2012 assets: $10 million), and PICO18 (2013 assets $15 million). Jenkins and Halci (1999) refer to national intermediary organizations as ‘technical support’ organizations because many of them provide technical support to local/state organizations. This includes training in

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18 PICO is a national network of faith-based community organizing (FBCO) coalitions. Other networks include Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Gamaliel, People’s Action, and DART. FBCO networks have a unique history and have evolved over time from training institutes to organizations that work on national issues and work to bring the voices of marginalized people into national debates (Wood and Fulton 2015). PICO and other community organizing national networks differ in one key way from other national intermediary organizations: they are accountable to their member organizations. Networks are financially accountable because some of their revenue comes from local organizations’ dues and local organization leaders are often very influential within the national organization (this contrasts with many national intermediary organizations that rely primarily on the expertise of national staff). I put PICO in the category of national intermediary organization here because it fulfills certain functions in the structure of the NPIC: it provides technical support and gets large grants from foundations and re-grants that money to local community organizing coalitions. Just like the OOC is part of both social movement infrastructure and nonprofit organizational fields, in addition to their role in the NPIC, PICO and other national networks serve movement-building functions as spaces where collaboration and coordination among movement leaders takes place.
organizing tactics, communications support, and expert advice on policy and electoral processes. Leaders in these organizations are often highly educated and/or experienced in their profession, and are thus well positioned to advise organizers and leaders in local and state SMOs. However, technical support is only part of what these organizations do.

National intermediary organizations receive large grants from foundations and then re-grant portions of that money in smaller chunks to local/state based SMOs that mobilize people. Many of these organizations also engage in policy research, advocacy, and communications efforts on behalf of social movements. Thus, national intermediary organization staff maintain relationships with foundation officials, elites in government and political parties, as well as staff of local/state SMOs. These organizations sometimes leverage these connections to help local and state SMOs gain funding for specific campaigns. A staff member of a national intermediary organization describes how the organization helped support a campaign that several local and state level SMO allies were working on:

“It might mean introductions to funders, it might mean us doing more than introducing, but actually going with the permission of certain partners to certain funders to make the case for why this effort happening in its’ state was important for the trajectory of [the issue] in the country... It involves organizing some calls, like group calls with interested donors who wanted to learn more about what’s going on and encourage them to weigh in... there were some funders in [the state] who were likely to do more if they could be assured that some national money was coming in as well, so there was some coordination around that. A
fairly integrated approach where the [local/state] groups could leverage their contacts, some in-state and some national, and we could add to that and amplify it and try to, in a serious and aggressive way, move things as quickly as possible.”

This quote illustrates the broker role of intermediary organizations. Given their closer proximity in the NPIC to large national foundations, intermediary organizations can leverage those connections to gain financial support for the work of allied local and state SMOs. These organizations also play a role in coalition building as they often have connections with SMOs across the country. However, national intermediary organizations generally do not have relationships with grassroots leaders and are not directly organizing in local communities; that work is done by local/state social movement organizations.

Kirk Noden describes the OOC’s relationship with the national intermediary organization called Center for Community Change (CCC) as a boon to the organization, particularly in terms of their role in helping set up and support the OOC’s electoral program:

They [CCC] were early investors in the OOC... We had no electoral experience and no electoral money and they gave us money to build an electoral program. First it was city council races in Cincinnati. And then [CCC staff] came out and helped train [organizers], helped us develop the program, put us through Wellstone training, all this stuff. So I think they’ve been catalytic in terms of investing in core capacities... they’ve also been good thought partners in terms of helping us think through what we’re trying to build. And they’ve
certainly helped us leverage and raise a lot of money, moreso than any network or national partner that we’ve been connected to.

National intermediary organizations can help local/state level SMOS by providing training, expert advice and funding for programs. They can help organizations build and expand their capacity into new areas. National organizations also help direct resources to local/state social movement infrastructure.

However, this support can be a double-edged sword for local/state organizations because intermediaries, like funders, often want to have a say in shaping local SMOs’ agendas and organizing methods. Stuart McIntyre, executive director of the Ohio Student Association, views national intermediary organizations with some skepticism as to their motives and purpose. In this quote, he describes one of the OSA’s national allies:

“So they are a national organization that is not exploitative, which is great. A lot of national organizations simply use their local affiliates to raise money and keep themselves afloat. That is not what [national organization] does... First off there is a really healthy structure and relationship between the national and their affiliates. Most of their groups are at best doing the most efficient young people voter engagement in the country and really giving young people a reason to care about politics. At worst, they are a training ground for future Democratic Party operatives and a sort of shadow party that is not driving the political agenda, but essentially choosing issues to work on from the agenda that’s set by somebody else. I think that increasingly it’s closer to the former.”
Stuart has observed that national organizations can have “exploitative” relationships with local affiliates. Often, when national organizations get grants to run issue campaigns, they keep a significant proportion of that money. State and local organization leaders sometimes feel that the proportion of the money that national organizations keep for themselves is larger than their role in the campaign warrants; this was a viewpoint I heard expressed in multiple contexts throughout the observation period. Local SMOs often take on the bulk of the organizing and mobilizing work for campaigns but get a smaller fraction of the money than national organizations. Furthermore, Stuart argues that in some cases, local affiliates are not empowered to set their own agendas but rather are subservient to an existing agenda; in the case he was discussing, the Democratic Party was a very influential force that threatened to override the voices of local organizations’ constituencies. This can lead to a scenario where organizing is not about empowering ordinary people, but rather advancing individual careers within elite spheres. I will discuss the relationship of the NPIC to the Democratic Party further in Chapter 4.

At the bottom of the diagram above are local and state level social movement organizations. These include community organizing coalitions like the OOC (2014 budget: $2 million) and its members such as the Amos Project and Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative. Also included in this category are local and state based policy think tanks and advocacy organizations; for instance the OOC works closely with Policy Matters in Cleveland and the Ohio Justice and Policy Center (OJPC) in Cincinnati. Furthermore, this category includes issue-based groups and other nonprofit organizations engaged in social change work. Basically, the category includes the organizations that
make up social movement infrastructure as described in Chapter 1. While the examples I have listed above are in Ohio, similar configurations of organizations exist in other local and state contexts.

A few general points about the structure outlined above. Note that availability of resources is concentrated at the top, in foundations and national intermediary organizations. Local and state level organizations often have very small budgets when compared to national intermediary organizations. Indeed, Jenkins and Halci (1999) found that advocacy and technical support organizations receive between one half and three fourths of movement philanthropy. Thus, foundations have a tendency to invest in and support organizations that are national in scope and at least one step removed from direct engagement with marginalized populations. Often these organizations are based in Washington DC. Organizations that organize marginalized people tend to have fewer resources and fewer connections to ‘big money.’

Another important characteristic of this structure is that accountability flows downward, not upward. What this means is that foundations are able to hold national intermediary organizations and local/state SMOs accountable to meeting their expectations. The money that flows downward comes with strings attached. Foundations have expectations about the outcomes that organizations will work to achieve and often require SMO staff to prepare elaborate reports detailing their progress toward the agreed upon goals. There are no mechanisms for foundations to be held accountable to working for outcomes that are important to people in marginalized communities.
National intermediary organizations have a dual role vis-a-vis local/state SMOs: they are on the one hand supporters and allies and they absorb some of the strain of matching organization agendas to funder demands. On the other hand, national intermediary organizations are also funders that place expectations on local/state SMOs to participate in campaigns, use tactics viewed as effective, and achieve particular outcomes. They do a lot of the heavy lifting of helping local/state SMOs learn best practices and establish legitimacy; but this work also contributes to institutional isomorphism that encourages organizers to be disconnected from their grassroots base.

A cynical interpretation of national intermediary organizations could be that these organizations keep local/state organizations locked in a cycle of dependency upon national experts and issue-based funding from national campaigns. This would mean that national intermediary organizations are fundamentally agents of the philanthropic sector; they allow foundations to maintain distance from more controversial uses of foundation funds and they ensure that elites’ agendas are carried out in marginalized communities.

I think that the cynical interpretation contains some truth, however the role of national intermediary organizations is ultimately more complex than that. Many of the national organization leaders I spoke with sounded similar to OOC leaders in that they work to maintain autonomy and their own agenda separate from that of foundations, and many of them want to support local/state organizations’ efforts to develop grassroots leaders and build independent political power. Many staff of national intermediary organizations are former or current community organizers who prioritize strengthening local organizations. However, these organizations, like the OOC, must constantly face
the specter of representing and imposing elite agendas instead of engaging marginalized communities in truly grassroots efforts. Given that national intermediary organizations are close to elite funders and disconnected from marginalized communities, they occupy an ambiguous position.

To my knowledge, there has not been any scholarly work that has examined national intermediary organizations and their role in social movements in-depth. Again, the current account is based primarily on the perspectives of those in local/state movement infrastructures; further research is needed to gain a more thorough understanding of national intermediary organizations.

**How Social Movement Organizations Get Funding in the NPIC**

Executive directors of nonprofit organizations are primarily responsible for fundraising. In this role, they interact with representatives of foundations to gain funding for their organizations. Individual leaders of social movement organizations can have agency in determining the amount and type of resources that their organization attracts (McCarthy and Wolfson 1996). This agency often takes place within and through nonprofit organizational structures, and is therefore both enabled and deeply constrained by those structures.

Multiple funders and social movement leaders I interviewed described there being an official and an unofficial process for organizations hoping to get grants from foundations. The official process is the ‘on paper’ process of applying for grants based on whatever criteria are put forth by the funder. In the OOC, submitting grant
applications and meeting grantmakers’ reporting requirements is a gargantuan task. In late 2014, the OOC and its member organizations were undergoing 41 separate grant application processes. Each grant has a different application and most require OOC staff to write detailed narratives, plans, and budgets in order to obtain funding. Then, once they receive the grant money, OOC staff must report their progress on working toward the outcomes they agreed to; this generally requires another written report and/or follow up conversations with program officers.

The unofficial process involves networking with foundation and national intermediary organization staff in order to be seen as legitimate recipients of funding within the nonprofit organizational field. It is important for organizers and leaders of nonprofit social movement organizations to develop and maintain relationships with program officers at foundations because they often have a decisive say in which organizations get funding. The executive director of the OOC, Kirk Noden, and other executive directors of OOC member organizations spend a significant proportion of their time and effort working to gain and maintain these funding relationships. I draw heavily on interviews with executive directors in this chapter.

Interviews with foundation program officers provided some insight into how funding decisions are made. It is common for program officers in large foundations to have a specific issue area that they make grants in. This allows them to develop expertise in trends and political developments related to that issue. In his interview, one funder described how he decides which organizations to recommend to his board to receive funding:
“A lot of what I do is about having relationships with a grantee and understanding them and their needs and their goals and how do they match our interests and my board’s interest... My belief, as a program officer now for 9 years, is that this really is all about relationships and knowing who’s running the organization, who is going to do the work and just having a feel for that and making sure that they’re really pursuing something that is of interest to my trustees.

The first thing for me is that if I’m going to give them grant money I need to understand their finances and what condition those are in... I think that that’s most important. So I look for do they have a diversity of funders and different kind of funders... That’s really important to me... because no long-term organization can survive with just one funder. So, that’s the first thing I look at, obviously I look to make sure that they’re in the black. Part of this job is really looking at the 990 Form and understanding it, making sure that everything is the way that it should be for the organization financially.

...On the program side: Is what they’re proposing make sense? Does the budget that they’re presenting for that make sense? What is their reputation? Can they actually get this done?”

This account is consistent with other funders’ descriptions. Funders have certain expectations and criteria that organizations must meet in order to be considered legitimate recipients of grant money. First, organizations must meet financial standards. They must be financially stable, and have the proper tax classification and paperwork. Funders also
want the organizations that they fund to have income from a variety of different sources; this criterion alone tends to favor established, professional organizations over emergent grassroots ones.

Another key factor is whether an organization’s agenda is in line with the interests of the foundation’s board of trustees. Thus, while organizations often apply for grants by proposing a project or campaign they have designed, their proposal is not judged on its own merits alone. How well the proposed project aligns with the foundation’s priorities also matters. As will be discussed below, social movement leaders are aware of this and often tailor their organizational agendas to what they know will gain support from foundation officials.

This quote also points to the importance of personal connections between funding officers and social movement leaders; an observation that was also present in other interviews with funders and social movement leaders. From a funder’s perspective, this personal connection helps program officers to more directly evaluate the leadership of the organization. This makes sense, given that all organizations strive to represent themselves well in written application materials. It can be hard for funders to determine based on those materials alone what the actual capacity of any given organization is. Thus, foundation officials are interested in learning about the reputation of an organization. For instance, one funder told me that he would ask state legislators how organizations are perceived by public officials to ascertain whether or not that organization realistically has the capacity to move a legislative agenda.
All of the requirements funders have of social movement organizations make sense from a funders’ perspective. Funders’ problem is that they must determine whether or not an organization 1) is financially viable; 2) will help solve a social problem of interest to a foundation’s board of trustees and 3) a worthy investment, an organization that can get the job done. The grantmaking processes, both official and unofficial, are set up to accommodate funders’ needs. Social movement organizations receive resources that are crucial to maintain their organizations and their work, and therefore also benefit from their participation in this process. However, raising funds in this way also places significant burdens on organizations and constrains their movement building capacity, which I will discuss further below.

**Issue-based Funding and Short-term Grants**

Most funding for social movement organizations is issue-based or program-specific, meaning that the funding is given for the purpose of achieving a particular aim, such as changing a specific policy. Issue-based funding thus has strings attached; foundations have expectations that particular outcomes will be achieved using the grant money. This can be contrasted with general operating grants, which can be used for any purpose. Most general operating grants that local/state SMOs receive are from social justice funders; it is extremely rare for large progressive foundations to provide local/state SMOs with general operating money.

The grants that social movement organizations depend on to survive also tend to be short-term; one year grants are very common. This means that if local/state SMOs
hope to survive, they must re-apply for funding every year. This encourages organizations to structure themselves to facilitate this process, for instance the OOC hired a staff person in 2014 whose main focus is facilitating the grant writing process for OOC statewide and member organizations; this is important given that the OOC collectively has to manage 40+ grants to cover its $2 million dollar budget.

One national intermediary organization staffperson summed up well the difficulty inherent in managing so many different issue-based streams of funding. She says:

“So one of our funders, for example, funds through different streams of work. Work on predatory lending, work on minimum wage, work on earned sick time and family leave, work on voting rights, and work on immigration reform. Well, the groups we’re working with do all of those things. So for them it’d be easier to get one big grant... Versus getting 6 streams of money from the same funder.

6 streams of money that all have deliverables attached, all have different timelines, all have different expectations because the funding officers aren’t talking to each other. And that’s just one funder. So us being dependent on that type of funding makes us contortion artists in a way. Because we’re just turning our selves inside out to figure out how to meet all of these timelines [and] deliverables.”

This national intermediary organization staffperson argues that it is difficult for organizations to manage multiple issue-based grants because each grant has different expectations and timelines and goes through different program officers. Organizations
that rely on multiple issue-based grants end up as ‘contortion artists’ because they must keep each funder happy to continue to be seen as a legitimate funding recipient. Since each funder has separate expectations and metrics and standards of success, this can quickly become a burdensome task that organizations must undertake in addition to actually organizing people and running issue campaigns. This staffperson points out that it would be more manageable for organizations to receive one big grant, but the way the system is currently structured does not require funding officers to coordinate with one another. This is one way that the NPIC is oriented to the needs of funders while placing significant and constraining burdens on nonprofit organizations.

The fact that most funding for social movement organizations is issue-based makes it more difficult for organizations to work on multiple issues at one time because adding more issues means juggling more grants and more separate relationships with funders. Even when organizations get multiple issue-based grants from the same foundation, they often have to manage each grant separately. Once a campaign is complete, the cycle then begins anew. Because most grants are short-term, organizations must plan and get funder approval for another campaign in order to maintain their organization and staffing levels. If a funder decides that they want to stop funding an issue area, which is a fairly common occurrence, then nonprofit organizations may find it very difficult to maintain the momentum they have built.

One executive director of a policy organization describes her experience with issue-based funding and short-term grants as follows:
“I would say recently just the changing environments in which non-profits are being pushed to function can be a little bit frustrating. There’s a lot of expectation that we’ll behave like businesses: we’ll be in this constant hustle. ... I think that increasingly there’s kind of a demand that you spend as much time selling what you’re doing as doing what you want to do. I think that can really be quite frustrating... So I think one of the ways that could be addressed by the funding community would be by giving more multi-year grants and more operational grants, instead of requiring that so much of the time of an organization be consumed by sort of getting the next dollar.”

This executive director laments the need to spend so much time “selling” her organization to foundations instead of being able to dedicate that time and energy to actually doing policy research and communications work. The widespread practice of one-year program-specific grants creates and exacerbates this problem because SMO staff must continually repackage and market their work to foundations and national intermediary organizations. Furthermore, the time that organizations must spend on fundraising is usually not taken into consideration by funders. This system gives funders tight control over organizational agendas because organizations must reapply for funding every year.

The funding cycle impacts the types of campaigns that SMOs are able to undertake and the amount of resources they are able to direct to those campaigns. If an organization reliant on foundations for funding wants to run a campaign but cannot get any funders to agree to pay for it, their ability to act is stymied. What funders are willing
to fund and how grants are distributed are thus key determinants of what nonprofit SMOs are able to accomplish. Funders’ priorities are likely a core influence on many social movement outcomes of interest to scholars. Funders influence whether or not nonprofit SMOs are able to run campaigns, which in turn impacts how many people are mobilized and whether policy changes occur.

**How the Non-profit Industrial Complex Impacts Social Movement Organizations**

In this section, I will explore further how the structure of the non-profit industrial complex constrains social movement organizations that rely on elite funding. I argue that:

1. Funders and national intermediaries have more power at the table than local/state social movement organizations; because of the power differential, social movement organizations must tailor their agendas to match their funders.

2. The priorities and agendas of foundations are a moving target and are not accountable to communities or the ongoing work of nonprofit organizations.

3. Social movement leaders must spend a lot of time and energy networking with foundation and national organization staff to be seen as legitimate recipients of funding.

   a. The difficulty of maintaining funding is exacerbated by the fact that organizations have multiple sources of funding and many grants are one-year, issue-based grants.
4. Organizers are in a constant struggle to meet funders’ expectations while remaining true to the ‘bottom-up’ mandate of grassroots organizing.

5. The structure of the NPIC makes it difficult for social movement organizations to collaborate with one another.

I will consider each of these points in turn.

**How the NPIC impacts social movement organizations.** A core fact of life for nonprofit SMOs is the power differential between nonprofit organizations and their funders. Funders have significantly more resources and nonprofit organizations are dependent on those funds for survival. This translates into power to set or at least influence the agendas of local and state SMOs. The policy organization executive director quoted above describes this dynamic in the following quote:

*I think more recently a lot of foundations have their own agendas and their own plans and their own desire to be part of the policy outcomes or to be full partners... But it can make things a little bit more complicated because they’re not equal partners at a table; they’re partners with a lot more power at the table. So there’s a real tendency to want to defer... I mean if there’s a funder in the room with an idea, nobody is going to say it’s a bad idea even if people think it’s a bad idea.*

*So if there’s a funder and they want credit everybody is going to want to give them that credit. So I think that there are awesome, terrific, amazing people working as program officers in foundations and enabling great work. Most of them are terrific partners, but I think that some of the ways that foundations have*
evolved have made things a little more difficult. Particularly, to the degree that foundations are changing their priorities really frequently, it makes it hard as a non-profit to fund a sustainable strategy.

In this executive director’s experience, foundations often have a ‘hands on’ approach where they want to participate in planning campaigns. However, this can put local organizations in a difficult position because there is pressure to conform to what funders propose, even if local leaders disagree on what strategy is best to pursue. Furthermore, foundations change their priorities, and this leads to pressure for local organizations to shift their agendas as well.

The points that the executive director made above about the tendency to defer to funders and the changing priorities of foundations are corroborated by two of the funders I interviewed. One program officer who works for a social justice funder says:

“It’s very hard to keep your feet firmly grounded in reality when you’re a funder because you’re always the smartest, prettiest, funniest person in any room because they want money from you. And so... it’s really hard to keep a sense of perspective.”

Some funders recognize the power differential and its pitfalls. This funder is aware of how people treat her differently because of the position she holds, and states that this makes it difficult for her to be “firmly grounded in reality.” It is worth noting that community organizers do hundreds of one on one relational meetings with people in marginalized communities, and thus are not detached from realities of life in poor and
working class communities. Another funder from a large progressive foundation also corroborated the point about funders’ influence:

“Well I mean there are all the pitfalls associated with being a funder. Undue influence, being too prescriptive, short-term attention span. The shifting winds and guidelines of a foundation. Those are all the kind of par for the course that come with being a funder and especially at a place as big as [large progressive foundation]. Yeah, I mean those are the ones that just come with the job.”

It is interesting how quickly and easily this funder is able to articulate these issues; in the interview it sounded like he was running down a written list, ticking boxes as he spoke. He not only pointed to his ‘undue influence’ and ‘being too prescriptive’ as pitfalls but also the ‘short-term attention span’ and ‘shifting winds and guidelines of a foundation.’

When foundations undergo transitions in leadership, they often restructure their funding priorities. This happened with one of OOC’s funders; the foundation got a new president and stopped funding organizing. This led to a budget shortfall that OOC leaders had to deal with to maintain their staffing levels. Even though the two funders quoted here are aware of some of the issues associated with the power differential, they are embedded in a structure that transcends their ability to overcome those problems as individuals.

Leaders must tailor their messages and agendas to what they believe will allow them to get grants to fund their work. To analyze this further, I draw on my interview with Doran Schrantz, who is the executive director of a community organizing coalition called ISAIAH in Minnesota. ISAIAH is a close ally of the OOC, and Doran often
fundraises with Kirk Noden, the executive director of the OOC. Doran and Kirk are both highly respected and recognized as innovative ‘thought leaders’ within the field of community organizing, and they have had an unusual amount of success fundraising within the non-profit industrial complex. Doran is a gifted communicator. In an interview, she shared her insights about the NPIC:

“There’s a certain set of incentives and disincentives inside that world. Some of which don’t help organizing move forward... The tail wags the dog a lot... I mean, you can watch waves move through it.

MO: Can you give me an example of what you mean by that?

DS: *pause* “The problem and the reason we’re losing as progressives is that we need a new narrative and there needs to be narrative work and ideology,” which may be true, right? But then, there’s a whole set of things that have to get funded like programs and projects about how we’re going to build progressive infrastructure... We have to have a set of think tanks, but then there has to be organizing- so it’s like this wave goes through, and then all this stuff gets funded. So what you’re doing as someone on the ground is you’re, like, looking, trying to anticipate the waves so you can be positioned in such a way that you can extract some small amount out of that wave to put towards organizing.

MO: And are the waves about issues?

DS: It can be issues or it can be ideas or it can be some particularly powerful program officer or funder has a ‘thing’ they want to do. It can be “everybody should be doing electoral work” or “everybody should be working on narrative”
and now we’ve got 8 national groups writing narratives that we’re all supposed to use... It tends to be very short-term, tends to be very buzzy. Foundations have a lot of temptation. It’s not just foundations- this world, this floating world... because they’re not grounded or accountable to what’s being built, they have a lot of temptations [to just] move on to the next thing.”

Doran observes that foundations get caught up in ‘waves’ or trends that may not have any clear relationship to the existing projects of social movement organizations. In order to obtain funding for her organization, Doran pursues a strategy of trying to anticipate the next trend and ‘positioning’ her organization to be able to gain funding. This means figuring out how to align her organization’s existing priorities with the evolving agendas of elites.

Doran characterizes the non-profit industrial complex as a “floating world” of elites; as an entity that is disconnected from local communities, grassroots leaders, and people who are most impacted by the social problems philanthropists are working to solve. The image that comes to mind here is of a zeppelin or blimp. Imagine that the people on the blimp (funders) regularly toss out sums of money for people on the ground to use. Most bundles of money have strings attached that keep people attached to the blimp, others do not.

One possibility for the blimp is that it could be tied to the ground (i.e. accountable to people in marginalized communities). If this were the case, the blimp’s tether would constrict its possibilities. People would be able to predict where it will be and gather
underneath to receive funds. People could build an entire city underneath the blimp that would be able to maintain itself through the resources provided by the blimp benefactors.

The other possibility (and the one that describes the non-profit industrial complex), is that the blimp is free-floating, a world unto itself. This blimp may have some ropes trailing down onto the ground for people to grab onto, but anyone who wants the money that is being tossed out needs to track down and chase the blimp. Then, once a person grabs on, they are dragged to wherever the blimp decides it wants to go. In this scenario, people are not able to settle down and build solid structures because they need to be constantly on the move.

This begs the question, is this a problem? Why should the floating world be tethered to the ground? After all, the individuals within the floating world are highly educated experts. Doran points out several ways in which the ‘floating world’ quality of the philanthropic sector is problematic. She argues that because the floating world is not committed or accountable to building long-lasting local infrastructures, it is tempted to only have a short-term vision and to quickly move from one idea to another. The problem is not necessarily that the ideas that the floating world works to implement are bad. The issue is that the ideas are not responsive to or grounded in the ongoing work of local organizations. This puts social movement organizations in the position of having to constantly figure out how to market themselves based on the changing priorities of elites. Instead of the smart ideas in the floating world being used primarily to support and enhance existing work, nonprofit organizations are forced to reorient themselves according to what experts decide is the most important thing to focus on. This makes it
very difficult for organizations to consistently build and sustain social movement infrastructure.

Thus, one of the central tensions that arises from social movement organizations being dependent on elite funding is the fact that ‘top-down’ professional staff-directed decision-making on which issues to pursue goes directly against many social movement organizations’ mission to empower grassroots leaders and work on ‘bottom-up’ campaigns. Stuart McIntyre, the executive director of the Ohio Student Association, articulated how he experiences foundations as disconnected from local work. He said:

So most foundations, they fund work based on issue areas, right? And as a result end up driving much of the work that the groups they fund do, because there is this power relationship where all of the practitioners are dependent on the resources, which the elites have and they can access... So they have to cater their agendas to meet whatever the foundation board decides. Oftentimes it is not something that actually builds power. I think that funding organizations and funding organizers would be much more effective than funding issues because it allows the work to be driven by organizations that are already effective and allows decisions to flow from the bottom and the people that are doing the work, rather than from the top.

One thing that I’ve always been struck by is the process of developing strategy, because a lot of the corporate and non-profit world are operating off of this military model of strategy. Some officers will decide ‘ok this is what needs to be done.’ They are the deciders and then their direct reports are the doers. So
when you have this separation between the deciders and doers, you’re in a situation where maybe the doers don’t want do what has been decided. So when the only decision makers in a non-profit are the board or a staff then you are in this process where you’re trying to get people to buy in to your plan.

This executive director argues that part of the structural problem is that funding is tied to issue areas rather than organizations or leaders. This means that the people in foundations, not people mobilizing on the ground, are the ones ultimately making the decisions about which issues to prioritize and address. He argues that it is the division between the “deciders” and the “doers” that creates this dynamic. This refers to the fact that the NPIC creates a system where professional staff-driven initiatives are carried out by grassroots leaders in marginalized communities. This division between ‘deciders’ and ‘doers’ can also be seen in the structure of the NPIC itself, where elites in foundations and national intermediary organizations are the ‘deciders’ and local/state SMOs are the ‘doers.’

The staff of local/state organizations (like the OOC) are often put in the difficult position of trying to sell to grassroots leaders a pre-existing, expert-vetted plan instead of being able to direct resources to working on the issues that are most relevant and urgent in people’s lives. One alternative would be for foundations to invest in organizations and let those organizations decide for themselves what issues to work on. In Stuart’s perspective, this would be more effective for the purpose of ‘building power,’ i.e. building social movement infrastructures. However, giving local/state organizations discretion over how grant money would be spent (by giving general operating grants, for
instance) would decrease the amount of control that funders have within the NPIC. Currently, few funders are willing to relinquish their power in this way.

**How the NPIC impacts social movement leaders.** Not only do nonprofit funding structures impact organizations, they also impact individual leaders. As discussed in Chapter 1, leaders are a crucial component of strong social movement infrastructure. Leaders do the work of organizing people and resources and directing them toward social change goals (Morris 1984; McCarthy and Wolfson 1996; Morris and Staggenborg 2007). Leadership structures and decisions impact how resources are allocated and what tactics are used (Martin 2007; Ganz 2009). Leadership teams that are diverse and that have relationships with the ‘rank and file’ grassroots base are able to develop strategic capacity that allows them to innovate and win against more powerful opponents (Ganz 2009). Thus, leaders’ time and energy is one of the most crucial resources that social movements require, and the institutional structures and cultures that leaders are embedded in impact movements.

One of the main ways that the NPIC impacts social movements is the fact that many organizers and social movement leaders spend a significant proportion of their time and energy networking within the NPIC. As discussed previously, executive directors of social movement organizations spend time developing relationships with program officers when they apply for funding. Goldstone (2009) captures this dynamic with an extended metaphor similar to the ‘floating world’ blimp metaphor above19. He argues

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19 I prefer the blimp or ‘floating world’ metaphor over Goldstone’s rainclouds one because the NPIC does not evaporate and disappear like clouds do.
that if foundation grants are “drops in the bucket” in terms of solving the vast social problems facing our society today, nonprofit executives are people running from one promising-looking raincloud to another, holding buckets over their head to capture whatever drops of water they can. He says of these executive directors: “They race out whenever dark clouds appear, at least until they’re so exhausted that they look for another line of work” (32). Goldstone is pointing to one of the major structural problems caused by nonprofit funding structures: burnout among nonprofit leaders. This was a recurring theme in my interviews and observations.

In addition to the time required to gain funding, grant recipients often encounter both formal and informal requirements for staff time spent at foundation-planned meetings and events. One executive director of a statewide faith-based community organizing organization described in his interview the demands he has experienced from foundations when he receives funding:

“The director must be at the following steering committee as a condition of the grant...” [One grant] required my time on steering committee, which then led to multiple other subcommittees. And it was an enormous amount of my time that was really either inferred or explicit about what was required if you were a part of this collaborative that came with the grant. I feel like that’s a lot of the way of the world especially around issue funding, transit, education, health care. There is a requirement of staff to be engaged in a very significant number of meetings... that is the nature of the nonprofit industrial complex today (laughs).
... I don’t know anybody that’s figured out a even 70, 80% funding an
organization that has the kind of level that has the collaborative movement
building work you have to do... that doesn’t take up an enormous amount of time
with the executive director in playing in that world. A lot of it is philanthropy
meetings, flying here and there, doing a workshop somebody wants you to do, [so
on and so forth]”

This executive director notes that amongst organizations similar to his (statewide
community organizing coalitions that engage in “collaborative movement building
work,”) it is common for executive directors to have to spend an “enormous” amount of
time networking with and meeting requirements of funders. This was the case for the
OOC’s executive director, Kirk Noden. During meetings of the OOC’s core team, there
were often discussions about their “campaign to liberate Kirk” from his fundraising
obligations so that he could focus on training organizers and building relationships and
coalitions with Ohio labor leaders and other key political leaders.

Not only does nonprofit fundraising require a significant time commitment from
organizers and executive directors, it also requires that those leaders enter into a culture
and incentive structure that is detrimental to building social movements. One executive
director I spoke with described what he calls the “perverse incentive structure” governing
nonprofit organizations and funders:

“I think that just in general most non-profits are organized into a
competition for scarce financial resources and most staff people have an incentive
to keep their jobs. Like when I first realized that I was allowed to lie for
fundraising, and that the reason was that everybody else was lying, that was really interesting to me.

...So let me just tell a hypothetical story. Let’s say that you run an organization and you are doing organizing around [issue]. So your funder is funding you for this and so they want to be able to make policy change on this issue. So you have a rally and you have like 20 people there, not a big turnout. If you put that you had 100 people, you would be lying, right?

But the program officer in the foundation that you send the report to actually has an incentive for you to lie, because they want the program that they’re funding to be successful so that they can move up in the foundation. So all the way up to the source of the money, there is an incentive to not give accurate information. So that is a pretty perverse incentive structure that doesn’t necessarily lend itself to really building power. So a lot of people get really good at producing fancy reports and making things sound like everything is great, but actually aren’t asking those tough questions about is this effective, are we really making change, could we be doing something better?”

This executive director illuminates a very interesting dynamic within the NPIC. One funder corroborated this, telling me, “We expect a certain amount of inflation [in reporting turnout numbers] because that’s what people do and we’re okay with that.”

Every actor in the NPIC has some incentive to exaggerate how successful and impactful a program is because individual career advancement is built on a track record of success. Perez (2007) sums up the “perverse incentive structure” well when she states: “The
reality is foundations are ultimately interested in the packaging and production of success stories, measurable outcomes... This resembles a business model in that the consumers are foundations to which organizations offer to sell their political work for a grant. The products sold include the organizing accomplishments, models, and successes that one can put on display to prove competency and legitimacy.”

The focus on promotion and marketing of one’s organization can cause organizations and leaders to emphasize only success and promote small victories so much that they lose sight of the larger picture: income and wealth inequality is still increasing, criminalization of people of color and mass incarceration still impacts millions of families, and no existing social movement is powerful enough to change these trends. The incentive to deemphasize setbacks does not allow for an honest conversation about how to build a movement to reduce inequality.

I return now to the interview with Doran Schrantz, executive director of ISAIAH. Doran and Kirk Noden have achieved a measure of success raising funds, however Doran sees success within the NPIC as a double-edged sword for social movement leaders:

“I’m of the opinion that there’s not going to be a significant, people-powered, independent movement funded by foundations. It’s just not going to happen. So, the challenge for the OOCs and TakeAction Minnesotas and ISIAHs is, we have to find a way to fund the work that is not so foundation-driven. It just-that thing that I just described [the NPIC] has its own momentum and its own set of priorities. Right now... the thing that’s depressing is that you take your... most talented organizers and all their strategic energy is focused on milking that thing.
And then, that thing can also defang you- turns you into a celebrity, turns you into a commodity. I’ve also seen that happen to people- they do really good organizing that becomes this big thing, like, they won [an impressive victory].

And then, you get positioned inside that whole system and then all of a sudden you could raise ten million dollars because you’re the new celebrity. So then you build a big national thing and now you’re a hustler. You hustle and broker. But the minute you float up into that thing and you get ungrounded from the base, you turn into something different. You’re still dependent on the base, but instead of it being an authentic relationship, you’re essentially buying it”

There are two key points in this quote. First, Doran points out that talented organizers spend a large amount of their ‘strategic energy’ on gaining resources from the NPIC. This represents a serious opportunity cost to social movement organizations. Organizers and executive directors spend significant time and effort strategizing about what grants to apply for and which funders to develop relationships with. They could spend this time and energy instead strategizing with local leaders, building relationships with political leaders in their state, and working to build social movement infrastructure. Instead organizers’ attention is directed upward, ascertaining elite agendas and figuring out how to frame their work to position their organization to gain funding.

Doran is also concerned by how the NPIC encourages social movement leaders to become detached from their base. Social movement leaders who achieve success often become part of the floating world instead of remaining grounded in their relationships with leaders in marginalized communities. Staff positions in national intermediary
organizations tend to have significantly higher salaries than positions in local/state SMOs; many community organizers view going to work for a national intermediary organization as a promotion, a way to grow their influence. Thus, talented and experienced organizers are encouraged by the structure of the NPIC to follow a career trajectory wherein they become progressively less connected to grassroots leaders and ultimately part of the ‘floating world’ of elites.

**NPIC makes collaboration difficult.** Many activists and scholars argue that it is critical for progressive social movements to overcome racial divisions and build connections among activists who work on seemingly disparate social justice issues (Duggan 2003; Roelofs 2003; Wood and Fulton 2015). Racial divisions have been exploited by elites to advance their political agenda of upward redistribution of resources (Duggan 2003; Alexander 2010). If talented people who want to fight for justice are kept occupied in separate domains within the NPIC, beholden to foundations for their continued livelihood, that is helpful to those who would be threatened by a movement focused on downward redistribution. A scattered and fragmented progressive social movement will not be able to gain enough power to counter the relative unity of corporations and elites (Domhoff 2006). A unified progressive movement where organizations work together across race, class, and issue area would be better equipped to counter entrenched elite power. This is the vision of ‘The Movement’ that activists and organizers often refer to and that they hope to build.
However, nonprofit funding structures often discourage durable collaboration among social movement organizations. Smith (2007), in the introduction to *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, articulates one aspect of this problem. She states, “As we become more concerned with attracting funders than with organizing mass-based movements, we start niche marketing the work of our organizations. Framing our organizations as working on a particular issue or a particular strategy, we lose perspective on the larger goals of our work. Thus, niche marketing encourages us to build a fractured movement rather than mass-based movements for social change” (10-11).

This quote reveals one of the core structural problems related to building social movements within the NPIC. In order to be considered legitimate recipients of funding, organizations must be very specific about what they are trying to do and what strategies they are pursuing. The structure of the NPIC and the grantmaking process discourages organizations from working on multiple issues at once. It is more advantageous within this system for organizations to have a narrow focus. This leads to segmentation by issue area and social change methodology\(^20\) within social movements. Not only that, but they must frame themselves, either implicitly or explicitly, as superior to other organizations.

\(^20\) The historical competitiveness of national FBCO networks with one another was likely caused or at the very least encouraged by the need for networks to compete with one another for funding. The divisions arose from this competition as well as differences in organizing methodology. While all networks draw upon the techniques of Saul Alinsky, there are variations. The methodological differences between networks appear small to outsiders, but those differences are often highly salient to organizers. Funding structures give organizers a compelling reason to argue for and believe that their particular methodology is superior to other similar groups. The animosity among community organizing networks is striking, given that for the most part community organizing coalitions have the same goals and very similar methods. However, instead of seeing the field of community organizing as a unified movement working toward the same goal, organizers are incentivized to view the field as a zero-sum competition, where the rising or falling fortunes of one’s own network vis-à-vis the others can impact their organizations and careers.
that funders could choose to support. Smith contends that this leads to a ‘fractured movement’ where organizations are more focused on niche marketing to gain funding than on building mass-based movements for social change\textsuperscript{21}.

Indeed, collaboration and solidarity requires that individuals and organizations recognize the collective benefit of aligning agendas and working together. This collective benefit is more difficult to discern when one’s career and livelihood is dependent upon coming out on top in a competition among similar organizations. Nonprofit funding structures obscure the extent to which organizations’ goals and methods are in line with one another by incentivizing staff of nonprofit organizations to focus on and highlight what is different and better about their organization. This makes it difficult for nonprofit organization staff to think in terms of building “the movement,” when their career depends on gaining funding for their organization.

This dynamic is not often explicitly acknowledged by nonprofit staff working to build social movements, however it is occasionally brought to the surface. While some funders cultivate intentional self-awareness and humility about their position of relative power, I also heard stories from social movement leaders about funders engaging in problematic behavior that undermined movement building. For instance, one national intermediary organization leader recalled a time when a funder made coalition formation and movement building more difficult:

\textsuperscript{21} See Chetkovich and Kunreuther (2006) pg. 58-61 for a discussion of how nonprofit leaders struggle with the tension between promoting their own organization and collaborating with others to build movement.
“This was a long time ago, but I remember actually at a [environmental movement coalition] meeting with a funder... the funder asked each coalition partner, so would you rather we fund you or that we fund this coalition?

M: With everyone else in the room?

J: Yes. (laughs)

M: What did people say?

J: ... The first person who answered the question said, you know, ‘Fund the coalition,’ was kind of noble about it. The second person said ‘Fund us,’ you know, ‘My organization should fire me if I don’t say us.’ It was kind of like, a bit tongue in cheek. Everyone really wanted both and emphasized that. That’s an example of one of the challenges.”

In this example, a funder encouraged organizations within a coalition to be openly competitive instead of cooperative with one another. Instead of framing the coalition as an important endeavor where organizations working toward the same goal can pool their resources and expertise, this funder directed the conversation to create a zero-sum game that pitted individual organizations against each other and the coalition itself.

Interactions of this kind can be harmful for coalition building, which is important for social movement campaigns. While it is difficult to determine how widespread these kinds of experiences are, it is likely that they have an impact on the formation and development of social movement campaigns and coalitions.

The NPIC impacts organizers’ ability to build local and statewide social movement infrastructure because competition over funding creates hard feelings and
strains relationships among nonprofit organizations with similar goals. I asked one organizer about relationships with organizations working on the same issue, who then expressed that those relationships were often tense:

*Organizer:* “[There were] a lot of things being said about me and the OOC. That we were just like a front for [corporations], which is just the craziest thing. If you even know anything about OOC, that just would never happen. And we actually had an executive director of another organization perpetuating those rumors.

*MO:* Really?

*Organizer:* Oh yeah. She was mad that I got funding and she didn’t.”

There were multiple instances in interviews where organizers referred to difficult relationships with allies and related the difficulty to competition over funding. Smith (2007) states, “The NPIC promotes a social movement culture that is non-collaborative, narrowly focused and competitive… this culture prevents activists from having collaborative dialogues where we can honestly share our failures as well as our successes” (10). The issues that the OOC is working on are huge problems; racial injustice and environmental destruction are not problems that will be solved by one organization alone. If organizations were able to build relationships of trust with one another, they would be able to pool resources including staff, financial resources, and knowledge and experience about issues, strategies and targets. Cooperation among social movement organizations is crucial for building social movement infrastructure and strategic capacity (Ganz 2009), however the structure of the nonprofit sector makes this difficult.
Unfortunately, this dynamic of noncooperation hurts those who would benefit most from social change. At the end of the day, elites in foundations want to be able to show their initiatives produce tangible benefit. Doing so reflects well on the company or family whose wealth is held in the foundation, and leads to personal satisfaction for foundation and nonprofit staff who sincerely want to make the world a better place. This is a very different set of motivations from the grassroots leaders that the OOC organizes. Poor people and people of color want their lives to be better; they want to have safe and healthy neighborhoods, access to opportunity, and freedom from injustice. They do not benefit from professional reports that exaggerate how much a nonprofit is benefitting a community. The emphasis on meeting elites’ demands for success stories undermines communities’ efforts to have real conversations about the daunting challenges they face. It makes it difficult to have a discussion about changing tactics that do not work, because for an organization to admit that they did not achieve their goal jeopardizes their legitimacy and future funding prospects.

Indeed, when everyone in an organizational field knows that their successes can be leveraged for more funding and their failures can be used as evidence that they do not deserve a grant, that discourages honest dialogue about what tactics are most effective for building power in marginalized communities. This is particularly damaging to movement coalitions’ ability to build strategic capacity. Strategic capacity is important for social movements, particularly ones that face more well-resourced opponents (Ganz 2009). Core to strategic capacity are the reflective practices and deliberative processes that leaders from diverse backgrounds engage in to identify creative tactics and solutions. If
leaders are not able to be honest with one another, if they always have in the back of their mind how their organization looks to funders, that severely restricts their ability to engage in the kind of reflection and deliberation necessary to build strategic capacity.

Not only does the NPIC foment competitiveness among organizations working on similar issues, it also encourages organizations and leaders to identify strongly with their particular issue instead of a broad-based movement for social change. Issue-based funding incentivizes organizations to focus on a single issue. In the case of multi-issue organizations like the OOC, being funded via involvement in national campaigns can influence organizers and activists to identify more strongly with the issue they are organizing around than with their multi-issue organizations. This creates segmentation by issue rather than unity across organizations that work to improve the lives of marginalized people.

Joy Cushman, national campaigns director with PICO, recognizes how funding structures contribute to divisions among progressive movement groups. Usually, to gain access to funds from national intermediary organizations, local/state social movement organizations must participate in a national campaign. Joy Cushman describes the racial segmentation that can occur as a result of organizers’ identification with issue campaigns instead of organizations:

So the history of these campaigns is good because it’s people in the organization fighting to move their constituents’ interest. But the result of it was then kind of siloing by race. So if you look at any one organization in PICO, for example, a lot of Latino staff might refer to themselves as C4C organizers, Campaign for
Citizenship organizers, and a lot of the black staff might refer to themselves as Live Free organizers rather than saying “We are Florida organizers, we work on all these issues.”

It is common for organizers to identify with the issue they work on; often this coincides with the identity of the organization they work for. However, community organizing coalitions affiliated with PICO are multi-issue organizations. Joy notes that organizers in PICO’s multi-issue organizations often identified with their issue campaign instead of their organization. She notices that the effect of this is to divide the organizations’ leaders and base along racial lines. This constrains the possibility of building the broad-based people’s movement because people are not building collective identity with one another as marginalized people. Instead, nonprofit professionals are encouraged to focus on and identify with one issue. This can make it difficult to retain leaders across multiple issue campaigns (Hart 2001). It can also impede collaboration among SMOs because leaders view their issue as the most important priority instead of shifting the power dynamic between elites and everyone else.

Joy acknowledges that national intermediary organizations, including PICO, are part of the system that incentivizes local/state SMO leaders to focus on issue campaigns instead of collaborative basebuilding work:

“In [community organizing coalitions] that have super strong directors who are clear about power... they are able to keep the base united through constant, constant relational work and training. But in states that have newer directors or smaller organizations that are really stretched, they end up in this
constant reactionary mode [chasing issues to keep their organizations funded], so it’s a challenge. How do we incentivize those leaders to do relational work?

...95% of our re-grant money to give to [local/state SMOs] comes through the campaign budget. So it sends the message to follow the money and not the word. It sends the message that what we care about are campaign outcomes.

What would it look like for us to give general operating money to some directors with the expectation that they are doing basebuilding work with that money? But could we... because we are funders in a way; could we persuade funders to give more in general operating money to create space for people to mostly focus on building and sustaining a big unified base, because the bigger and more unified the bases, the more power they have to move issues?

Joy observes that some community organizing coalitions are able to build a unified base through intensive focus on training and relational work. This includes bringing people together across region and race for training and action, using bridging cultural practices (Braunstein, Fulton and Wood 2014), and engaging in one-to-ones the relationship-building practices of community organizing (detailed in Wood 2002; Warren 2001). These activities are generally not directly funded by foundations and national intermediary organizations. Joy argues that funding organizations through single-issue national campaigns “sends the message that what we care about are campaign outcomes” instead of building social movement infrastructure through relational work.

The OOC deals with internal strain because the issue agendas of member organizations do not always overlap. Similar to what Joy observes above, the strain often
takes place along racial lines. This can become apparent when planning an organization-wide action or event. In 2014, OOC leaders planned to have a convening in January 2015 on the topic of criminal justice reform. Leaders from across the state were involved in the planning process, which was led by DaMareo Cooper, the lead organizer of the OOC.

At one December 2014 planning meeting at the Freedom Hub in Columbus (Summit UMC), these tensions came out into the open. White leaders from rural Ohio participated through their organization Communities United for Responsible Energy (CURE) along with mostly black grassroots leaders from OOC affiliates in Akron, Youngstown, Dayton, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland. About 35 people were present at this meeting; the purpose of which was to finalize plans for a January 2015 statewide event at the State Capitol in Columbus, OH.

There was some confusion during the meeting about the agenda for the January event. CURE leaders were confused about how their work fit into the agenda of the meeting. Someone had added green jobs to the official list of demands, which had not been discussed by the criminal justice reform team that was primarily responsible for planning the January convening. There was some tense discussion about this, with CURE leaders raising the question of whether environmental racism would be an issue addressed in the January event. The CURE lead organizer, a white woman in her 30s named Caitlin Johnson, spoke passionately about how the issues are connected; for instance environmental contamination in impoverished areas contributes to behavioral problems that lead to more people being incarcerated. It was clear after the discussion that some of
the CURE leaders in the room were frustrated and perceived that their issues were being sidelined.

The OOC organizers had a heated conversation about this over lunch. Caitlin was frustrated that the agenda for the January event had been set at prior meetings that she had not been told about. Her leaders had not had an opportunity to give input, which made it difficult for them to feel connected to and invested in the event. DaMareo acknowledged that internal communication in the OOC is a problem but he countered by framing the conversation in a different way. He said that to focus so much on what issues get addressed during a public meeting misses the big picture. He argued that the main goal is to bring people together, build relationships and connect everyone to a larger vision. When the whole group reconvened after lunch, DaMareo addressed the elephant in the room. I paraphrase his remarks below:

“We are in a marathon, not a sprint. If you go to where you’re from and get a bunch of people to come into this room and get exposed to ideas… this happens every time we put an agenda together, bring people together. Everyone says my issue isn’t on the agenda enough (sounds of agreement)… The enemy we’re fighting is not separate, it’s not like the people we’re fighting against are different… Any place we can fight them [rich people and corporations] is a benefit for our movement. Your issue might not make it into this thing, or it might not look the way you want it to look, but that doesn’t mean it’s going away. We need to figure out how to work together. I want to win. I want my son to grow up in a society where he’s going to get a good education, not go to prison. When it
comes to that, let's make something happen. January 22nd we got a chance to make that happen. I'm willing to stay here with you all and figure that out.”

DaMareo emphasized that the public meeting they were planning was one step on a longer journey. While people in different OOC affiliates have different issues they are passionate about, their targets are the same: rich elites and corporations that cause poverty and hurt communities. In DaMareo’s view, the primary purpose of coming together is not to advance a specific issue agenda but rather to strengthen social movement infrastructure. OOC organizers’ goal is to build the political capacity of marginalized communities, including white people living in impoverished rural areas and black people living in distressed urban neighborhoods. DaMareo points out that the way to accomplish this is by building relationships across race and geography, and by connecting seemingly disparate issues by pointing out that the underlying cause of social problems is exploitation by wealthy people and corporations. However, his explanation did not seem to satisfy all the CURE leaders in the room, some of whom did not participate in the second part of the meeting.

The example above shows that when marginalized groups are organized according to issue focus, this can make it more difficult for people from different communities to recognize their common interests. Issue-based funding encourages organizers and leaders to see a public meeting as the primary end in itself as opposed to seeing public meetings like DaMareo does, as a means to the end of building power for marginalized people. While OOC organizers prioritize basebuilding, that is not a primary goal of funders, who instead want to see measurable progress on specific policy changes.
This influences how organizers and leaders think about social change work and constrains the possibility of a broad-based movement combating elite dominance. OOC organizers have strong relationships with each other, they are able to overcome some of this difficulty. CURE organizers and leaders ultimately showed up and participated in the January event. In the next chapter, I will unpack more of the dynamics that result from combining issue-based funding with a community organizing ethos that prioritizes leadership development.

**Conclusion**

The channeling thesis (Jenkins and Eckert 1986) contends that elite funders ‘channel’ social movements in more moderate directions by funding professional SMOs with moderate goals instead of more radical groups focusing on organizing. Previous research has operationalized this insight by looking at whether or not organizations engage in disruptive protest (Cress and Snow 1996). The current study focuses on an organization that relies on foundation funding whose primary activity is grassroots organizing and that regularly engages in disruptive protest. Despite their focus on organizing and use of disruptive protest tactics, OOC organizers and their allies experience a variety of constraints related to their dependence on foundation funding.

Drawing on ethnographic data, I find that nonprofit funding structures entail that social movement organizations must shift their priorities and expend significant resources to meet funders’ expectations. Ultimately, working within the non-profit industrial complex distracts from and distorts social movement organizations’ mission to organize
marginalized people to create social change. Thus, simply asking whether or not an organization engages in disruptive protest or not is not enough to understand how organizations are impacted by funding from elites. There are a myriad of often subtle mechanisms by which nonprofit funding structures constrain mobilization possibilities in organizations that engage in protest and receive funding from foundations.

This account adds to previous research by showing how nonprofit funding structures form a ‘non-profit industrial complex’ that defines the universe that nonprofit social movement organizations inhabit and constrains the possibility of a broad-based movement led by marginalized people. The channeling thesis still has explanatory power: professional SMOs that focus on advocacy attract more funding from foundations than organizations that organize people in marginalized communities. The OOC faces isomorphic pressure to professionalize and behave more like an advocacy organization where staff experts decide the issues for grassroots leaders to work on instead of facilitating ‘bottom-up’ mobilization. One of the overall impacts of nonprofit funding is to divert leaders’ attention away from grassroots organizing and toward networking with elites.

This research points to several mechanisms through which social movement organizations and leaders are impacted by reliance on elite funding. These include: 1) issue-based funding narrows organizations’ focus and segments the base; 2) short-term grants mean that organizations must constantly be fundraising and this requires them to tailor their priorities to match their elite funders; 3) nonprofit SMOs make plans based on what they determine is likely to be funded; 4) social movement leaders are distracted
from grassroots organizing and encouraged to detach from marginalized communities, and 5) funding structures discourage collaboration within and among social movement organizations.

To conclude, the overall structure of the NPIC is fundamentally top-down; elites at foundations set issue agendas, determine criteria that organizations are evaluated by, and decide which organizations to support. Social movement leaders hoping to build a ‘bottom-up’ grassroots movement through this structure wrestle with meeting the demands of funders while remaining true to their mission to build broad-based social movements led by marginalized people.
Chapter 3: Issue-based Funding and Leadership Development

The primary goal of the OOC is to build progressive social movement infrastructure in Ohio to combat elite power and substantially reduce economic and racial inequality. A strong social movement infrastructure includes “diverse leaders and a complex leadership structure, multiple organizations, informal ties that cross geographic and social boundaries, and a resource base that draws substantially on contributions from their members for both labor and money” (Andrews 2001: 76). Leaders are the core of social movement infrastructure, they are the ones who do the work and build the relationships necessary to garner political influence.

One of the most significant obstacles that the OOC faces is the lack of political efficacy in marginalized communities. People are not born knowing how to organize and confront powerful institutions, and in fact there are forces working against marginalized groups being able to recognize their potential influence. Organizers in the OOC therefore see leadership development as one of their primary goals, even moreso than achieving policy wins. Saul Alinsky (1946), whose teachings form the basis of community organizing methodology, said, “It is impossible to overemphasize the enormous importance of people’s doing things themselves… The objective is never an end itself.
The efforts that are exerted in the actual earning of the objective are part and parcel of the achievement itself. It is all one continuous process” (192).

In this chapter, I will consider how the issue-based funding favored by the NPIC makes it difficult for organizers to prioritize leadership development. I start by discussing why leadership development is important: the neoliberal doctrine of personal responsibility has shaped the way that many people think about themselves and their communities. Then, I describe how the OOC constructs an alternative perspective that takes into account how capitalism, structural racism, and gender inequality are connected. I contrast the ideal vision of leadership development with the reality that occurs when organizers are confronted with conflicting demands from funders and leaders. Issue-based funding makes it incredibly difficult for organizers to prioritize leadership development. Black organizers, in particular, observe that issue-based funding undermines the organizations’ ability to build authentic, trusting relationships with community members. This is a serious problem for the OOC, it contributes to organizer burnout and threatens to undermine their mission.

**Neoliberalism, Intersectionality and the Battle for Hearts and Minds**

Elite rule requires the consent and support of masses of ordinary people. In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels famously wrote, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” They contend that the elite is compelled “to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society… it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.”
Thus, Marx and Engels argue that capitalist elites not only determine the dominant cultural values and standards, but also convince ordinary people that it is in their interest to support and advocate for those values. Ideas that, in truth, only benefit the elite are masked and promoted as ideas that benefit everyone.

Marx and Engels’ insight applies to neoliberalism, a set of economic and political assumptions that exalts the primacy of the ‘free market’ as the core societal ideal. Neoliberalism promotes entrepreneurship, privatization, and decreased restrictions on corporations. Neoliberal economists argue that pursuing these policies will result in generalized economic prosperity and social progress. Neoliberal ideas have been accepted as unquestioned truth among many elites and dominant institutions in US society (Duggan 2003). The widespread adoption of neoliberal thought has underwritten deregulation of corporations, globalized free trade, and privatization of a variety of public institutions.

According to neoliberal ideology, social problems such as poverty are caused by failures of personal responsibility on the part of individuals and families. The purported need to promote personal responsibility has been used to justify decreasing government spending on welfare and increased incarceration through the War on Drugs. These policy decisions have contributed to huge levels of wealth and income inequality and an unjust system of mass incarceration (Alexander 2010). All of this has led to a significant amount of economic strain and widespread dissatisfaction with the political ruling class.

Political theorists have identified neoliberalism as an increasingly dominant paradigm in all spheres of social life, not only politics and economics. This presents a
significant challenge to political agency on the part of ordinary people. Wendy Brown, drawing on Michel Foucault, argues, “neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities… and reconfigures human beings exhaustively as market actors” (31). Human beings under neoliberalism are not individuals with inherent worth, but rather “human capital.” Brown argues that this has devastating consequences for the ability of ordinary people to claim and have a meaningful voice in politics. Furthermore, “When the domain of the political itself is rendered in economic terms, the foundation vanishes for citizenship concerned with public things and the common good” (39).

Thus, community organizers are not only up against the wealth and political clout of corporations and elites in government; they are also fighting an ideological battle. One of their main goals is to develop bases of community leaders and activists that are committed to long-term engagement in politics and social movements. In order to do this, however, they must confront neoliberal ideology and its hold on the imaginations of ordinary people. People have internalized the neoliberal doctrine of personal responsibility, often blaming themselves for their own poverty or seeing the deterioration of communities as due to the personal moral failings of poor people and people of color.

DaMareo Cooper, the organizing director of the OOC, gave a testimony at OOC’s weeklong training about when he realized that ‘personal responsibility’ does not tell the whole story about his community. DaMareo is a tall, broad shouldered black man with dark skin and a booming voice. He is one of the most powerful and influential organizers in the OOC. He grew up in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Akron, colloquially
known as “The Bottom.” In a profile published in the Devil Strip (a local news blog in Akron) he describes his childhood, saying, “I was like everybody else. I ended up thinking I was gonna be a drug dealer, or, like, trying to be a drug dealer—I wasn’t very good at it. I just wasn’t. I was too nice, you know? Like, I would take somebody’s TV out of their house and then, like, take it back.” DaMareo was not temperamentally suited to a life of crime, but the lack of access to opportunity in his neighborhood led him to believe that drug dealing his most viable career option.

At weeklong training, in front of over 100 OOC grassroots leaders, DaMareo recounted why he chose to major in psychology when he went to college. He thought his family was so messed up, so many of his male family members were in prison, that he wanted to know what was wrong with them. It was a sociology course that made him realize that his initial diagnosis of his family as psychologically deviant was in error. He realized instead that society is built in a way that funnels people like him to poor neighborhoods and prison. DaMareo’s initial instinct to attribute the dysfunction of his family and his neighborhood to individual moral and psychological failures is not uncommon. Viewing individuals as solely responsible for their own poverty is promoted by neoliberal discourse that emphasizes individual failures as the source of social problems.

One of the primary ways that the neoliberal agenda is enacted is through elites emphasizing racial differences. It is well-documented, for instance, that Richard Nixon’s so-called Southern Strategy was an attempt to exploit white peoples’ racism to gain power (Alexander 2010). We are entering a period of ‘unsettled lives’ (Swidler 1986)
with respect to what racial differences will mean in the 21st century. This is indexed by
the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to police shootings of
black men, shifts in public opinion about mass incarceration, and protests on college
campuses about racial climate. Race was a defining issue in the 2016 presidential
election, with Republican candidate Donald Trump’s campaign using white resentment
and conflicts with racial and religious minorities to promote his candidacy. Trump
signaled his allegiance with white supremacists and promised to “Make America Great
Again,” a racialized message that resonates strongly with a significant part of the
Republican base.

The OOC occupies an interesting position as a multiracial organization that is
working to combat structural racism. Racial divisions can stymie progressive movements
by undermining solidarity and siloing the base, making it difficult to mobilize large
numbers of people across racial lines. Because of this, community organizing coalitions
have historically avoided engaging with issues of race (Osterman 2001; Wood and Fulton
2015). This ultimately meant that coalitions tended to address issues that were important
to white people (such as healthcare and education without a racial justice lens) while
ignoring issues that primarily impact people of color (such as mass incarceration, police
brutality). In multiracial organizations, there is a tendency for white dominance to go
unquestioned (Edwards 2008; Ward 2008). Because of this, white leaders and
predominantly white organizations on the left have come under heavy critique from
people of color for their avoidance of race.
The OOC and other community organizing coalitions are attempting to create frameworks for understanding race, class and gender that will allow 21st century social movements to meaningfully address inequality. Academic works, such as *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, have been influential in activist circles, illuminating the ways in which race is connected to capitalism and how racial injustice persists even after movements for change (abolitionist, Civil Rights) have been declared successful. Community organizing coalitions across the US are increasingly embracing an explicitly antiracist ideology with the aim of building long-term multiracial coalitions that can stick together to work on a variety of issues (Wood and Fulton 2015).

The Ohio Organizing Collaborative promotes a political analysis that connects economic exploitation through capitalism to racial injustice and argues that a massive social movement led by ordinary people of many racial backgrounds is necessary to achieve justice for poor people and people of color. One training workshop offered by OOC organizers that I encountered several times during my observations was a training asserting that capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy were three interlocking aspects of one overarching system of domination, the “Master’s House.” Training participants were encouraged to brainstorm about how this is the case. OSA organizer James Hayes led this training at the OOC staff retreat in 2015. OOC staff members worked in groups to list ‘rules’ that capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy make people live by. Rules

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22 OOC organizers cite this training as being adapted from a workshop offered by The Wildfire Project, an organization that provides training to grassroots groups. The Wildfire Project has worked with the Ohio Student Association to train student leaders. Traditionally, organizations in the field of community organizing only endorsed trainings offered by FBCO national networks. The OOC utilizes concepts and ideas from a variety of training institutes.
that many people have internalized, at some level, as true. The rules that the organizers came up with are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 5: Rules of the ‘Master’s House’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capitalism:</th>
<th>White supremacy:</th>
<th>Patriarchy:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• If you’re poor, it’s your fault</td>
<td>• White men make rules</td>
<td>• Men are breadwinners, women are caretakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Money makes rules</td>
<td>• Black people are dangerous</td>
<td>• Marriage is between a man and a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stuff is more important than people</td>
<td>• Good jobs for whites</td>
<td>• Men can’t cry, women are too emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Your value is what your own/owe</td>
<td>• Love stays within race</td>
<td>• Only white history matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greed is good</td>
<td>• Don’t challenge white authority</td>
<td>• Women’s value is based on how physically attractive they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Everything and everyone has a price</td>
<td>• Only white history matters</td>
<td>• Assertive woman = bitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Only a few people can be on top</td>
<td>• Proper English only proper language</td>
<td>• Women have more responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Our highest calling is as consumers</td>
<td>• God likes white people</td>
<td>• Women defined by ability to produce children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Everyone for oneself/trust no one</td>
<td>• White is beautiful</td>
<td>• Women’s issues are a special interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Convenience over community</td>
<td>• Non-white people are expendable</td>
<td>• Objectified and sexualized/discrediting women’s leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Moving and managing $ is the most valuable work</td>
<td>• Humanity reserved for white people</td>
<td>• Women make the world run but don’t run the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being poor is a sin</td>
<td>• White/black: Good/evil</td>
<td>• Men are the ones in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• White people set standards</td>
<td>• Men’s eyes (white men) define female beauty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OOC organizers believe that working to overcome these ideologies must take place on an individual, organizational, and societal basis. One black organizer remarked, “The reason you’re able to put this stuff [see above] on papers is because you believe it, you have it in you. It would be disingenuous to say that it’s outside of us, we are all still
working on this stuff.” This acknowledged that even people who view these ideas as false struggle with their internalized beliefs. Organizers were encouraged to think of how they could instead build the “People’s House,” a movement that embodies class, racial and gender equality that can build power and ultimately tear down the oppressive structures making up the Master’s House. This training explicitly asserted that progressive social movements need to address multiple dimensions of social inequality simultaneously.

In the OOC, racial and economic inequality was discussed much more often than gender and sexuality. However, during my observations, the OOC was starting to have intentional discussions about gender in addition to race and economy. For instance, at their annual staff retreat there were frank discussions about experiences of women in organizing; women shared their stories about being sexually harassed in organizing spaces, or not taken seriously in male-dominated settings. During this discussion, men in the room listened to women speak about the kinds of experiences women do not normally bring up among professional colleagues. There was also a tense discussion about how the experiences of white women differ from the experiences of black women. One black woman challenged the white women present to consider how black women are doubly disadvantaged by both gender and race. Thus, within the OOC gender inequality and its impacts on women are increasingly being acknowledged as important in addition to economic and racial inequality.

In addition to the internal organizational work described above, OOC leaders also challenged gender inequality through issue campaigns. When pursuing a campaign to
increase the minimum wage in Ohio, OOC leaders argued that they should include tipped wages based on how this issue impacts women. They argued that tipped wages are a way for employers to systematically pay women less for their work. Furthermore, tipped wages can create a scenario where women are must be sexually objectified and flirted with in order to get paid. They faced resistance from political allies, who argued that to include tipped wages in the campaign would provoke powerful opposition. Nevertheless, OOC leaders remained committed to raising tipped wages, citing the importance of addressing gender inequality in addition to economic and racial inequality. Thus, the OOC has incorporated intersectional analyses into its political campaigns in addition to its internal proceedings.

The preceding examples indicate that OOC leaders are collectively constructing a comprehensive critique of interlocking systems of race, gender and class-based inequality. Indeed, Duggan (2003) in her polemic critique of the political left argues, “Effective resistance to the culture war strategy of neoliberal economic, political, and cultural restructuring requires a vision of the significant links among various cultures of downward redistribution in a context of multiple, overlapping inequalities” (41). In this view, illuminating the role that race, gender and sexuality play in dividing people that have similar economic interests is crucial for the ultimate success of a progressive movement to combat neoliberal ideology its impacts on our economic and social structures. The OOC encourages its leaders to internalize an intersectional analysis of power and oppression in society.
**Issue Campaigns**

Most funding that community organizing coalitions receive is program specific, which means that it is tied to work on particular issues. Community organizing coalitions mobilize people to take action on local, state and national issues. They use both institutional and disruptive tactics. Organizers and leaders meet with public officials to gather information and to educate legislators. Leaders attend and speak at City Council meetings and hearings at the state legislature. Community organizing coalitions also engage in disruptive protest, including marches, rallies, die-ins and occupations. For instance, in 2014 The Ohio Student Association occupied the Beavercreek Police Department in response to the shooting of John Crawford III by a Beavercreek police officer. The OOC summarizes its successes in issue mobilization each year in an annual report that is prepared to communicate to funders and other interested parties what the organization has accomplished in the preceding year.

The stated goal of many funders that support community organizing coalitions is policy change on issues of interest to their trustees. When making funding decisions, foundation staff and boards must determine whether or not an organization has the capacity to garner policy wins. Thus, community organizing coalitions must demonstrate an ability to move toward and gain policy ‘wins’ on particular issues in order to obtain funding. Issue-based funding often takes the form of re-grants from national intermediary organizations. Access to these funds is contingent upon a local/state organization’s participation in a centrally planned national campaign.
OOC leaders do not think that issue campaigns are the most important work of organizers. Experienced organizers often put forth the view that mobilization on issues is merely a means to the ends of leadership development and building social movement infrastructure. However, as a nonprofit organization, the OOC’s fate is tied most closely to their ability to consistently move people into action on issues of interest to their funders. This structural reality presents difficulties for OOC organizers and leaders who have a broader vision of the movement they are working to build and the change they want to create.

One organizer, James Hayes, regularly expressed skepticism about the orientation toward policy wins among social movement groups. James is a black organizer with the Ohio Student Association. He is in his mid-20s and is impressively thoughtful and articulate. James is recognized as a leader in the Black Lives Matter movement; he was one of the young activists that met with President Obama in the wake of the Ferguson protests. Troy Jackson, the executive director of faith-based Amos Project in Cincinnati, invited James Hayes to speak at an Amos Project leadership convening. The audience James was speaking to was composed of mostly white middle-aged and older people who attend churches in the Cincinnati area. That James was the featured speaker on their agenda is an interesting example of how the OOC facilitates connections across racial difference in order to build a movement that includes many different constituencies working on a variety of issues.

While speaking to the church leaders, James expressed reservations about the vision of policy change embraced by progressive groups working for justice, saying:
“I’ve been thinking a lot about wins as it relates to this movement. All the things we’ve been talking about wanting, I’m not convinced are going to do much. All these policy reforms, cameras for police, citizen review boards… it doesn’t really feel like it’s going to do much. What I want is freedom. I know what I mean when I say it, I feel it, but it’s hard to say what that looks like in terms of policy.

In the movie Roots, there’s a scene where one of the older slaves is talking to Kunta Kinte, is talking about how he has pine floorboards and eats at the big house and he doesn’t want Kunta Kinte to mess that up for him. I feel like the wins we talk about are pine floorboards. It would be much nicer to have pine floorboards than a mud pit. That is better, but is it going to end slavery? It’s like if abolitionists had their campaigns be about limiting the number of lashes that people get. Even if you got rid of lashes, there’s still slavery...

I hate the term the Civil Rights Movement being put on that era, to me it’s one continuous struggle. It is the Black Freedom Movement. We’ve reached this point, what do we do now? The question then was the same now. What does freedom mean? Why is it such a difficult conversation to have?”

In the wake of protests in Ferguson, many progressive elites encouraged young activists in the emerging Black Lives Matter movement to translate their anger into concrete policy demands and focus on pushing those through. James sees this as a narrow and unambitious vision of social change that will not fundamentally restructure race relations. Nevertheless, operatives in the NPIC and the political establishment believe that working
toward identifiable, concrete policy changes is what social movements should be focusing on.

James expresses a fundamental dissatisfaction with the focus on winnable policy demands. He argues that garnering policy ‘wins’ of the kind that are attractive to funders will amount to little more than cosmetic changes from a big picture perspective. In fact, focusing on issue ‘wins’ as the primary objective actually serves to obfuscate and suppress the larger vision he thinks social movements should be advancing. Evidenced by the Master’s House training workshop described above, ‘freedom’ as conceived of by the social movement leaders in the OOC is inextricable from a fundamental critique of capitalism and how racialized and gendered oppression is deeply connected to economic structures. In this view, social movements that focus narrowly on issue campaigns and do not work to address larger social, cultural and economic issues that underwrite racial inequality will only make surface level changes. To use James’ metaphor, they will only get pine floorboards in the slave shacks while the institution of slavery remains intact.

James further asserts that to bracket the “Civil Rights Movement” as an historical movement with a particular set of demands that were ultimately met obfuscates the fact that black people in the United States have always been and are still fighting for freedom from oppressive conditions. As Michelle Alexander argues in The New Jim Crow, the systematic oppression of black people in the United States has not fundamentally changed, but rather has put on different masks throughout time. What James is pointing out is that a focus on issues and policy wins ignores the underlying fact that the actual causes of social problems like police brutality are deeply rooted cultural and economic
factors. Incremental policy changes may make small improvements but do not get at the heart of the issue: black people are subjugated by a combination of forces resulting from capitalism, racism, and gender/sexuality (Collins 2005).

In March 2015, DaMareo Cooper provided a diagnosis of the problem during a core team meeting, saying, “We’re not framing organizers as social change agents. We’re framing them as issue-based instead of having organizers that understand you build power and there are things you go through to build power. Campaigns matter but our focus [should be] building power.” Because organizers are often funded using issue-based grants, they can end up having a distorted view of what their purpose is. DaMareo argues that in the OOC, they do not understand the “things you go through to build power,” like leadership development, because they see the main task of organizing as running issue campaigns.

True movement victory as envisioned by OOC leaders requires a more transformational vision than a focus on issue campaigns alone would entail. However social movement organizations find it difficult to develop and implement ambitious visions given the constraints they experience in the NPIC. There is always temptation to define movement success in terms outlined by funders; in terms of organizational survival it is the path of least resistance.

Furthermore, being funded based on issues means that local/state social movement organizations must tailor their work to the interests of funders, which makes it more difficult for organizations to allow for ‘bottom-up’ surfacing of issues important to local communities. One key problem that the NPIC creates for community organizers is
that the issues of interest to funders are often not the same issues that interest ordinary people. This can put community organizers in a difficult position where the work they are being funded to do is at odds with the work that they and their grassroots leaders are most passionate about.

**Issue Mobilization and Organizers.** The negotiations related to issue mobilization create strain for organizers, who often feel as though they are being pulled in different directions by their various constituencies. One organizer confessed to me that the stress level was often enough to drive her to tears. She was helping to organize two simultaneous campaigns; one that was funded (a get-out-the-vote initiative) and another that was not (protests surrounding the shooting of John Crawford III). A different organizer said during a meeting that she felt she had to “sneak” to do work on the issue she is passionate about since the primary source of funding for her work was from a grant focused on another issue. This organizer said that working on the issue stipulated by the grant made her feel like a “fish out of water.” In general, organizers work very long hours and often need to run multiple issue campaigns at once in order to fulfill all of the organization’s obligations to funders and grassroots leaders.

The fact that grants are tied to issue campaigns can also make it difficult for organizers to prioritize leadership development and building social movement infrastructures. A training workshop during OOC’s 2015 staff retreat in Myrtle Beach, SC uncovers this issue. Doran Schrantz, the executive director of a faith-based community organizing (FBCO) coalition called ISAIAH in Minnesota was invited by OOC’s leadership to conduct some training workshops for OOC organizers. Doran is a
petite white woman in her early 40s who is extremely articulate and charismatic. She is recognized as a gifted organizer and executive director and, like Kirk, has cultivated a good reputation within the NPIC. In interviews with funders and national intermediary staff, it was not unusual for them to refer to “Kirk and Doran” as a unit because they are close allies who fundraise together, and they generally see eye-to-eye on many topics.

In fact, Doran Schrantz’s training about leadership development described above came about as a result of core team discussions about staff organizer development. It was determined that most staff development in the previous 2 years had focused primarily on skills not directly related to organizing. Instead, they worked with consultants who focused on helping the OOC become a stronger nonprofit organization. OOC staff had participated in trainings on building trust, different working styles, managing email and giving effective feedback. When evaluating organizers’ job performance in 2014, the OOC core team decided that they should be providing organizers with more training in organizing craft and basebuilding. Ultimately, they decided to invite organizers from ISAIAH\(^2^3\) to conduct training workshops at that year’s staff retreat instead of the nonprofit organization consultants that had been core to previous retreats.

One training session was focused on building a grassroots base and how organizers should go about developing grassroots leaders to be part of their base\(^2^4\). Early in the training, Doran asked the assembled organizers about their experience with the

\(^{23}\) They also invited an African American organizer from New York to join the retreat and conduct organizing training but he was unable to make it at the last minute due to his flight being cancelled.

\(^{24}\) I use Doran’s trainings to illustrate these concepts because she does a good job of articulating and distilling organizing principles that I saw throughout my data. Core team members, in particular, are well versed in these ideas and they invited Doran to train OOC organizers because they wanted to reinforce these principles.
campaign to defeat “SB5,” which was a bill that would have crippled public sector unions in Ohio. The OOC led the allied outreach effort for that campaign, which was ultimately successful in preserving public sector unions in Ohio. She asked the organizers how many people participated in that campaign. Kirk responded that during that campaign 10,000 volunteers collected petitions. Others chimed in with figures from other events during that time; there were 1000 people at a public meeting in Youngstown, a mass meeting of 25,000 at the Ohio statehouse.

Then Doran said, “People were in motion at mass scale so you won.” A pause. “What just happened in your last election?” Here she was referring to the 2014 midterm elections. The organizers in the room responded that there was record low turnout, people did not show up to vote, progressives lost ground in legislatures, and the Republican incumbent Governor Kasich was reelected. Doran continued by saying, “They (the people who volunteered and showed up at rallies during the SB5 campaign) were not captured into anything that they owned. People skated across the surface and went back to their old ways. The 10,000 volunteers had no place to go after that was over. There was no sustained power. Building that sustained power is your job.” At this point she paused, and the tension in the air was thick. “You are the organizers, this is your job. This was the OOC’s job. So what happened?” Again, a tense silence. She continued: “This is your job, building base… If you do not have a base, you will continue to lose.”

The implication here is that even though the issue was won, the OOC failed to utilize their involvement in the SB5 campaign to build and sustain a base of grassroots leaders that could be called upon again for elections and other issue campaigns.
According to standards commonly employed by funders, the SB5 campaign was deemed a major success. However, using the standards of community organizing, the fact that people were not “captured” into a base represents a failure to capitalize on an opportunity to strengthen social movement infrastructure\(^\text{25}\).

Doran concluded by saying, “Organizers forget what their job is all the time. We get distracted by all kinds of stuff. There’s sexy stuff out there. We run around the Capitol, we get sucked into a campaign, we get caught in our own egos” Coordinating an issue campaign is exciting work that often involves rubbing elbows with influential public figures and being in the news. Doran argues that the whirlwind drama can in fact be a distraction that makes organizers forget what their true job is. She points out that it is possible to work on an issue campaign in ways that do not build a lasting base of grassroots leaders. It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of an issue campaign, even seeing it as a means for personal advancement, instead of focusing on the painstaking work of putting grassroots leaders at the center of the work.

One organizer commented that she found herself often doing tasks instead of delegating to leaders amidst the stress and pressure of running an issue campaign. It would take longer to teach a leader how to write a press release, for instance, than to just do it herself. Being consumed by issue campaigns and seeing issue ‘wins’ as the end goal of organizing can prevent organizers from dedicating their time and energy to

\(^{25}\) This failure to translate SB5 mobilization into a robust grassroots base was in part due to a decision by some union leaders to not use the data gathered during the campaign, (e.g. the list of volunteers) for organizing purposes. The OOC did not have control over this, and OOC leaders discussed this as a lesson learned to make sure that they owned future lists. This was part of the motivation for the OOC’s attempt to lead a minimum wage ballot initiative in 2016, which I discuss in Chapter 4.
leadership development. If organizers do not focus on leadership development, then they risk becoming professional advocates that work ‘for’ rather than working ‘with’ grassroots leaders in marginalized communities. Indeed, the structure of the NPIC encourages this kind of relationship between nonprofit staff and their constituents. The funding structures that the OOC is embedded in constantly incentivize organizers to think of issue wins as the primary goal of organizing and mobilization. This will be discussed further in the next section.

**Leadership Development**

Leadership development is a multifaceted undertaking within community organizing coalitions that is intended to introduce ordinary people to public life and cultivate long-term commitment to activism and organizing. Prior research has discussed how leadership development works in community organizing and its importance (Warren 2001; Wood 2002; Stout 2010). Leadership development in the OOC includes political education, learning organizing skills and techniques, and mentorship and reflection during issue campaigns. Throughout, leaders are asked to take on increasing amounts of responsibility within the organization. The leadership development process also encourages people to develop activist-leader identities that underwrite long-term commitment to social activism (Oyakawa 2015).

Leadership development is where community organizing coalitions take on the third face of power (Lukes 1974). The third face of power is elite domination that is so institutionalized and embedded in social structure so as to basically be invisible. It is a
concept that captures how social structure impacts people in ways that they may not be aware of. The third face of power in contemporary US society can be seen in: 1) the unquestioned dominance of neoliberal ideology in public discourse and individuals’ consciousness and 2) the lack of political efficacy that runs deep in many communities, particularly low income and minority communities, and is reflected in low voter turnout and political participation.

At its root, the third face of power is about how people are convinced to be silent and not speak out against injustices they face. One reason this happens is that many people do not have the facts, concepts, and language to make sense of their situation as resulting from social structure. Therefore, people under economic strain are likely to default to the dominant view that frames their situation as a result of individual failings. Another reason that people are silent is that they do not feel that they are able to meaningfully impact their environment. For instance, Annette Lareau writes about how working class children develop a ‘sense of constraint’ from an early age (Lareau 2002). This sense of constraint is seen in fear of authorities and institutions and lack of willingness to ask questions and confront officials.

The OOC’s program of leadership development confronts the third face of power in the following ways: 1) Political education that reveals the social structure of racial and economic inequality and encourages people to call into question the neoliberal assumptions that underlie political and economic institutions; 2) Mentoring people through experiences of confronting dominant power structures during issue mobilization. I will discuss each of these aspects of leadership development in turn.
**Questioning neoliberal assumptions.** The OOC challenges ordinary people to discard an individualistic interpretation of the problems that they face in their lives and instead adopt a more sociological analysis. OOC organizers provide people with alternative analyses based in analyzing how power acts upon people at a structural level. Their analyses are informed by an intersectional critique of capitalism, structural racism, and patriarchy as shown in the Masters’ House/Peoples’ House training described above. In this section, I will provide several examples of the OOC’s political education from my observations.

One of the OOC’s major undertakings is their low-propensity voter program. The definition of what a low-propensity voter is can vary, but they are often defined as voters who have voted in some presidential elections, but have not voted in midterms or local elections. The OOC’s goal is to mobilize voters in low-income, predominantly black communities while at the same time giving people opportunities to become involved in local issue work led by community organizations. The OOC hires additional organizers to train and deploy dozens of door-to-door canvassers during election season. They hire canvassers who are from the neighborhoods that are being targeted and provide them with political education and organizing training. OOC organizers identify canvassers who have talent and passion for organizing and encourage them to remain involved after the election season. The OOC’s involvement in electoral politics will be interrogated in more depth in Chapter 4.

The low-propensity voter program is funded by the Center for Community Change (CCC). The funding is connected to an experiment (led by Dr. Hahrie Han) that
examines whether programs run by organizations like the OOC are impactful and cost effective compared to canvassing programs run by for-profit vendors. CCC is a national intermediary organization that is both a funder and an ally to community organizing coalitions in the NPIC. CCC and the OOC hope that the experimental results will bolster their argument to foundations and political donors that voter programs run by community organizations are a worthy investment. Funders are primarily concerned with whether a program is cost-effective and whether it results in measurable impact on voter turnout. This focus on short-term, measurable outcomes does not take into account how the canvassing programs develop grassroots leaders and help build social movement infrastructures.

The door-to-door canvassers in OOC’s civic engagement program in 2014 took part in a training workshop led by DaMareo Cooper, an African-American organizer who is the most influential organizer in the OOC. As described above, he has a commanding presence; he is over 6 feet tall and is a very charismatic speaker. When DaMareo speaks about the injustices he has experienced in his life and that he sees being perpetrated in poor black communities, his anger is palpable. The vast majority of the canvassers attending the training were black people that live in the communities being targeted by the program. This is part of how OOC’s electoral program differs from traditional get-out-the-vote efforts. Usually, door-to-door canvassing is done by for-profit contractors who do not reside in or hire from the communities they canvass. In the 2014 training,

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26 I began working with Dr. Han to collect qualitative data as part of this study in Fall 2015, after I had completed data collection for my dissertation.
canvassers were not only taught about how to do their job, but they were also presented with a critical analysis of power in society.

Early in the training, DaMareo showed a Power Point slide similar to what you might see in an introductory sociology class, showing how productivity in the US has increased but wages have remained stagnant. He said, “The thing that we’re told is that we’re lazy. During slavery, slaves were called lazy and they were doing the most work!” He continued, “People would have us believe that that’s just the way it is. But these are decisions that are being made.” He then showed a slide with statistics about wages going down. After explaining the statistics, he said, passionately, “Those are our wages! These aren’t just numbers, this is your life!! While we busy blaming kids for the problem, while we busy blaming other people for the problem, this is what happens for real.” Here DaMareo is outlining a position that discards individualistic explanations for community problems (e.g. people being “lazy”; “blaming kids”) in favor of explanations that take social structure into account.

DaMareo stressed that inequality is the result of people making decisions; it is not like the weather, it is not an inevitable fact of life. This emphasis is important for a few reasons. First, it is more impactful in terms of eliciting emotional responses that can motivate people to take action. Instead of “this just happened to me and my family,” the frame becomes “X person/corporation did this to me and my family.” “The water supply is polluted,” versus “public officials made decisions that led to my family drinking polluted water.” Also, emphasizing the contingent nature of the decisions made provides room for agency and change; if someone is deciding to do things one way that benefits
corporations and the wealthy, ordinary people can build power and exert influence to ensure that different decisions are made in the future.

A similar analysis was presented to grassroots leaders at OOC’s annual weeklong training. This training is an intensive introduction to organizing. Since they started conducting their own weeklong training workshop in 2010, hundreds of leaders have participated in the OOC’s weeklong training. On one of the first days of training, DaMareo Cooper and Troy Jackson (executive director of the faith-based Amos Project) led a plenary session entitled “The Story of Ohio” where they presented an analysis of the political context in Ohio. This analysis included slides showing statistics about the unequal distribution of wealth, mass incarceration, and the political context in Ohio. The two organizers each told a personal story about economic hardship to connect their stories to the political analysis, a practice that is common in community organizing (Oyakawa 2015).

One slide in this training showed a map of the congressional districts in Ohio, which are heavily gerrymandered in ways that benefit Republicans. DaMareo made the point that Republicans are in power in Ohio and argued that the way the district lines are drawn is “not an accident,” that Republicans redrew these lines to benefit themselves. He said, “Don’t feel bad if you didn’t know this already, but make sure that you start learning it!” He continued, speaking with great passion to the point where he was yelling, “This is purposely not taught to you, you’re not supposed to understand this! This is how they control us! People have been taught that they’re stupid if they don’t understand! You’re not crazy, this is crazy (pointing to the map)!"
Here, DaMareo is unmasking the third face of power. He argues that people are encouraged to be complacent and to consent to elite domination, they are not given important information about how power works. Poor people and people of color are systematically excluded from opportunity; their education is substandard and they often lack the social and cultural capital to gain entry into the circles of power. Conversely, white people from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are able to use their education, technical knowledge, and decision-making power to write rules that reduce others’ representation in government. Then, when people turn away from the political process because they sense it is corrupt, they are defined as stupid or lazy by the political establishment and blamed for their lack of political efficacy. DaMareo is both affirming people’s generalized sense that the political system is rigged and problematic, while also agitating them to “start learning” about how they are being taken advantage of so that they can put an end to it.

Another slide showed a color-coded map of Ohio detailing how people are extracted from urban areas and put into prisons located in rural counties. DaMareo told the training participants that the map shows how the racialized social structure established by slavery has not been transformed. He said, “Bodies are taken from one place and repurposed for economic purposes in other places.” Resources are allocated based on people “stolen.” So when people are taken from inner-city Cleveland and put in prison in a rural area, the representation and resources that would have gone to Cleveland instead go to a rural county. DaMareo also connected this to the issue of public schools versus charter schools to illustrate his point. He said, “In our education system, money
follows children. Each child has a certain amount of money per year that follows them through the system. In Akron, one guy who runs charter schools made $1 billion from this system. Even if a charter school is shut down in disgrace they still get the money.”

The narrative is clear: Elite actors make decisions that benefit themselves and consolidate power and wealth while at the same time robbing low-income communities of resources they desperately need. Furthermore, issues that are often viewed as separate in the NPIC, such as education and criminal justice, are described as closely connected to one another.

Thus, emphasis is not placed on needing to fight for one particular issue, instead the issues are presented as interconnected, with several common threads. One of these is that racial oppression is driven in large part by economic factors; capitalism and structural racism are intimately connected to one another. I witnessed multiple organizers drawing this parallel in a variety of settings; many of them are familiar with and influenced by Michelle Alexander’s analysis in The New Jim Crow. Also, organizers emphasize that a variety of social problems (that the OOC is addressing through separate issue campaigns) are the result of wealthy elites using their political influence to consolidate their power and gain more wealth. Another common thread that runs through this narrative is that marginalized people can influence outcomes on these issues by organizing and voting.

The plenary session concluded with DaMareo giving a passionate speech, saying, “This is not a game. In the coming years whether or not we have collective bargaining in Ohio is going to be decided. We came down here to build a social movement.” DaMareo

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27 He is referring to David Brennan.
was angry, shouting, “[The people in power] won’t stop! It took them 30 years to get the [share of wealth at the top] going back up. They haven’t forgotten their plan, it’s been the same plan since the very beginning!” The OOC frame is that the political power of the wealthy and corporations are the drivers behind decisions and policies that impoverish people and marginalize them politically. When DaMareo was giving this speech, there was so much emotion in the room that tears came to my eyes. He concluded by saying, “Stand up if you’re in!” And everyone in the room, an auditorium full of people, stood.

The preceding examples demonstrate that political education in the OOC discards individualistic explanations for social problems in favor of explanations rooted in social structure and a critique of elite power. Organizers encourage people to view the current social structure as the result of decisions made or influenced by wealthy people and corporations working to protect and advance their interests. Also, OOC leaders present an analysis that emphasizes the interconnectedness of issues and social problems, as opposed to viewing issues as separate from one another.

**Mentoring people through leadership experiences to build a base.** The OOC also utilizes issue campaigns to develop grassroots leaders. This requires that organizers actively work to mentor, support, and challenge leaders through their experiences confronting dominant power structures. To discuss this further, I will return to the training conducted by Doran Schrantz (executive director of ISAIAH in Minnesota) at the OOC staff retreat.
Doran defined a grassroots base as “A network of leaders who are in relationship with one another, have their own followings.” Thus, by this definition, a grassroots base is made up of a social network of interconnected leaders, each of which has their own contacts they can mobilize. A chart outlining the characteristics of a grassroots base was written up on a flip chart: it is collective, it can be moved, it is consistent, and it is disciplined. Doran painted a picture of a grassroots base as a collective of hundreds or thousands of people that can be consistently counted on to show up to meetings, events, rallies, and protests. Over time, she argued, this forces public officials and others in power to take the organization’s demands seriously.

The premise of the training was that way to build a grassroots base is to prioritize leadership development. Doran encouraged OOC organizers to prioritize thinking about, “Who are my projects? Who are the people that I’m trying to change and convert into this path?” Thus, in this view, organizers should view the development of community activists and leaders as a core part of their work. Doran drew on her own experience when she started organizing, saying, “When I first started organizing I thought there would be Martin Luther Kings in the congregation.” This preconception was quickly dispelled when she was confronted with the reality of the people that were available for her to work with.

Doran acknowledged that it is easy to get frustrated and it can be tempting to write people off as hopeless. She said, “Leaders don’t exist. They are made. That is your job. Not to write them off.” Organizers should not have an expectation that they will encounter people in communities who already have a sound political analysis and
who already know how to organize. Instead, they should be prepared to teach people those skills and mentor them. Doran said that in her case, one leader that started out as a “whiny victim” became “a stalwart warrior for the organization, can turn out 50 people from her church consistently… is raising $5000 in hard cash for the organization and getting in the face of the police chief.” Leadership development is thus about personal transformation, where ordinary people become effective leaders in the organization.

In this training, Doran spelled out for the OOC organizers what leadership development looks like in action. She posited leadership development as a process whereby people go from being disempowered victims to agents of change. She used an example from her organization to illustrate what the process looks like in action. She said,

“This is not about a road to Damascus moment. It’s not one encounter, it’s a whole host of things. How is everything you’re constructing, every meeting, every action, every space, everything is actually focused on [leadership development]? How is the campaign constructed so that all these people have this experience?

I just agitated an ISAIAH organizer because she was going to go meet with an author of a bill by herself. I told her, ‘You just had 300 people in candidate forums that engaged 21 legislators and you don’t have anyone in your imagination that you would bring with you?’ The organizer said, ‘They’re not ready.’ I asked her, ‘What about Beth who got in the face of that Republican legislator? Why isn’t she in the face of Rep. Perry in that meeting?’
conversation I’m going to have with 2 pastors and Beth before the meeting?

What am I going to teach them about themselves and about power?...

[Then, during the meeting with the legislator] you’re watching Beth and Reverend Brown, and how they act. And you come back out and you say to the Reverend, there was a moment when he started to do pastoral care, ‘Who did you sell out when you did that? You gave pastoral care to the legislator who wants to cut people’s benefits? Why did you do that?’ That’s an evaluation. Do you see what I’m saying? Everything in the organization should give people this experience. What will start to happen is they’ll start to do it to one another...

That’s when you have a collective, a base, and people who are leaders.”

This example shows how a key part of leadership development is about mentoring people through their experiences of taking political action, encouraging them to take risks, and challenging them when they falter. Organizers can be mentors by observing people’s behavior and coaching them to be more effective. They do so in part by challenging people to reflect on how they act in situations where they are confronting power, whether that is in a meeting with a legislator, a public meeting, or a protest action. Premeetings and evaluations before and after meetings and events are key sites where organizers practice this mentorship. A good organizer in this framework does not try to control people or direct them to execute a plan perfectly. Instead, she should help people understand what they are capable of, then unleash them on unsuspecting elites. Doran encouraged OOC organizers to think about and incorporate mentorship into all their meetings, actions and campaigns.
Issue campaigns are therefore not only about winning on the issue, but also creating learning spaces for people to learn about power, specifically they react to it when it acts upon them and how they can wield it themselves. In the example Doran provides, the organizer challenges a pastor who abandons the contentious stance the organization wishes to take on the issue and instead comforts and provides ‘pastoral care’ to the legislator. Part of an organizer’s purpose is to ensure that grassroots leaders stay on mission and do not allow themselves to be manipulated by savvy political operatives. Importantly, leadership development is not framed as an optional side project for community organizers. It is their central mission, even moreso than advocacy on particular issues.

Late in the training, Doran said, “If you want to hang out with people who know what they’re doing, go to a foundation, be a lobbyist, hang out with electoral politics people.” This is a telling statement. People in prestigious nonprofit institutions and electoral politics are generally highly educated experts and professionals. Ordinary people do not arrive at organizing as “Martin Luther King Jr.’s” Organizers who are accustomed to and prefer professional meetings among well-educated experts may have a difficult time wrangling disgruntled community members who are angry and emotional about the serious issues impacting their lives. Organizing is a messy process. Sometimes leaders have personal issues or emotional habits that make effective political participation difficult. Many people feel intimidated about the prospect of speaking in public or creating tension with powerful institutions and elected officials. The job of the organizer is to create collectives of people who all understand what they are doing, why they are
there, and who are committed to working toward a goal together through taking risks in public.

In an August 2014 interview, DaMareo Cooper articulated how he views his job as an organizer, providing insight into how he approaches leadership development. I quote him at length below:

“To be truthful- I’m angry. And I don’t think there’s enough social spaces for people to be like righteously angry. And I think like until people create those spaces, there won’t be opportunities for us to see our collective anger and experience it as a group...

And this idea that real people got the information and we don’t have to depend on the professors like you... or a professional organizer like me or all this shit that comes with titles. It’s like, people who are experiencing all this pain understand it, they’re the experts. Like our mission is around like getting those experts into rooms together so that they can like decide what they wanna do.

...I like when people who are written off like show up to the party. You know what I’m saying? Like the people who are forgotten and not talked about. Like the “non-cool kids”... When they show up to the cool kids party and just start fucking shit up...I mean when you get a bunch of poor people together and march them into a Walmart and shut the Walmart down- I love that! When you have a poor mother, single parent with like four kids sitting down having a conversation with Sherrod Brown. I love it because how often does that happen? These are things that I love this work for, it’s like redefining spaces. Belligerently.
...I think the most challenging part is being patient through the process of people having to come to their own self-discovery. No matter how much shit you put in front of somebody, until they understand it they don’t understand it. Even though they saying they understand it- they don’t know until they get to the place. Because like people live in so much shame that there’s so many layers blocking their ability to like live in a dignified way. You know and there’s all these obstacles in the way. It’s like people put money in front... They may get like some gold chains or sit down and play video games for the rest of their lives. All these things are in front of moving towards their own dignity.”

Part of an organizer’s job is creating spaces where people can express their anger and see that they are not alone, there is collective anger shared by many people with similar experiences. This can happen in a variety of contexts, including community meetings, training workshops, or one-on-one meetings. Experiencing righteous anger as a group can be a powerful experience that help bring people out of their feelings of isolation and shame. Then, an organizer takes that anger and helps to direct it constructively, convening meetings and gatherings where people can use their expertise about their own experiences to create collective goals and strategies.

DaMareo makes a point to emphasize the fact that professionals and people with fancy titles are not the ones with the necessary information and expertise to figure out what needs to be done to solve social problems. This is a core belief of community organizers, that people who are directly experiencing the impacts of inequality have the best insight into what kinds of interventions are most necessary in their lives. Organizers
help lead poor and “forgotten” people into action, which redefines political spaces that are generally dominated by elites. DaMareo enjoys this, but also makes a point similar to Doran’s about how frustrating it can be to mentor leaders through these experiences. People often have bad habits and layers of mental and emotional obstacles that stand in the way of them being effective leaders. DaMareo observes that people often “put money in front” and try to carve out an identity through consumption, which reinforces the very system that is oppressing them and hurting their community.

As both Doran and DaMareo articulate, organizers create spaces where people are able to learn about themselves and about power. This is an emotionally taxing process, it is not unusual for people to express strong emotions and cry during organizing meetings and trainings. Organizers encourage people to acknowledge their pain and anger, recognize that they are not alone, and then deal with those emotions by expressing themselves through collective public action. Then, once people have had the experience of confronting power and redefining spaces, organizers encourage and challenge leaders to reflect on their work. The ultimate goal is to get to a point where the leaders themselves are in the habit of mentoring and challenging one another and bringing new people into the fold. When a collective has formed that is disciplined and consistently moving into action, that is when an organizer has been successful in building a grassroots base.
How the NPIC Undermines Leadership Development

In the previous sections, I outlined how leadership development in the OOC ideally includes 1) political education that challenges neoliberal assumptions about society and 2) mentoring people through experiences of taking political action. While these activities are core to the mission of the OOC and many other community organizing coalitions, they are usually not directly supported by funders. The goals and metrics that funders use to evaluate organizations and decide which ones are worthy of funding generally do not acknowledge leadership development as a primary goal. Funders measure a group’s effectiveness by how many people they mobilize and whether they are able to obtain policy wins. The OOC’s leadership, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with whether or not organizers build a base by developing strong grassroots leaders. These two goals are somewhat complementary in that leadership development and building a base can be achieved in part through issue campaigns. Still, the mismatch between the OOC’s goals and their funders’ goals remains and has serious consequences for the organization.

At the first OOC all-staff meeting I attended in May 2014, the staff had a discussion about how to bring leaders into the organization’s strategic decision-making. Kirk told the assembled organizers, “Leaders need to have more power to determine the direction of the organization.” Part of the idea behind the August 2014 OOC leadership convening described in the Introduction was to jumpstart the process of making the OOC less staff-driven and place more emphasis on allowing leaders to provide direction. Throughout my time observing the OOC, they struggled to turn this vision into reality.
There was a moment during Doran Schrantz’s training at the OOC staff retreat where this issue came to the forefront. Nadia Garnett, an African American woman and staff member of Center for Community Change (CCC), raised a question about the issue of trust in poor and black communities.

Doran: You are going to have incredibly high expectations of what [leaders are] going to do and deliver, and they’re going to love it... that’s how you build an organization. That’s how you unleash people. You don’t control them, you unleash them.

Nadia: Folks feel used. The man is coming to help poor black people. How do we get around some of that where there is not trust? People have been used, there is a trust wall. They may want to move from victimhood, but they don’t trust.

Doran: There’s no one single solution to that, especially when you’re operating in a context that has been burned. The organizational culture, the relationship I just described is an equitable one. It’s not about getting you to do something so we can get a bill passed. It is about relating to each other as equal human beings. I’m agitating you to lead, it is your organization.

While organizers emphasize the importance of having grassroots leaders in the driver’s seat, this is not always the case in practice. Nadia brings up a crucial point; people do not want to be used to fulfill someone else’s agenda. However, in the NPIC that dynamic is unavoidable for organizers who want to meet their obligations to funders.
Grassroots leaders are often not the central decision-makers about what issue campaigns to pursue, and this is a serious blow to the OOC’s authenticity. It is incredibly hard, perhaps impossible in some cases, to build trusting relationships with people in communities when organizers are asking them to work for free on something that a funder wants. There is a huge difference between asking a leader to work on an issue campaign that funders have chosen and asking them to support an agenda that they have created themselves. The intended relationship between organizer and leader is that the organizer should support leaders in doing what they want to do. The NPIC distorts this, which presents a direct challenge to organizers’ ability to credibly say that they are not there to ‘use’ people.

One notable trend in the interview and observation data is that black organizers and leaders tended to be the ones who brought up concerns about paternalism, not bringing leaders into the decision-making, and bias in favor of college-educated professionals within the OOC. Their standpoint (Collins 1986) as people of color made certain aspects of the NPIC harder to stomach. The NPIC reinforces elite dominance, and part of what that means is that it reinforces white supremacy. The interviews and observations indicate that organizers of color felt the strain of this structure more acutely than did white organizers and leaders.

When I asked Nelson Pierce, a black organizer with the Amos Project, what the OOC’s weaknesses were, he raised the issue of hiring standards for organizers. He said:

“I think the next set of challenges for the OOC, and I think it’s one that we’re beginning to address and hit head on, is how we are as an organization dealing
with not the theory around race, class, and gender, but actually like the practical issues around it. So how are we attentive to how that impacts our hiring decision and our willingness to invest in staff? One of the things we’ve realized is that in the back of our minds somewhere we’ve had a pre-requisite that you have to have a college degree to be an organizer... What does it mean to qualify for this job? [Is there] a common set of standards? You know, you have to have a college education, good contacts, those type of things. As opposed to valuing somebody who, instead of being politically connected, is actually connected to a group of people in our base and has the trust of the people to organize them... So how do we value those sets of skills and those histories at least equally with things like having a college degree?”

Nelson was concerned that the OOC’s hiring standards often seemed to be more reflective of the priorities of a professionalized nonprofit organization rather than a grassroots movement for social change. This is a very important issue because it gets right to the heart of the elite dominance the OOC is trying to fight. Who can be a leader? According to organizers, ordinary people make the best leaders because they have experiential knowledge and community connections. In the floating world of the NPIC, leaders have advanced degrees and political connections. Nelson wanted the OOC to deprioritize these indicators in favor of hiring those who have “the trust of the people,” which would make them effective organizers.

I also asked Trevelle Harp, executive director of NOAH in East Cleveland, what he thought the OOC could do to improve. Like Nelson and Nadia who raised concerns
about trust above, Trevelle is black. His organization, NOAH, is a member of the OOC, but their collaboration is limited primarily to training. His answer illuminates several factors that make it difficult to develop leaders and build social movement infrastructure using funding from foundations.

“I think – and this is me speaking from the outside because I really don’t know at this point- but I think, having tangible things happening in community. Having deep, intimate relationship. Because initiatives can’t be dictated by philanthropic support, or funders, where the money is at. I think for it to last, and be good, and not put a bad taste in people’s mouths, I think it has to be long-term. It’s not a short-term sort of like transaction. I mean for instance – I got a call from [an OOC organizer] who wanted to see if I could bring some leaders to [an event for a funded campaign]. Although [leaders] may care about [the issue that the funded campaign is about], that’s not the first thing on their minds, that’s not what makes them wake up. What makes them wake up in the morning is that the community is falling apart and that kind of thing. Really connecting to that. But, I mean yeah because I guess some of the frustrations I had back when I was more involved was like on the dime I’d get a call saying yeah- we need leaders for this. And I can only charm them by my charisma for so long, right?

...Like for instance, Hank who just called. I’ve been after him for a while. When I first met him I was trying to tell him how to build power city-wide, not even state-wide... And he said, ‘But on my land we have young people -and if you
could get the young people just to pick up the garbage, man we can get people like the street club. I’m just worried about my land.’

It took me a long time. I finally acquiesced and said ok, let’s get a thing organized on your street. So, I helped him get a street club and then he was able to see the bigger picture. But, like not until then. And not only that, but he trusts me, too. And in return, I trust him as well. He’s the one who brought me 20 seniors who meet in my office every Tuesday.

Trevelle makes some very compelling points about how funded campaigns undermine trust. In order to build trust with community members, organizers ideally should meet them where they are. Funded issue campaigns make that difficult because organizers are under pressure to turn out leaders to events. The issue campaigns that the OOC pursues are always in line with their mission to contest elite power, the event Trevelle was referring to above was about holding a corporate entity accountable for harm they were doing to many people in the state. But, as he says, even though his leaders may genuinely support the OOC’s position, that issue is not “what makes them wake up in the morning.” Asking people to show up and devote their time, unpaid, for an issue that they only care about a little is transactional, and if organizers do this too much they risk leaving a “bad taste in people’s mouths.” Thus, the NPIC encourages organizers to behave in ways that undermine their ability to build trust with the people they are trying to organize.

Like Doran and DaMareo describe above, developing leaders can be a long, difficult, and nonlinear process, and Trevelle’s account of his work with Hank illustrates
this. He could not get Hank on board with the usual organizer talk of “building power” in the city because Hank’s focus was closer to home. Instead of giving up on Hank, Trevelle decided to meet him where he was at and organize a street clean-up. This was a bit of a departure from his normal work because it was a very small-scale action that did not seem to be directly related to building political power. However, Trevelle used the clean-up as an opportunity to show Hank the possibilities that organizing and collective action could open up. Also, the gesture that Trevelle made in helping Hank get his street cleaned up led to a foundation of trust for their relationship. This investment in Hank paid off for Trevelle’s organization, because Hank is a community leader who has a base of at least 20 people that he can get to show up to a meeting.

Organizers often try to jolt people out of complacency by challenging them, making brutally honest judgments about their behavior (e.g. “Are you going to spend the rest of your life sitting there playing video games? That would be sad, you are capable of so much more.”) Then, they offer a different path (e.g. “Didn’t it piss you off when City Council closed down the rec center? We are having a meeting to figure out a plan to fight back. We need your help.”) This is a practice that organizers refer to as agitation. A necessary prerequisite for effective agitation is a strong relationship built on a foundation of trust between the organizer and the leader. The NPIC makes it difficult for organizers to build that kind of relationship with community members. OOC organizers struggle to create experiences like Trevelle did for Hank because they are stretched very thin with meeting demands from funders. The next section will discuss this tension.
Organizer Burnout: A Side Effect of Building Movement in the NPIC

One notable exception to funded issue campaigns within the OOC in 2014/2015 was the work that the organization did on mass incarceration. OOC organizers spent a lot of time and energy on this campaign, organizing a statewide lobbying day in January. There was a peculiar interaction during a summer 2014 strategy meeting that illuminated the often confusing game that organizers must play to work on the issues that their leaders are passionate about. This meeting took place from 10:00-4:00 in a space owned by an arts co-op in Columbus; about 20 people were present. The team working on this issue was newly forming, and the structure of how decisions would be made across regions and organizations was unclear. Late in the day, there was a discussion underway about which leaders would represent their local area in statewide strategy calls where information would be shared and decisions made.

During this discussion, an older white man (“Frances”) asked the organizers, “Who is the ultimate authority here? Who is deciding stuff?” After a few moments of tense silence, the lead organizer, DaMareo Cooper, began by saying, “I’m going to be straight with you.” He said that decision-making power about what campaigns to pursue would rest with grassroots leaders from various regions. However, “in terms of the organization that brought you here and bought lunch today, I am the one who is responsible for the outcomes of this campaign. I am the one accountable.” Frances then asked DaMareo if he was being paid to do this. DaMareo’s responded by saying that there is no significant source of funding for this work in particular and that all five of the OOC staff organizers in the room were actually being paid to do different things. He said
there was some funding for their work from a national campaign called Lifelines to Healing run by PICO (a national faith-based community organizing network), but that money was not enough to pay for even one paid organizer in the room.

When grassroots leaders’ interests do not match up with existing funder priorities, organizers have to figure out how to fulfill their contrasting commitments. On one hand, their mission as organizers building social movement is to empower ordinary people to take collective action based on their self-interest. Most organizers take this seriously and therefore they are committed to pursuing issues of interest to their grassroots base. On the other hand, organizers have significant obligations as employees of a nonprofit organization funded by grants from foundations and national intermediary organizations.

What leaders care about the most may not be immediately legitimized by experts as a strategic intervention or investment. Prior research has shown that philanthropic funding for organizations in the Civil Rights Movement was spurred by indigenous grassroots mobilization (Jenkins 1986). This leads to a situation where in order to obtain funding for their work on an issue, organizations must demonstrate that they have capacity in and understanding of the issue area at hand. However, in order to obtain that capacity and expertise, organizations are often on their own and must fit in research and work on a new area amongst their other obligations to funders. This is a structural problem that leads to strain for local grassroots organizations. In this case, the OOC was expending a significant amount of resources on organizing around ending mass incarceration without a dedicated funding stream to that issue area.
This strain leads to excessive workloads and burnout among organizers on OOC’s staff. Rebecca Soldan, a friendly white woman in her 30s, was an organizer with MVOC during 2014. She was personally connected to the issues the organization was working on because she had struggled with drug addiction and spent some time in prison. I asked her what MVOC could do to improve, and her answer provides insight into how working within the NPIC creates conflicting demands for organizers that can lead to burnout:

*I don’t know. I think sometimes, I feel like sometimes we’re a little scattered… sometimes the things that are coming down from OOC [the statewide organization] tend to distract us from the local work of MVOC [the Youngstown affiliate of the OOC], if that makes sense. Not that it’s not important, but there’s sometimes directives that are kind of guiding our work [rather] than our work springing from a more organic place. That results in me feeling a little more scattered and stressed out and then that can sometimes cause a chain reaction of being behind on planning. And then, so leadership being involved in planning doesn’t happen because it has to get done quickly. And then it ends up, you know, with less leader buy-in because of it. So workload, I guess, is sometimes a complaint I would have.*

Similar to other interviewees, she expresses frustration with needing to meet the demands of funders. Also, like the organizer in Doran’s training above, she finds herself taking shortcuts when it comes to involving leaders in the work for the sake of getting tasks accomplished more quickly. Organizers in the NPIC are caught in a bind. They are
supposed to develop leaders but this is difficult when they need to simultaneously meet the demands of funders as well as the demands of grassroots leaders (who, after all, are told that the organization is theirs). All of these conflicting demands led Rebecca to be “scattered and stressed out” and to feel strained by the workload placed on her. Ultimately, Rebecca left her job at MVOC before the January 2015 retreat. Core team members believed that burnout was part of what led her to that decision.

Rebecca’s experience also points to another danger inherent to building movement in the NPIC. The OOC consistently risks becoming just another layer of the NPIC, another piece of the floating world instead of an organization that represents ordinary people.

Conclusion

The goal of leadership development is to make marginalized people dangerous to the elite powers-that-be. The OOC works to transform ordinary people into activist-leaders that are willing and able to stand up and challenge entrenched power structures. They do so by connecting people’s lived experiences to an analysis of the social structures that lead to poverty, marginalization, racial segregation, and political disempowerment (Oyakawa 2015) and by mentoring and coaching people through their experiences of taking political action. Even though their funding is based upon their issue work, OOC organizers insist that their primary focus is leadership development and building a grassroots base to contest elite power. They combat internalized neoliberal ideology through political education and teach marginalized people skills that allow them
to effectively contest and negotiate with elites. In order to do this, however, they must confront and overcome isomorphic forces that encourage and incentivize them to discard or deprioritize this part of their mission.

However, organizers’ dual commitment to funders and to grassroots leaders comes with a hefty price. Joan Roelofs (2003) argues that one way philanthropic foundations help maintain capitalist hegemony and elite dominance is by integrating “into their networks persons who are ambitious, or who threaten to lead counterhegemonic movements. They can accomplish this by offering funding, positions, legitimacy, access, and even social events” (199). Kirk Noden is respected by funders, and has been quite successful in gaining funding from foundations. However, in order to do this, he has to spend a significant proportion of his time among elites in philanthropy and national organizations, which means sacrificing his ability to be involved in the day-to-day running of the OOC. This is a significant cost to the OOC. It also carries the consequence of Kirk and other executive directors in the OOC being more distant from grassroots leaders.

This raises a question: at what point does an organizer cease to be connected to and representative of a grassroots base and instead part of the elite floating world? This is a question without a clear answer, and there were many indications throughout my observations that that tension weighs heavily on Kirk. At the August core team meeting he said, “That foundation bubble can be a bubble. You get insulated because people keep telling you how great you are.” At one point he lamented, in a rare display of anguish, that he did not want to get to a point where he “believed his own hype.” Kirk has a very
good reputation among funders, and when surrounded by praise it can be hard to maintain perspective. Organizers and nonprofit executive directors who spend time in the floating world can risk becoming detached from their base, seeing the world from an elite perspective. In the OOC, there are some protective mechanisms against that given community organizers’ commitment to a populist political logic. However, it would be risky, perhaps even foolish to assume that anyone is immune to the charms of accomplishment and prestige among elites.
Chapter 4: The OOC and Elections

In 2016, Hillary Clinton unexpectedly lost the US presidential election to Donald Trump. Political experts were stunned. Trump had done everything wrong according to their conventional wisdom. He had directly insulted and mocked vast swaths of the US population, including women, disabled people, and racial minorities. A videorecording where he admitted to sexually assaulting women was uncovered before the election. He started and escalated unnecessary feuds with sympathetic public figures, including a Latina former Miss America and a Muslim Gold Star family. Trump’s campaign spent less money than Hillary Clinton’s campaign and did not have a strong ‘ground game’ or professional operation to mobilize people. In general, Trump and his campaign were seen as incredibly unstrategic by the political establishment. Yet he won.

Many essays and thinkpieces have been written in the wake of the 2016 election, a wide variety of postmortem analyses. Most of these agree that the Democrats lost in part because their candidate failed to connect with people. In particular, there has been a lot of discourse identifying a disconnect, even hostility, between liberal elites living on the East and West Coasts and working and middle class people in ‘Middle America.’ White working class people that voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012 voted for Trump in
2016. There was low turnout amongst people of color and young people, both key Democratic constituencies. The results of the 2016 election deeply challenged the conventional wisdom about what ‘works’ in politics, and left the Democratic Party reeling from their unexpected loss.

We can learn about our democracy from the experiences of organizations that prioritize the interests, voices and leadership of ordinary people. In this chapter, I draw on the OOC’s experience in electoral politics to show that a top-down managerial approach to politics is very influential within the NPIC, particularly progressive foundations that fund social movement organizations like the OOC. The Democratic Party and the political ‘establishment’ have embraced a model of reliance on elite expertise. This is often prioritized at the expense of listening to and engaging with constituents. The conventional wisdom about political mobilization favored by the Democratic political establishment has a strong influence on foundations and the consequences of this reverberate throughout the NPIC.

There are two ways to look at the OOC’s electoral program, both of which contain a measure of truth. One is to view it as a program funded, designed and controlled by white elites, implemented with disproportionately white leadership in low-income black neighborhoods. Thus, organizing and mobilization in black communities is being monitored and controlled by elite entities far removed from the low-income communities they are serving. These programs are designed according to a technocratic political logic where social scientists and political experts design canvassing operations according to their priorities. Thus, the canvassing addresses priorities that are
determined by primarily white elites and these agendas may not seem relevant or even make sense to the OOC’s purported constituency of ‘ordinary people.’ This has a detrimental impact on the OOC’s ability to build trust in communities and strengthen social movement infrastructure.

Another way to look at the OOC’s electoral program is to recognize that Kirk Noden and sympathetic allies within the NPIC have found a way to invest in building social movement infrastructure in areas that were not being invested in or organized prior to this work. Kirk has orchestrated an influx of resources into low-income predominantly black communities with the intention of giving them some space and autonomy to build organizations and political power. While the program is not perfect, it is an attempt to create change through navigating the world as it is. Another way of phrasing that is Kirk uses his race and class privilege and ability to navigate the NPIC to garner resources and create some space and resources for people of color to organize. The staff of the OOC who can navigate spaces dominated by upper-middle class professionals absorb some of the demands of funders in the NPIC. This creates space for black organizers to organize poor people in the neighborhoods they are working in.

Both of these views are supported by theory and data. To say that only one or the other is accurate would be to unfairly reduce the complexity of the situation. There are several key factors that I uncover here: 1) The assumptions that the Democratic Party relies on to design its election campaigns prioritize engaging middle class white people, who are considered “likely voters.” This is a self-fulfilling prophecy that disempowers people of color and low-income people and encourages public officials to prioritize white
middle class interests over other groups; 2) The electoral industry operates according to a technocratic political logic where the focus is on messaging to passive consumers and creating political strategy at the top rather than inviting people in to build a movement or a party; 3) The political ‘establishment’ resists leadership from outside of itself that prioritizes marginalized constituencies. The OOC is trying to do something different, to build and exert political power on behalf of the poor and people of color, but the organization is deeply limited in what they can accomplish by their reliance on foundations for funding. The limits of the OOC’s power were very apparent in their failed attempt to run a minimum wage ballot initiative in the 2016 election.

**Managed Democracy**

Skocpol (2003) asserts that the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s ushered in a “reorganization of national civic life” wherein professionally run advocacy organizations proliferated while civic organizations with active members became less prevalent. In the US, membership associations were instrumental in the creation of impactful social programs that helped millions of citizens. For instance, the American Legion wrote, advocated for, and ultimately helped to pass the GI Bill, which provided educational and financial benefits for millions of veterans. However, with the advent and rise of professional advocacy, civic organization membership has declined.

Skocpol found that the strong civic associations of the past were not started by spontaneous grassroots organizing in local areas. Instead, it was “nationally ambitious leaders—bold and visionary men and women who launched and spread the great
voluntary federations” (47). Local chapters were generally established after national and state leaders had already set up the framework of the organization according to a central vision. These organizations often mirrored the federated structure of the US government (Skocpol, Ganz and Munson 2000). This is interesting for a couple reasons.

The OOC, in some ways, follows the model of civic organizations described by Skocpol. An enterprising leader, Kirk Noden, has established a statewide organization and built a team of other talented leaders that run local member organizations; this could be seen as analogous to creating ‘chapters’ of a civic organization. One major difference, however, is that the OOC relies on outside funding from foundations to pay staff organizers, instead of being run largely by volunteer leaders and funded by dues and donations like the organizations Skocpol profiles. This leads to some limitations in the OOC’s potential as a vehicle for democratic expression; the OOC’s voice is not completely the voice of “the people” but is influenced by elite priorities. The OOC’s internal struggle reflects the overall professionalization of politics and shift toward elite control of political expression in the US.

Political theorist Sheldon Wolin (2008) writes cogently about this in Democracy Incorporated. Wolin argues that the United States government is dominated by elites who prioritize corporate interests over the public good. Furthermore, the practice of politics is controlled by experts who are trained in social science and policy. These experts view citizens as “respondents rather than actors, as objects of manipulation rather than autonomous” (132). This brings about a “managed democracy” in which corporate power and culture are core to politics and citizens are marginalized and managed by
anointed elites who go through the proper channels (e.g. elite schools, political parties, corporations, think tanks) to gain power.

Foundations are an integral part of this system. They support the think tanks where policy proposals are written and finance a wide variety of political causes and projects on both the right and the left. Foundations are similar to both the electoral industry and the corporate world in their commitment to a technocratic political logic, whereby technically trained professional experts determine the correct means and ends of political action.

Although the boundaries between social movement activism and electoral politics are often porous, the sociological literature exploring the relationship between social movement organizations and elections is surprisingly thin (Heaney 2013). Perhaps this is in part because of disciplinary divides: traditionally sociologists study social movements and political scientists study elections. There are, however, several studies that examine this topic. Blee and Currier (2006) found that many informal social movement groups viewed elections as antithetical to radical change and therefore eschewed involvement. How to approach elections was a source of conflict in several groups. McAdam and Tarrow (2010) identify several ways that social movements and elections are connected, including the use of movement mobilization strategies in electoral politics, the use of local elections to further movement aims, and the use of ballot initiatives. All of these are present in the data described below. Also, Fisher (2012) describes how the Obama presidential campaign further blurred the lines between movement activism and electoral
politics, particularly for young people. She notes that there is a need for further research on the interconnection between social movements and electoral politics.

Andrews (1997) examined elections in the south after the Civil Rights Movement and found that work to build social movement infrastructure is associated with more black candidates and elected officials. This research shows that social movements can have a measurable impact on elections for decades because the local infrastructure that is built for movements can also be used for elections. He calls this “election mobilization infrastructure.” The data presented below corroborates Andrews’ findings; the OOC builds and utilizes social movement infrastructure and this infrastructure can be mobilized for elections as well as issue campaigns.

Thus, while many experts agree that we live in a managed democracy largely controlled by elites, social movements appear to be one mechanism through which ordinary people can build electoral mobilization infrastructure and exert influence in government. Now I will describe the OOC’s approach to and experience with elections.

**Organizing and Elections: A Paradox in the NPIC**

Historically, many community organizing coalitions have eschewed electoral work, viewing it as outside of their purview, a distraction from achieving true social change. Organizers asserted that their role was to hold whoever was in office accountable, not to try to get certain people elected. There has been a shift in the field of community organizing with regards to involvement in elections. Now some coalitions

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28 One exception to this is ACORN, which perhaps accounts for why the organization was targeted by right wing activists.
are starting large-scale civic engagement programs. Community organizing coalitions are increasingly participating in elections to build social movement infrastructure using voter mobilization tools including phone banking, door-to-door canvassing, data targeting, and voter registration.

One reason for this shift is that there is a lot of money in elections, particularly in a swing state like Ohio. Large individual donors make significant investments in political campaigns and foundations fund civic engagement work that includes voter registration, and education about issues. In 2016, over $145 million was spent on the election cycle in Ohio29. Community organizers view this influx of funding for political mobilization as an opportunity to bring more money into their organizations. In 2016, the OOC was able to raise $8.5 million dollars to do a statewide voter registration program. When you consider that on average, community organizing coalitions have a budget of $175,000 (Wood, Fulton and Partridge 2011), it is clear that elections are a significant opportunity for people’s organizations to increase their revenue and capacity. The OOC has run the largest independent voter engagement program in Ohio since 2012. In 2016, they registered 155,284 people to vote in Ohio.

Organizers are also interested in electoral politics because they view it as an important way for their organizations to build power and exercise influence. In his interview, Kirk Noden described his reasoning for shifting his viewpoint on combining organizing and electoral politics. His narrative is revealing, so I include the long quote below:

“Traditional community organizing is almost anti-electoral politics, it was almost like a rejection of politics... And I think there’s 2 things that really started to change how I personally thought about it. One was, my wife was a community organizer for a couple of years and they had a big convention, I mean they had like 1300 people there or something, it was huge. And we went to this big convention and I think there was one state rep there. The city council people didn’t come, nobody came. And (laughs) I was like, how’s that, like how’s that possible?

...Then I was like, oh this is like the 7th convention in a row. The alderman, the city council people figured out I can come to these meetings, I can say yes to all the demands, I can say no to the demands, I can say yes to half of them and like, and these people have no impact on whether or not I get elected. So, why should I even bother showing up? ...I was like yeah that’s true. There’s no bite behind the bark of a public meeting if there isn’t the ability to actually quantifiably move votes and determine elections based on a set of issues or based on supporting a candidate. So that was a big learning moment...

And then I think too, coming back to Ohio and having this whole set of experiences with elected officials where we just clearly weren’t respected. We couldn’t talk their language, they knew we weren’t electoral operators, they knew we couldn’t turn out votes. It wasn’t their currency, like their currency is voter registration, voter turnout, direct mail, phone banks, calls to the office, that’s the metrics that they evaluate power by, not how many relational meetings you had or
how many people you had at your public meeting. Public meetings don’t hurt, they’re certainly a useful tactic, but that being like the culmination of how power is expressed is faulty logic. Faulty logic that I adopted for 10 years, but faulty logic nonetheless.”

The conventional wisdom of community organizing is that organized people equals power; however repeated experience was not reinforcing that conventional wisdom. Kirk and other leaders in community organizing coalitions have become increasingly concerned with how they are marginalized in politics, even when they meet their organization’s goals for ‘building power.’ A public meeting of 1300 people is a large turnout by community organizing standards, so when that is not enough to get city officials to attend, what is wrong? How are community organizers and their constituencies supposed to influence decisionmakers if those decisionmakers will not even acknowledge them? Over time, it became apparent to Kirk that existing organizing tactics were not allowing organizations achieve the level of political power they wished to exert. It is an impressive achievement to get 1300 people care enough about an issue to show up for a public meeting, however if no one is there to hear them, what impact does their action have? Are public meetings a demonstration of people power when the targets don’t even show up?

Kirk argues that the problem is that community organizing groups are not viewed as a legitimate threat by politicians, and that those politicians are at some level correct in their assumption that people’s organizations cannot hurt them. There was no “bite behind the bark” of public meetings. The “metrics” used by community organizers to determine
whether or not they are successfully building power include how many “one-on-one” relational meetings they have and how many people they can get to show up to a public meeting. While these practices help community organizing coalitions build social movement infrastructure, those metrics are not recognized as legitimate measures of power. The “currency” of elected officials is voter registration, voter turnout, direct mail, phone banks, calls to the office. Because community organizing groups were not using the legitimized language and metrics, public officials did not view them as having any real power. A well-organized public meeting is ineffective if it is being completely ignored by decisionmakers consequence-free.

I asked Kirk if he thinks that the OOC’s electoral work has helped the organization. He said:

“I think it’s absolutely built the power of the organization in the last 10 years. No doubt about it. It’s positioned us differently with electeds, it’s positioned us differently with funders and donors, it’s positioned us differently with the ability to move issues. I mean I think like one of the primary ways we got the land bank in Trumbull County was a really good electoral program and a big public meeting combined. I think it’s been healthy and stretching for the OOC. I think the tension and the challenge is that people who are attracted to organizing tend to be more artistic and they’re more philosophical, they’re more relational. I think electoral work, there’s a brutality to it, to the rigor, to the discipline, the top-downness of it.”
Kirk describes how electoral work has given the OOC more clout with elected officials and funders and he ascribes a major victory to combining traditional organizing tactics with an electoral program. However, he also identifies that electoral work is often in tension with organizing because the “top-down” nature of elections work has a “brutality” to it that conflicts with the more “artistic,” “philosophical,” and “relational” styles of many community organizers. This is the case in part because electoral work is first and foremost a numbers game, which goes against some of the instincts and common practices of organizers. For instance, in an electoral program, the amount of doors knocked is more important than the quality of conversations you have. Also, electoral programs are run in a top-down, hierarchical manner, which limits how much input community members can have in how the program is run. This conflicts with the community organizing ethos of having people shape the goals and strategy of campaigns.

Thus, there are tradeoffs that community organizing coalitions make when they get involved in electoral work; these tradeoffs lead to unique challenges. Heather McMahon, the executive director of the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative and managing director of the OOC spoke to this tension in her interview.

“I think the most challenging thing we’ve faced as an organization is actually getting through the 2012 election... 2012 was the first year that we had a state-wide program with a state wide director... There were a lot of issues of trust between the people who were doing electoral work and people who were doing regular organizing work. There was a lot of internal work that needed to be done. [People were] like, well what does this matter to my work? Why can’t we just let
the electoral stuff be a component? Why do we have to be in touch with them?

Why do we have to be moving on this? There were a lot of challenges associated with that program, which is funny because it was super successful...

I think it exposed at the time the weaknesses in structure, weaknesses in how we were managing staff. There wasn’t necessarily a protocol. Different people managed different staff differently. People don’t always know who their supervisor is. It exposed some structural weaknesses that we have been addressing over the last year and a half. Which, I mean, it’s to be expected. We were new. It was the first year we had staff. So I think that was a significant challenge ... It’s not been easy because we are somewhat fluid as an organization.”

When the OOC embarked on its first statewide electoral program in 2012, they found that the way the organization was structured was not conducive to running a top-down program. The OOC is generally a flexible and informal organization that allows organizers to have a certain degree of freedom in determining their own work agendas. This is important because it allows OOC member organizations to pursue their own agendas without central control. This means that organizers can be flexible and if their base of leaders wants to pursue a campaign (e.g. the OSA’s response to John Crawford’s shooting), they do not need to get permission from OOC to do so.

This is an organizational structure conducive to community organizing, but for electoral work, it is problematic when “people don’t always know who their supervisor is.” In 2012, organizers responded in varying ways to the more “top-down” demands of
electoral work. Heather noted that there was a lack of trust between electoral and organizing staff; this became a very serious problem within the organization. OOC leaders decided to hire consultants to help address the dysfunction and prevent the OOC from fracturing along these fault lines. The first OOC staff meeting that I attended included an in-depth workshop about developing trust that was part of this intervention. Indeed, throughout my observations and interviews with organizers, funders, and allies, I got the sense that community organizers and electoral operators often viewed each others’ methods and goals with a certain degree of confusion and suspicion.

Despite these tensions, the OOC has continued to run a statewide electoral program each year. In 2014, the OOC targeted voters in low-income, predominantly black communities. The organization employed a team of door-to-door canvassers drawn from those communities who worked for the OOC full time from August through November. The funding for this program was connected to an experimental study conducted by Dr. Hahrie Han and the Center for Community Change30. There were treatment and control precincts in Dayton, Akron, and Youngstown/Warren. The goal of the experiment was to assess the impact and cost effectiveness of “integrated voter engagement,” a term used by funders to describe combining voter mobilization with community organizing.

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30 In 2015, as I was winding down observations for my dissertation, Hahrie Han, Molly Shack and Nadia Garnett from Center for Community Change asked me to help with this experiment by collecting qualitative data to supplement their quantitative analysis. I did this in 2015 and 2016. I observed canvasses and supervised African-American research assistants who also observed canvasses. I also did 4 focus groups with canvassers and 6 interviews with OOC staff. While I am not explicitly drawing on that data for this chapter, the knowledge and experience that I gained while working on the project gave me greater insight into the dynamics described in this chapter.
The program was led by Molly Shack, a charismatic and articulate young white woman in her mid-20s who was on staff as an organizer with the Ohio Student Association before assuming the role of OOC civic engagement director. I interviewed Molly in 2014 as she was starting her new position and then again in 2015 after she had led the program for one year. In the first interview, she described “top-level things” causing tension for her and I asked her to elaborate. She said,

“We know we want to build power through elections. In order to have accountable, high quality, effective canvass operations you need a hierarchical top-down structure. So there’s just a sort of natural tension that comes like when you’re trying to build a base of people who feel ownership and feel like everything is really bottom-up. [And to] then be like okay- If we really want to have our power heard we really want to like build collective power state wide...

[Also], organizing mass amounts of phone banks, door knocks... any of that sort of stuff requires quality control, requires turf-cutting and all this stuff that is more professionalized. So I think that’s just a natural tension. This year we’re trying to do a better job with integrating voter engagement from the ground. To equally value conversation as much as the voter contact.

We need to really train canvassers to understand how to make good organizer choices about how to spend time at the doors, how to have conversations, how to bring people in, how to identify what they care about. I
"think that’s always the goal but sometimes when the crunch comes down it’s not ultimately what gets valued over the numbers."

One “natural tension” that Molly mentions is the fact that much of the work that goes into voter mobilization is professionalized, often requiring a significant amount of technical expertise. In the professionalized world of voter mobilization, it is often necessary to be college educated and able to operate in an environment dominated by white elites. The vast majority of people employed by the OOC’s voter engagement program are from low income black neighborhoods; many of their canvassers do not have a college education. On the other hand, the top leadership of their electoral program tends to be predominantly white, starting with Molly Shack in 2014 and 2015. When Molly moved to organize in Columbus instead, a white man with significant experience in electoral politics was hired in her place. The staffperson in charge of data, a very important position in electoral operations, is also white.

The political establishment that dominates electoral politics reflects existing racial and class dynamics that empower upper class white elites. This establishment resists change. When those who are not members of the existing political elite attempt to enter the political arena, there tends to be pushback. Molly Shack described an interesting example of this in a core team meeting in 2014. She said that a leader from the Democratic Party called her and asked her to get DaMareo Cooper to stop creating “trouble” in Akron by organizing people and taking them to City Council meetings. Of course, Molly had no interest in doing this. She, like DaMareo, quite enjoys the idea of
making “trouble” for Democratic politicians; indeed this is part of why organizers are viewed with suspicion by political elites. Also, as the Organizing Director of the OOC, DaMareo was her mentor and she had no authority over him. But the fact that the Democrats reached out to Molly, who is white, and assumed that she might be able to put pressure on DaMareo is telling about the racial dynamics at play here.

Molly also says that there is a “natural tension” that occurs with trying to combine voter engagement work that requires top-down hierarchy with bottom-up grassroots organizing on local issues. She implies that it feels like a bait and switch with leaders. Organizers talk about prioritizing allowing leaders to feel ownership over the work but then put them in this top-down structure that does not allow leaders much room for input or innovation. How is the OOC supposed to build a people’s organization where leaders own the work using this type of program? She articulates the vision that OOC leadership has for how their electoral program will contribute to building social movement infrastructure,

“So, what we’re trying to do is use the resources that we get to build meaningful infrastructure that’s owned by the people who are affected and who are voting. So it’s not just a conversation at the doors reminding them to vote, it’s about reminding them that there’s a local election coming up and... it’s not the President who decides whether your potholes get filled. And there’s a lot that we can control locally that we don’t assert our voices in. And if we get together and actually put together a platform or a vision or an agenda of the things that we care about, and we do that and we continue and we pressure and we vote and we
agitate and we organize and we vote and we repeat, that we can start to push an
agenda that’s not grounded in a candidate but that’s grounded in the communities
that we’re organizing.”

The OOC integrates electoral work with ongoing local campaigns. For instance, canvassers in Akron used the electoral program to raise awareness about the ongoing work of the Akron Organizing Collaborative (and their hub called The Womb). In Warren, OH, leaders were passionate about pressuring local officials to allocate funds to a recreation center. The OOC is trying to get people in marginalized communities to recognize the potential for gaining concrete changes in their neighborhoods through voting and organizing. However, despite efforts to make the work more immediate and relevant to local leaders, the tension between the professionalized top-down methods of the electoral program and the bottom-up ethos of the member organizations within the OOC remains.

The OOC also uses the electoral program as an opportunity to identify and train community leaders. By hiring people from the targeted neighborhoods, the OOC builds trust in communities by providing people with jobs and advancement opportunities. Canvassers attend training that includes political education. They are encouraged to think like organizers and to see their work as more than “just a job.” During a group debrief of the electoral program in 2014, many canvassers spoke about how they learned a lot about politics. One older black woman told me that being part of the program taught her about how local government works. Because of this, she figured out who to call to get a streetlight repaired on her block and she did so. She said to me, with pride,
“Whenever I look at that light, I think, ‘That’s my streetlight!’” The OOC is building political capacity of low-income communities by educating residents about politics and giving them opportunities to organize and advocate for themselves.

Observations of the OOC’s voter mobilization work indicate that local organizations had autonomy in how they decided to use the program to build their organizations. The leadership of these local organizations is overwhelmingly black and drawn from the low-income communities they are trying to organize. There was significant evidence of local control of organizing agendas, even under the imperfect circumstances of a top-down electoral program.

Black organizers and leaders in the OOC had their own plans for how they were going to use the electoral program to build power. Richard Clay Dixon is an older African American man on staff with the OOC as the lead organizer in Dayton. He was affectionately referred to as “The Mayor” within the OOC because he was the mayor of Dayton from 1987-1992. Based on his prior experience with politics in Dayton, Mr. Dixon had a clear idea of what he wanted to build in Dayton through electoral work and other organizing initiatives:

“[In prior years] the priority boards were a very strong organization because their leadership came from the neighborhood. The kind of organization that we’re trying to build [with the OOC] existed within the priority boards system. Each neighborhood had a representative on a priority board, and all the city governments like all the heads of departments would come to the priority
board meetings and the citizens they represent would have an opportunity to talk about their problem...

[The priority boards] were really strong and then they were phased out because the city doesn’t have the resources to staff them because they provided each priority board with staff.

...Now they hold a monthly meeting and there’s not a lot done between meetings. Where before they were very active. And it just gives us an opportunity to go in there and say, “Hey, we’re right here to help you do the kinds of things that priority boards are not doing anymore.”

Mr. Dixon has a clear conceptualization of the kind of infrastructure he wants to build through the OOC. He sees community organizing as an opportunity to build community capacity and strengthen the responsiveness of local government.

DaMareo Cooper also has a plan for how to use the electoral work to build power with people in his community in Akron. When DaMareo trained canvassers for the OOC’s electoral program in 2014, he counseled them to respond to people disgusted by national politics by emphasizing how they could make a positive impact locally. He said, “Well the problem is that we don’t have people like you voting for people like me. Why don’t we put someone from your neighborhood in office? Why don’t we pick someone from our churches, from our parent committee at the school?” DaMareo acknowledged that many people would view government as an impenetrable adversary. He urged canvassers to see government, particularly at the local level, as an institution that they could infiltrate and use to better their community. In meetings, DaMareo consistently
brought up the possibility of developing a candidate pipeline where OOC leaders consistently run for political office.

DaMareo and other leaders in Akron have used the funding they get for electoral work to support building social movement infrastructure in low-income black neighborhoods. They have established a base of operations, called the WOMB (Way of Mind and Body), that not only serves as the office for the Akron Organizing Collaborative, but it is also a cultural hub and healing space for activists and community leaders. The WOMB hosts educational events about black history and culture, poetry nights and other social events, and serves as a meeting space for black-led organizations and initiatives. During election season, the OOC hires people from the neighborhood to be door-to-door canvassers and those canvassers go through OOC training. From there, organizers identify promising recruits and ask them to become involved on a volunteer basis after the election. Thus, while the top leadership of OOC’s electoral program is predominantly white, black community leaders have significant latitude to use electoral resources to build their organizations according to their own visions.

The OOC’s allies in the NPIC, including national intermediary organizations, provided significant support for their electoral work. Nadia Garnett, political director of the Center for Community Change (CCC) supported the OOC’s electoral program (which was funded through CCC) in 2014. She is a sharp African American woman who speaks fast and with intensity. Nadia is a Democratic political operative by training; she has worked for the White House, the Democratic National Committee, and has held a variety of positions in political campaigns. She eventually left CCC to become the African
American Vote Director for Hillary Clinton’s campaign in 2016. Nadia often contrasted what she saw happening in the OOC with her experience in the electoral industry. In her interview, she said,

“So, I think it’s different because [for the] OOC … It’s not about a dollar amount, you know? …It’s something that’s much bigger than that, and you can’t get that on the electoral side.

...These people have a personal interest in their community… There was a guy today at the meeting in Dayton who’s formerly incarcerated and he had knocked on this young man’s door about voting and the guy came and got his mom, and his mom was like, you know what, can you come in and talk to my son about why he should vote? And come to find out, her son was an ex-felon, he didn’t know that his rights had been restored. You can’t get that from a traditional type of door-to-door electoral canvassing 30 days out. Like we couldn’t have paid for this any other way...And like I said, OOC is not going anywhere, so November the 10th, if he wants to come to an OOC meeting, he can do that because there are other things that are taking place.”

Nadia is contrasting the OOC with canvassing operations that are standard in the electoral industry. These often for-profit organizations do not prioritize investment in local communities. Nadia was excited about the OOC’s electoral program because it introduces the possibility of using voter mobilization to build long-term political capacity in communities. This contrasts with a model of political campaigns bringing knowledge and resources to an area but then leaving after the election. This was Nadia’s experience in
previous elections. Furthermore, because the OOC hires canvassers that are from the neighborhoods they are doorknocking in, this can lead to more in-depth and meaningful conversations\textsuperscript{31}. Experts have hypothesized that these conversations are more likely to result in people voting or becoming engaged in other types of civic action, and research studies are underway to see if this is correct. The research project that the OOC’s electoral program was a part of (with CCC and Hahrie Han) was examining whether their program was more effective than traditional programs at getting people to turn out to vote. The idea is that the research results could then be used to make programs run by community organizing coalitions more attractive to political donors. In the next section, I will describe the elections industry from the OOC’s perspective in more depth.

There are two conclusions that can be drawn from the preceding accounts. On the one hand, the OOC’s electoral program is funded, designed and controlled by white elites. These programs are designed according to a technocratic political logic. Social scientists and political experts design canvassing operations using rules and practices that prioritize establishing legitimacy with funders over building social movement infrastructure. On the other hand, the OOC’s electoral program represents a sincere effort by Kirk Noden and sympathetic allies within the NPIC to invest significant resources in areas that were not being organized prior to this work. Kirk has orchestrated an influx of resources into low-income predominantly black communities with the intention of giving them some space and autonomy to build organizations and political power. Both of these

\textsuperscript{31} I witnessed several interactions similar to the one Nadia described when I observed OOC canvassers in 2015 and 2016.
views are supported by theory and data. The NPIC thus creates a paradoxical situation in social movement organizations. Because of this paradox, the OOC is often at odds with itself, and it can be a struggle to build trust among organizers in this context.

The Structure of the Electoral Industry

The experiences of OOC leaders in electoral politics reveal structures and assumptions that underlie voter mobilization in the US, particularly on the Democratic side. While the OOC is a 501c(3) organization, and thus does not directly engage in partisan politics, the conventional wisdom of electoral politics deeply impacts how funders evaluate the OOC. The non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) is influenced by political operatives and the assumptions of the Democratic Party about what effective mobilization looks like. Wolin (2008) and Roelofs (2003) describe how think tanks, foundations, universities, and other elite-driven institutions are connected to one another. These organizations develop a common set of assumptions and attempt to influence the terms of political debates. Most foundation funding that is aimed at social change goes to advocacy organizations that hire professionals like lawyers and policy experts to come up with solutions to social problems. Policy is often the result of conversations and debates amongst these elite entities.

Organizations like the OOC are seen as junior partners by labor unions, campaigns, and political operatives. Nonprofit organizations that serve low-income people and people of color tend to be 501 c(3) organizations that have small budgets and are restricted from directly engaging in partisan political activities. This keeps those
organizations from being able to establish legitimacy in the electoral industry according to the standards of people who work in politics. Because of this, 501c(3) organizations have significantly fewer resources for civic engagement than 501c(4) organizations. Community organizers want to enter the halls of real power; they want their organizations to have credibility and to be listened to by public officials. But to do so, organizers must confront the perception that their organizations are small and unimportant.

The OOC is a 501c(3) organization and the vast majority of OOC organizers’ work takes place under c(3) guidelines. However, the OOC also has a c(4) sister organization called Stand Up for Ohio. This bifurcated organizational structure is becoming increasingly common among community organizing coalitions, although most of the funding available for organizing goes toward c(3) activities. DaMareo Cooper explains how this works for staff within the OOC:

“The difference between c(3) and c(4) is like the level of political participation you can do. So when you’re c(3) you can do door knocking, you can register people to vote, you can tell people to go vote and you can slightly talk about why people should go vote. And a c(4) is more direct, you can do all those things except for you also can be like ‘John Kasich sucks, and this is what we think should happen.’ ...So my role, when I’m playing dual roles like that I have to keep track of my hours when I’m doing which thing you know what I’m saying. So when I’m doing c(4)[work] in front of a labor union and I’m telling them that...
Organizers and leaders in c(3) organizations have to be careful to not endorse or condemn candidates or officials because that could jeopardize their organization’s tax-exempt status. Some OOC staff spend a portion their time working for Stand Up for Ohio, and they have to make sure that they document that time so they are paid from the correct source. In effect, this means that organizers are occasionally able to speak openly about and act on their partisan political preferences, but most of the time they are not able to do so.

Data is central to how powerful organizations on the left mobilize voters. The Democratic Party, unions, and powerful interest groups use the Voter Activation Network (VAN), which is a database used to identify, target, and engage voters. 501c(4) organizations coordinate their use of the database with one another through America Votes. 501c(3) organizations also use the VAN, however their database is separate for legal reasons. The c(3) VAN is administered by State Voices, which functions similarly to America Votes for c(3) organizations. Gary Davenport, a white man in his 20s, was in charge of managing data for the OOC in 2014, and he described the difference between the c(4) and c(3) infrastructure from his perspective:

“[America Votes] is a c(4) organization, so they do c(4) electoral work. So, they have a c(4) VAN. State Voices has a c(3) VAN. So picture this. So you have this really sleek, new, awesome van—as awesome as a van can be. Like, 2015, energy-efficient, super cool. And then you have this Chevy van or the kind of van
with the curtains in the back. It’s all sketchy and rusty and a little bit creepy. We spend most of our time in a c(3) VAN which is like a creepy, beat-up van. And we spend the least of our time in c(4) VAN, which is the nice, robustly-supported, has a lot of people using it. Because that’s how the money flows. So, there’s about a dozen organizations using the c(3) VAN on a somewhat regular basis. And we’re one of them…

And to give you context, State Voices [c(3) coordinating table] has an agenda and a dozen people at the table. You can kind of tell people are there because they have to be—they were told to. America Votes [c(4) coordinating table] has 60 or 75 people in the room and their agenda is tight. Everyone wants to be talking to each other there. They all know why they’re there. And I think that’s part of the nature of c(4) money. So, night and day difference.”

Gary compares his experience in the c(3) world with State Voices to his experience in the c(4) world with America Votes. It is apparent to him that the c(4) table is more tightly run, their database is better, and people are motivated to be there to have conversations and make deals with one another. Why would this be the case? One reason, which Gary cites, is “how the money flows,” referring to the fact that the vast majority of funding for voter mobilization goes to c(4) organizations. This makes sense, given that c(3) organizations are not able to openly support candidates. Furthermore, when organizations cannot make a clear statement about who they are supporting in an election, it is difficult to coalesce around a common agenda. The unions and powerful lobbies
working through America Votes are very clear about what they are there to discuss and negotiate; they have an interest in being present with their peers in the Democratic political establishment.

Organizations that are incorporated as a 501c(3) get certain benefits that 501c(4) organizations do not. They are tax-exempt and are more attractive recipients of funding from foundations. However, as a form of political organization, 501c(3) organizations leave much to be desired, in part because the rules were specifically designed to keep “charitable” organizations from working toward political goals. Community organizing coalitions, as primarily 501c(3) organizations, are relegated to a less powerful position within electoral politics. They are not considered full partners by the organizations that wield power in the Democratic and progressive political world. One organizer lamented that the political establishment sees organizations like the OOC as “peons” and “grantees” rather than as leaders in the progressive movement.

This can be illustrated with an example. At an April 2015 statewide leadership convening at the Freedom Hub (Summit UMC) in Columbus, OOC leaders discussed and made plans for a 2016 minimum wage ballot initiative. There were 30 people present at this meeting, about 2/3 were staff of OOC organizations and 1/3 were grassroots leaders. Advisors from national intermediary organizations, Joy Cushman from PICO and Nadia Garnett from CCC, were also present. Kirk Noden told a story about what happened to the OOC in a previous election.

“What happens to this state every 4 years, the election typically uses us.

We would like to use the election [people in the room applauded at this]… So, I
really love the Vice President [Joe Biden], he’s a great guy. He was doing a campaign stop and they were asking to have real people. So I was excited, I gave him a list of real people including Pastor Michael Harrison, Sybille [an African American woman who is on the MVOC board], a GE factory worker. Then the campaign came back and said, oh no no no, we want a list of “real people.” They had specific categories they wanted filled like, “single mom in the suburbs, blah blah blah.” They wanted props. This is what happens, we get treated as a prop. Politicians come through, we get to be the background...What would it look like for us to, instead, be out front saying we want everyone to respond to income inequality?”

Kirk paints a picture here of people and communities being ‘used’ by the electoral industry during elections. He was excited for an opportunity to give OOC leaders a chance to speak with the Vice President, but instead the Biden campaign wanted people who fit certain social categories that fit their pre-existing agenda. Even political figures that organizers admire, like Joe Biden, are part of a system where people are used as political props, part of the background in a well-orchestrated production. People’s organizations like the OOC are not at the table helping to make decisions about Democratic politicians’ priorities; instead they are either ignored or taken for a ride by the Democratic political apparatus.

Because the OOC is relatively new to electoral politics, they rely on expert advice from allies from within the NPIC. One person that advised the OOC about electoral work was Joy Cushman, the National Campaigns Director at PICO, a national network of faith-
based community organizations. Joy is a white woman who is unassuming and soft-spoken, but her intelligence, experience and demeanor command respect. She helped design the Obama campaign’s field program and later led the New Organizing Institute before moving to PICO. Joy came to several OOC meetings in 2014 and 2015 to advise leaders on organizing training and electoral mobilization. When I asked Joy to share her thoughts on the challenges facing progressive organizations and movements, she said that the progressive movement was struggling in part because of overalignment with the Democratic Party. This was not an answer that I was expecting, so I asked her what she meant by this and she said,

“...The dominant threads of organizing through the 70s, 80s, 90s became very professionalized and very focused on maximum performance. Whether it’s collecting money or whether it’s maximum turn-out or maximum signature gathering, just maximizing outcomes. I think that professionalization led people to become more dependent on consultants.

...So is voting industry as a sector has emerged really in the last 40 years and it’s been driven by the money flowing through elections. It’s very consultant driven. I’m not like inherently critical of [this], just trying to be explicit about...the way it’s been structured. The focus is on winning elections and there is very very little focus on governing between elections.

And so our groups, like independent power groups, in almost all cases when it comes to communication strategies, or when it comes to targeting for an

32 The Amos Project in Cincinnati is a PICO affiliate.
election, or when it comes to strategizing about where to do election work, we almost always rely on the same consultants that the Democratic Party uses. And so, by default, the combination of professionalization and the dependence on the same consultants the party uses has led us into this like...lockstep alignment with the Democratic Party. And I don’t think it’s good. I don’t think it’s good for us. I don’t think it’s good for the party. I don’t think it’s good for winning.

Joy points out several interesting things here. The professionalization of community organizing, driven by isomorphic forces in the NPIC, has led to a field-wide interest in maximizing measurable outcomes. At the same time, a consultant-driven voting industry has come to dominate electoral politics. Community organizing groups and social movement organizations tend to rely on advice from the same consultants that the Democratic Party uses whenever they do electoral work. This was the case when the OOC tried to put minimum wage on the ballot in Ohio in 2016, which I will describe further below. The consequence of this is that the assumptions and strategies that organizations must adopt in order to be seen as legitimate recipients of funding are the same strategies that the Democratic Party uses in political mobilization.

Molly Shack also identified an electoral industry dominated by consultants. She pointed out racial and class dynamics, as well as how the general ethos of electoral politics conflicts with the ethos of “people power” in community organizing:

““There’s a class of elite white men, mostly, who are getting rich off of figuring out how to market to low income voters, black voters, women voters and young voters... the whole Clinton model is about like polling everything, figuring
out what people want to hear and saying that. And so like, it’s a model to speak to the masses that doesn’t actually empower but just gives people what they want to hear. So rather than having like a vision of what you stand for, really getting out there on an issue… it’s about how you’re talking about it, rather than how you’re doing it…

...So there’s like a consultant class of folks who do political strategy, who do data, who do mail, who do messaging, who do commercials and radio and all this stuff. And most of the firms, literally less than 2% of the Democratic Party’s money went to firms that are owned by minorities. So it’s another way of looking at the same intersection of structural racism and structural classism and structural sexism… The way the infrastructure and power is built and the way that it’s engineered, it’s still controlled by elites with money.

I’m relatively new to the sort of traditional voter engagement world and so I’ve seen a lot in the last year. You know, I’m sitting in conferences and people are like, “This is the heart and soul of the progressive movement,” and I’m looking around and half the room is consultants and people who are owning firms….And maybe it’s, maybe it’s true, maybe that’s part of the problem is that they are the heart and soul of the quote, unquote ‘progressive movement,’ not the people who are affected in our communities. And they’re the ones making the decisions, not the ones in our communities. Maybe that’s part of the problem.”
There are several main points to draw out of this quote. First, the electoral industry reflects structural racism, classism and sexism, recalling the “Master’s House” framework discussed in Chapter 3. It is dominated by professional white people, disproportionately men. These political elites have a lot of power to determine how “the left” in the country is engaged and mobilized. Their ideas about what is best for the country and what will resonate with people are given much more weight than “the people who are affected in our communities.” The fact that racial minorities and working class people are marginal within the electoral world means that the same phenomenon is reproduced within nonprofit organizations that rely on funding and expertise from members of the white elite political establishment.

Another key point that Molly makes is that the Democratic Party’s approach to politics is fundamentally about messaging and marketing a pre-existing agenda to various constituencies. Whether the agenda addresses the concerns of ordinary people is of less concern than how it is communicated and whether it is politically popular. This can be identified in the language of funders and Democratic political operatives. For instance, Tom Streyer, a billionaire who spent $87 million on the 2016 elections, was quoted in The Hill, saying “I think there’s no doubt that we reflect the will of the people to an overwhelming extent. I don’t think we were successful in conveying the spirit behind those policies, and I don’t think we were successful in transmitting the urgency behind those policies.” This statement is striking in its assumption that the reason Democrats lost is because they were not “conveying the spirit” or “transmitting the urgency” of their
policies. The problem is identified as a failure in communications and marketing rather than the candidate chosen, the content of policies, or any other factor.

This type of thinking is also common in the NPIC; when foundations determine which projects to fund, constituencies are not asked what they need but instead are sold a pre-existing agenda. During a meeting, one organizer said,

“I was triggered by a phone call I was on yesterday [with foundation staff]. You hear these funders talk, ‘We’re going to figure this out, we’ve got to get to this community and figure out what the frame is there, what’s going to resonate there.’ At no point do they think about actually going and talking to the community. They’re just sitting there imagining what a farmer might think about or what a Latino person might think. It’s arrogant, disrespectful and it doesn’t work. A lot of these things they’re talking about, the media, the lobbyists… they can supplement but if you’re not building relationships in communities, none of it is sustainable.”

This organizer was frustrated by funders basing their strategy off of what they imagined would appeal to various demographic groups. Organizers spend a lot of time getting to know communities by having conversations with hundreds of people about their lives and what they care about. Often, they find that the issues elite funders want to address are not the issues that are most pressing for ordinary people. This organizer posits that when elites try to manipulate people without building relationships in communities, they are not able to be effective in achieving social change.
Organizing is based on the premise that elites in the majority group should not assume that they know what poor people and racial minorities want or how they feel. However, the electoral industry and the NPIC operate according to a different set of rules. Predominantly white and highly educated elite experts are the arbiters of what counts as legitimate knowledge, and as a result their pronouncements about policy and mobilization tactics are funded and acted upon. This is particularly evident in how the liberal political infrastructure approaches and utilizes one of their most powerful tools: data.

**Data Use: Likely Voters and Self-fulfilling Prophecy**

The Democratic Party and affiliated constituencies have built a highly sophisticated database and targeting system (the VAN) that allows them to identify and predict individuals’ voting behavior with impressive accuracy. Unions and influential lobby groups like Planned Parenthood and Sierra Club coordinate to use this data through America Votes. This is a table that includes organizations with a 501c(4) tax classification, which means that they can engage in partisan politics and endorse candidates. To be clear, America Votes does not coordinate directly with Democratic political campaigns. However, as Joy stated above, there is a lot of overlap in the tactics and strategies used, and the organizations tend to use the same political consultants as the Democratic Party. OOC leaders participate in America Votes through their 501c(4) organization, Stand Up for Ohio.
I interviewed Khaled Salehi, the Ohio director of America Votes, in his office in downtown Columbus. He explained how America Votes supports organizations on the left by providing them with access to useful data about voters.

“So America Votes provides the data to all of the partners. They get their data from us. [Some of the data is public, from the Board of Elections]…Then there’s a lot of information that you can get that we work with vendors [through] contracts that we have with them to make sure we have lots of data points… we use that in targeting to understand that individual voter… So for example… You buy whatever you need [at the grocery store] and you scan your little card so you can get 10 cents off of whatever you buy. That’s all consumer information that’s available for purchase… So if you subscribe to say a yoga magazine and you buy cat food and you drive a small Toyota Prius, guess what? And then you voted in the Democratic primaries and you signed a petition… That gives us an idea of what type of voter you are. So everything from age, income level, education level, where you live and then some of these consumer patterns...

America Votes compiles data that they retrieve from public sources with data they purchase from vendors. This information is held in a database called the VAN that creates a “voter file” for every voter. The voter file has information about an individuals’ voting history. Statistical models are then used to determine how likely it is that an individual will vote and who or what they are likely to vote for. Khaled describes it as follows:
“... There’s certain data that’s available to all of our partners. We created a voter propensity model so... [our partners are] not wasting time turning out a voter that’s not going to come out and vote regardless. Because voting is like a habit like anything else. Like you either have a habit of smoking and you’re a smoker, or you’re a drinker or you’re and exerciser, whatever right. Or you don’t. Voting is the same way. So we created vote propensity model.”

The conventional wisdom of the electoral industry and Democratic political operatives is that the best way to use limited resources is to focus on turning out voters who consistently show up to vote. This has the effect of ensuring that certain populations and individuals that are designated “high propensity” voters will experience a lot more outreach and advertising than those that are designated “low propensity” voters. This allows campaigns to maximize the impact of their field programs and advertising.

Focusing on high propensity voters makes sense for funders and political campaigns in terms of a short-term cost/benefit analysis. However, one of the main impacts of this practice is that it marginalizes racial minorities, young people and other “low propensity” constituencies. Joy Cushman describes this below:

“[Democrats and progressive campaigns] focus on likely voters, who are persuadable, which is shorthand for suburban whites. And so, that means cycle after cycle after cycle, people of color are getting more and more and more marginalized by the whole election machine that is the Democratic Party and our organizations. Because something that you think of as innocuous like targeting is not actually innocuous. There are a lot of assumptions behind it... Once you
decide who you’re going to talk to and why, that targeting affects how all the money in the campaign gets spent. So in the progressive movement, even organizations that start out wanting to focus on people of color and their issues or working people and their issues, somehow through this industry and the consulting advice they’re getting end up spending most of their money talking to persuadable white voters. It takes an enormous amount of willpower to resist that whole machine.

...The basic social science around voting is if you engage people they will turn out. It doesn’t matter if you’re black white, young, old, woman, man. If you are engaged, you will turn out. So, I would just say that low turnout is because, for the most part, communities have not been engaged except at the very last minute. Which isn’t really engaged when you compare it to a suburban mom who gets 8 ads directed at her and couple of canvassers during the fall and a handful of phone calls. That’s engaged. It’s not like the last minute jump in the van and I’ll take you to the poll. There’s a lot of narrative in the party and people who don’t vote are called sporadic voters and sometimes, behind the scenes, “lazy voters.” That has so many connotations.

According to Joy, there is a lot of pressure on progressive organizations to adopt the strategies that are deemed best practices by experts and consultants. This results in a field-wide tendency to prioritize messages that appeal to suburban whites and to spend resources engaging middle-class and white people. Meanwhile, the priorities of people of color and poor people are marginalized or ignored and they do not get contacted by
political campaigns. This is justified with the narrative that because since they do not vote, it is not cost effective to talk to them. There is even racialized language (e.g. “lazy voters”) used to refer to low propensity voters behind the scenes. Joy argues that this ends up turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy. If Democrats and progressive organizations are not prioritizing outreach to people of color because they are not voting at high rates, then it is unlikely that those low turnout rates will change.

The emphasis on targeting likely voters can make it difficult for organizations like the OOC to drum up enthusiasm for reaching out to “low propensity voters” among powerful funders and consultants. It also puts strain on community organizing coalitions that are adopting technology and standards that may be new and unfamiliar to people from low-income backgrounds. Stuart McIntyre, the Executive Director of the Ohio Student Association says,

“In the past 10-15 years or so there’s been a real revolution in technology available on the Democratic political side... So this has led to the funding community and political donors all wanting to see more statistical proof that these organizations that they’re giving money to are effective. So at its best this is a way to fully understand the values and preferences of the people that we’re engaging to expand our reach... and provide messages that really speak to them. At its worst it’s just market research so that there can be more effective marketing even if the product, in this case voting for the Democratic Party, is not really something that if people buy it will really make their lives any better.
So we have this uneasy relationship with data because of that, but also because there are real technology gaps... I was raised in a household where I had always had access to a home computer, my dad even worked in a communication technology lab and would bring home like video cameras and stuff for me to play with... At the same time, we have people that don’t have enough money to keep their phone turned on, people that are going to the library at their university to get on the Internet... So for us having all these reporting requirements like we have to keep track of our data, we have to make sure we’re collecting all this information, and keep all these lists and use technology in this way... there is a real class divide. Right now within the non-profit industrial complex it’s, in my opinion, a big fault line that is just sort of waiting to inspire discussion. “

Because of advances in data technology, the “funding community and political donors” want to see statistical proof that electoral programs are impactful. The study that the OOC was participating in with CCC, for instance, was a treatment/control study designed to test whether the OOC was able to make a statistically significant difference in voter turnout in treatment precincts. In order to track their work and keep funders happy, OOC leaders needed to become familiar with technology and reporting requirements. This is easier for middle class people who have professional experience than people from working class or poor backgrounds who do not have the same access to technology.

As discussed above, this leads to a structural issue within the OOC’s electoral program where staff with middle class fluency are put in charge of the aspects of the program that require technical expertise and interfacing with elite funders and political
operatives. This means that the top leadership of the program is disproportionately white. Black leaders from low-income neighborhoods lead in and have some autonomy to shape local programs, but they do not have a strong voice in shaping the overall mobilization strategy. That strategy is determined by a negotiation among researchers, funders, and OOC leaders based on existing best practices for voter mobilization. The funders and researchers that the OOC works with want to expand the electorate and empower black communities. However, there are still significant constraints based on funders’ goals and existing legitimized practices. OOC organizers and leaders are not able to tailor electoral programs to the communities they are working in; they must work with existing templates for how voter mobilization is done.

One issue that the electoral industry faces is that the messaging to appeal to diverse constituencies is created by highly educated, predominantly white elites who are not connected to people who live in poor neighborhoods. Perhaps an even more fundamental problem, though, is the issue Stuart identifies when he calls the question of whether voting for Democrats will make peoples’ lives concretely better. Indeed, in cities where Democrats have been in charge for decades, yet people still live in poverty and see resources taken away from their communities, what would motivate people to vote for Democratic politicians? Some political experts and funders see this as primarily a problem of communication. But many people do not see voting as benefitting them in any real way. Can a change in messaging overcome that deficit?

There is evidence to indicate that shifting messaging alone might not be enough to convince certain constituencies to vote, particularly among oppressed groups that face
significant difficulties in their daily lives. Clay Dixon, OOC organizer and former mayor of Dayton, says that in his experience it is hard to convince oppressed people that voting can make an impact in their lives. He says,

“African Americans are so involved with dealing with their basic needs. And you know, sometimes they don’t have a clear thought of what’s really causing these problems. These grassroots problems like employment, terrible education system, poor housing, and mass incarceration. All those kinds of things keep them from looking up (laughs). You know, they just keep their head and their nose to the ground instead of looking up to see what’s really happening to them and how they can bring about the change. And I see that as the biggest struggle that we still have in our communities, to show them that by voting and by getting involved that you can make a difference. [People ask] ‘Why should I vote? It doesn’t help me. I voted and look where I am, I’m still in the same place.’ So they don’t understand that you have to keep fighting. Keep fighting, keep voting and eventually change will come. They don’t see the long term. Everybody has immediate needs that must be met’”

People living in poverty are often focused on their own immediate needs; often they do not have mental space or energy for thinking about long-term plans (Desmond 2016)\(^33\). They do not necessarily understand civic involvement as a route to a better life,

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\(^33\) In 2015 and 2016, I conducted 4 focus groups with canvassers from the OOC’s low propensity voter program. One of the main themes in the data was that they often encountered the attitude Clay describes here. Dr. Hahrie Han and I have a draft of a paper where we argue that the social context of voting has an important, but understudied, role in voter turnout outcomes.
especially if no one reaches out to educate them about the connection between political representation and conditions in their community.

Voter mobilization best practices are premised on the assumption that the main goal is to turn out people who are already understand the benefits of voting and are therefore likely to vote. In this formulation, the main task is simply to get people to turn out to vote. Therefore, polling, data, and the other powerful tools that the electoral industry uses are aimed at identifying likely voters who will vote Democratic and getting them to the polls. However, these techniques do not necessarily help Democrats and other progressives engage with impoverished communities and people of color. There is little to indicate that existing tactics are able to break through the problem that Mr. Dixon identifies above; many people are living in situations of dire need and they do not see Democrats directly speaking to or addressing their problems and their pain.

The OOC is trying to build something different from existing voter mobilization structures. Through leadership development (discussed in Chapter 3 in-depth), the organization educates people and encourages them to overcome the feelings of disempowerment Mr. Dixon describes above. Molly Shack articulates how the OOC’s narrative about voting differs from the narrative in the electoral industry,

“The fact that we had the lowest turnout in 2014 since WWII or something like that, people aren’t just dumb. They stopped voting because voting stopped being an avenue for political change for them. And so I think what we’re trying to figure out is, not just ‘How do we talk about voting better to convince these stupid people?’ Because that’s not it, right? People are not collectively dumb
and that’s why they’ve failed to turn out to the polls. Like politicians have been bought off, the game has been rigged, electoral politics and voting has not led to representation in people’s communities. And so it’s not, for us we’re not trying to figure out the ‘best message’ to convince somebody that voting matters. We’re trying to figure out how do we actually invite communities and invite people into something more powerful that makes voting mean something.

Molly is drawing on a piece of conventional wisdom in organizing here. Community organizers have long argued that people are not apathetic about politics because they are dumb or because they do not care about their communities. People are apathetic because they do not see how their actions will have an impact. Because “politicians have been bought off [and] the game has been rigged,” people know that voting does not necessarily give them a real seat at the table. Voting for Democratic candidates in cities has not led to great outcomes for impoverished urban neighborhoods. The solution offered by community organizers is not to try to convince people that voting for a politician leads to change but rather to “invite people into something more powerful that makes voting mean something.” In building social movement infrastructure through electoral work, the OOC hopes to create avenues through which ordinary people can hold elected officials accountable and have a real say in politics. However, there are real limits to what the OOC can accomplish given its reliance on funding from outside elite sources.

Khaled Salehi of America Votes is also concerned about this problem and points to a culprit: the way that decisions are made about where to spend money in elections.
“...So, [when it’s not a presidential election] we lose a lot of capacity, especially in the urban areas, poor communities and in rural areas... If we don’t engage those individuals and those communities around the issues, educate them about why it matters, agitate them so they can take action... we lose a lot of that capacity frankly.... I just think that we just need to do a better job of bringing resources to make sure that we don’t have a 100% drop basically in African American voting, young people voting, women who are in a particular socioeconomic group voting... And you can only do that if you have the resources so that you’re organizing and unfortunately those resources come and go given the priorities and the ranking of a state.

... So, there are limited resources out there. We don’t have the Koch brothers that are gonna say, here’s a billion dollars, go have fun. So for us on the progressive side, we have to prioritize. Prioritize levels of the ballot, prioritize individual races, prioritize states. And Ohio in 2014 was not a priority state. And because of that again that’s the local nature of when the money comes in, especially on the c(4) side. That money never came so because of that there wasn’t as much robust partner program.”

From his vantage point at the table where decisions about data and mobilization get made, Khaled sees how the money flows into elections based on how they are prioritized at a national level. This is an example of technocratic political logic, decisions about where to invest resources are made based on calculations made by political experts about what races and states are most strategic for the Democratic Party as a whole. The goal is
to elect as many Democratic candidates as possible with limited resources. This can be contrasted with the OOC’s populist political logic that prioritizes using voter mobilization to give voice to ordinary people. The OOC is committed to a long-term vision of engaging low-income communities of color on a year-round basis, building up trust and political capacity over time.

Now I will turn to an example that illustrates many of the points discussed above.

2016 Minimum Wage Ballot Initiative: The Limits of Building Power in the NPIC

In January 2015, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative had its annual staff retreat in Myrtle Beach, SC. The retreat took place in a large house located one block away from the beach. One room in the house had been cleared of all furniture save for a circle of chairs. There were about 30 people there, including all staff from OOC core member organizations (OSA, CURE, Amos Project, MVOC). There were also allies from around the state, including Pastor Michael Harrison, chair of the Ohio State Baptist Convention, Tammy Thomas Miles from CCC, a representative from Interfaith Worker Justice, and a couple staff from small organizations in Ohio that were interested in joining the OOC. During the 4-day retreat, several guests from organizations in Ohio as well as national allies came through, attending and conducting trainings and strategy sessions, meeting with organizers, and observing the OOC’s work.

On the second day of the retreat, Kirk Noden laid out the plan for the next two years. His discussion of the minimum wage ballot initiative strategy was embedded in a reflection about a prior campaign that the OOC had been involved in, the fight to defeat
SB5. SB5 would have limited the collective bargaining rights of public sector unions in Ohio but was soundly defeated at the polls after significant mobilization funded by unions. I paraphrase Kirk’s remarks below:

“The next signature campaign we’ve been seriously exploring is a 2 year organizing strategy around income inequality. We played a huge role in SB5; we ran the allied outreach. We spectacularly won that. What we imagined would happen after that would be a renewed and dynamic movement of workers. That’s not what happened…

One of the stories out of SB5, which is so depressing, we had a list of 10,000 volunteers that went out to collect petitions. At the end of SB5, We Are Ohio [the union-run coalition that coordinated the SB5 campaign] had a million dollars left. Me and the late president of CWA [Communication Workers of America] went to the coalition and asked them to give us the list and said let’s use the money to organize people. They wanted to give the list to the Democratic Party. [And as for the money] they decided to make a donation to Toys for Tots and then spent the rest of it on consultants…

The minimum wage ballot initiative would be the anchor of a 2-year strategy on income inequality. We could bring in white working class. We want to be ready with a strategy, rather than being swept up into other people’s decisions. We don’t want to be a vendor, we want to be deciding and leading what’s going to be happening in the state. We have some initial money to do signature
Kirk argued that the minimum wage ballot initiative would be good for the OOC because it would be a way for the OOC to help set the agenda for the 2016 election and be recognized as an influential progressive organization in the state. The ballot initiative would also give them an opportunity to reach out and build more of a white working class base. Kirk wanted the OOC to move away from being an organization that is paid to implement campaigns that have already been designed. Instead, he wanted the OOC to have a significant role in setting the agenda and determining strategy for progressive mobilization in Ohio in the 2016 election.

Part of Kirk’s motivation for wanting the OOC to lead the ballot initiative was the OOC’s experience with the SB5 campaign. The OOC was an integral part of that campaign, but labor unions were the primary funders and they controlled the We Are Ohio coalition. The unions decided against investing in organizing with the money left over from the SB5 campaign. Instead they made a donation to charity and used the remainder to hire political consultants. Kirk viewed this as a huge missed opportunity and as a lesson about the dangers of participating in a campaign controlled by someone else. He wanted the OOC to have control over the minimum wage campaign so that they could ensure that resources would be used to organize people and build political capacity among progressive constituencies.

In a follow up interview in 2017, I asked Kirk about his motivations for pursuing the minimum wage ballot initiative. He offered critiques of the Democratic political
establishment that reveal stark differences between the populist political logic that guides community organizing and the technocratic political logic of the electoral industry. He said:

“Progressives/Democrats are always giving lip-service to all this shit and never winning anything. And what I said to the Democratic Party and labor and other people is, if progressives are going to be legit and have real credibility and ground to speak on, we need to actually win things for our people. We need to deliver things to our people that are not just like, ‘We stopped the Republicans from ending collective bargaining.’ ‘We made the tax cuts a little less terrible.’ ‘We didn’t see education totally gutted, only partially gutted.’ It’s like, number one, it’s not an agenda, and number two, people see through that.

...And on the other piece, we knew a year and a half out before the election happened, we knew people were not excited about the candidate. Our people are not motivated by this race. They’re not motivated by this election generally, like if we don’t have other things to energize and inspire people to get them out to vote, we’re going to get creamed. We said that, like 2 years before Election Day... Some people kind of agreed with us, but other people just didn’t hear it or didn’t want to hear it.”

Community organizers regularly demand that public officials make decisions that result in concrete improvements in people’s lives. An extension of this logic is that if Democrats want to claim workers as a constituency, they need to actually make workers’ lives better in real ways. When Kirk says, “we need to win things for our people,” he is
drawing on a community organizer’s political instincts. Organizers are trained to motivate people to act based on self-interest. As Clay Dixon says above, oppressed people often have a hard time seeing something like voting as connected to making their lives better. It is very hard for Democrats in Ohio to win anything at the state level because there are Republican supermajorities in both chambers of the state legislature and a popular Republican governor. A ballot initiative is one of the few avenues available to people that want to see progressive policy changes in the state.

Kirk’s argument was that to motivate people to vote in 2016, Democrats needed to make a case for themselves that was directly connected to tangible benefits they would bring about in peoples’ lives. The 2014 midterm election did not go well for Democrats in Ohio. Their candidate for governor, Ed Fitzgerald, lost in 86 of 88 counties. Voter turnout that year was lower than any midterm in Ohio since 1978, when the state started keeping track of turnout numbers. Based on that experience and ongoing conversations with ordinary people, OOC organizers believed that they would struggle to get their people out to vote in 2016. I observed several conversations among organizers about this topic in 2014 and 2015; there was a serious lack of enthusiasm for the prospect of a Hillary Clinton candidacy among community organizers. Kirk’s goal in promoting a minimum wage ballot initiative was to simultaneously drive voter turnout and strengthen the OOC. He said,

“We really believe that a ballot initiative that’s well designed can really be a great tool to build organization. So if you start early enough you can do dynamic volunteer and paid signature collection. Ballot initiatives create the
opportunity for c(3) and c(4), creates an opportunity for everyone to coordinate across the spectrum. So we saw it as a great opportunity to develop leadership, build organization, give coherence to our electoral program, enhance our voter registration program, enhance our get out the vote program, all that stuff.”

What Kirk describes here is very much in line with the definition of social movement infrastructure, which includes “diverse leaders and a complex leadership structure, multiple organizations, informal ties that cross geographic and social boundaries, and a resource base that draws substantially on contributions from their members for both labor and money” (2001: 76). Kirk points out that ballot initiatives provide a rare opportunity for c(3) and c(4) organizations to work together. This is because c(3) organizations do not face the same legal restrictions for ballot initiatives as they do with political candidates. A ballot initiative is a chance for organizations to work with allies they might not otherwise encounter and thus build and strengthen social networks among progressive activists and organizers.

A ballot initiative would also help the OOC’s voter registration and get-out-the-vote programs. Civic engagement in a c(3) context can be difficult because it is often unclear exactly what exactly you are trying to get people to vote for when you cannot endorse a candidate. A statewide ballot initiative would have given canvassers something concrete to talk about at the doors and would have helped the OOC advance its name and brand by allowing it to be attached to a clear agenda. Ballot initiatives provide an opportunity for recruitment and leadership development because hundreds of
volunteers are needed to collect signatures and organizers are needed to run both paid and volunteer canvasses.

After Kirk proposed the minimum wage ballot initiative at the January 2015 staff retreat in Myrtle Beach, several organizers brought up potential issues, like the fact that a minimum wage strategy does not necessarily help poor people who are dealing with long-term unemployment. DaMareo Cooper acknowledged these limitations but tried to redirect organizers’ focus to the potential of how they could use the strategy for organizing. He said, “Nothing we do is about what we’re doing, what we do is about where we’re going. Can the things we just talked about build your base? Where would you build based on the ballot initiative? How can we use this as an opportunity for leadership development? How can you use this to shift the narrative around poverty and criminal justice in work that you’re doing?” DaMareo encouraged organizers to not think of the minimum wage ballot initiative as the end goal but rather as a starting point for developing leaders, building a base and shaping political debates.

Once the top leaders from the OOC decided that they were going to move forward with the ballot initiative, Kirk secured funding to conduct a poll. In her interview, Joy Cushman from PICO used this process as an example to illustrate Democratic political consultants’ influence on progressive social movement groups. I quote her narrative below:

“For example, the OOC is going to run this minimum wage ballot initiative in 2016. The first step is to run a poll. That’s the only way to get money into the campaign. Which is really frustrating because that’s not where
organizers would start. So then Kirk has to look for someone to do the poll. So he finds Celinda Lake. All the polling and research consultants have some contracts with the parties and some contracts with groups like ours. So Kirk starts working with Celinda Lake on the poll and on what it’s going to look like. And Celinda Lake has done this poll on minimum wage probably dozens of times over the last 10 years. She has a default template of what the questions are, what the debates are, how to frame the narrative, how to frame the issues.

And it’s very, and this is my personal opinion, very small thinking. So then it’s very hard for Kirk or anyone else in this situation. Kirk is doing this for the first time. He’s read a lot of polls but this is his first time shaping a poll. It’s very hard for him to get enough leverage with her to really rethink the frame of the poll and rethink what are we trying to do here? Are we just trying to gauge is this 10, 10.10 and hour or 11 an hour or 12 dollars an hour? That’s a piece of it. But what’s the overall narrative that we’re trying to move that would really challenge Democrats rather than make it easy for Democrats. What’s the narrative?

I mean every minimum wage increase that has gotten on the ballot the last 10 years has passed. So how could this be an initiative rather than just winning the wage, which is important, but also a down payment on a bigger story about what families need to thrive in this country? But doing that runs completely countercultural with Celinda Lake. And she’s great! She’s great at what she does, but it runs completely countercultural to the way she’s thought about polling minimum wage in the last 10 years.”
In planning a campaign, organizers would ideally start with conversations with grassroots leaders, gauging their enthusiasm and allowing them to shape the campaign alongside policy experts and professional organizers. The strength of leaders’ commitment and the size of the coalition’s base would be the key determining factors of whether to move forward. However, that approach would not garner momentum with funders. Conducting a high quality poll of likely voters is crucial for getting political donors to fund a campaign. Funders do not want to make a bad investment, they want to know before the campaign starts that it is winnable, and polls are the legitimized way to establish that. As Joy points out, pollsters have some contracts with the Democratic Party and some contracts with 501c(3) and 501c(4) organizations; this means that in practice there is significant overlap in the framing and content of polls.

In order to be seen as a legitimate recipient of funding, it is important to select a pollster with a good reputation among funders; Kirk selected well-respected pollster Celinda Lake for this reason. A poll does not begin as a blank slate, particularly on issues like minimum wage that have established industry standards about what questions are important to ask. Prestigious pollsters have significant clout. An organization that is trying to run a ballot initiative for the first time, like the OOC, does not have enough influence to make significant changes in the standard template for a minimum wage ballot initiative. This is important because the poll helps to determine the content of the campaign (e.g. how much to increase minimum wage) and the framing that the campaign will use (e.g. why raise minimum wage?). If the OOC wanted to use a frame that was significantly different or more ambitious than what Democratic campaigns generally use,
they would face resistance. I know, for instance, that when testing messaging, the OOC was encouraged to use language in survey questions that talked about the middle class instead of people in poverty. OOC leaders resisted framing the poll to in terms of the white middle class because they see their target constituency as working class people and people of color. That is countercultural in the electoral industry because the conventional wisdom is that white middle class people are most likely to show up to vote, so campaigns should prioritize appealing to them.

The poll that the OOC commissioned returned favorable results indicating the ballot initiative had a good chance to pass in 2016. In May 2015, Joy Cushman got on a conference call with OOC organizers to give them some strategic advice about how to approach organizing the campaign. Below, I paraphrase a short excerpt from their conversation that illuminates how the OOC wrestles with combining an organizing ethos with the culture and expectations of the electoral industry:

*Molly Shack (OOC Civic Engagement Director):* We’re getting a lot of expert narrative things that will let us talk about the issues in a way that will resonate with people’s values. But in terms of like the long-term vision or theory of change or story of the economy, we’re still trying to figure out how to craft it. There are experts that are going to help us, and we need to balance that with what organizers and grassroots leaders say. In terms of motivating volunteers, we need a more compelling theory of change that people want to connect to and get involved with. In terms of record-low turnout in 2014, people know the system
is not working for them right now. It’s not just collective stupidity, there is a lack of response from the political system to the needs of people in the state.

Joy Cushman (PICO campaigns director): The polling and messaging testing is really for TV and direct mail. What works and what is proven to work is storytelling. Who we are as a community, who we are as a state, that is definitely not going to come from message testing, because you will sound like direct mail instead of a human being. I sent a bunch of training materials to Molly and Stu and I would be happy to help with this, we trained people to tell a story of self, story of now, story of us. You started to tell some of it Molly, we’re getting screwed by political system, we’re trying to build independent power to be able to get what we want done. I think it’s really important when it comes to organizers and volunteers not to have just a single story, but have them write their own story of us and now... This choice we’re making right now, collective decision is not just to get this on ballot and win, it is getting people to be a part of building independent political power.

Molly and other OOC organizers were struggling with how to connect their organizing to what they were learning about messaging from pollsters and experts. Molly pointed out the need for a “more compelling theory of change” to motivate volunteers to work for the campaign. Joy agreed with this instinct and advised the organizers to utilize trainings that she had worked on with Marshall Ganz and utilized during the Obama presidential campaign. She encouraged them to have leaders come up with their own stories rather than imposing a single uniform story. Having a frame and message that resonates with
people is not enough to motivate people, community organizers also emphasize that it is important to tell a narrative or story that connects personal experience to political context (Oyakawa 2015). This is different from the Democratic Party influenced strategy of determining the correct messaging to use based on polling.

Later in May 2015, OOC leaders convened a meeting with potential coalition partners on the minimum wage campaign. This meeting took place at the Communication Workers of America (CWA) office in Columbus, and the purpose was for stakeholders to consider the feasibility of the campaign and options for moving forward. Representatives from several labor unions, researchers from policy think tanks, media consultants, Center for Community Change (CCC) staff members, representatives from the Ohio Democratic Party, and professional political fundraisers were among those present. Basically, the purpose of this meeting was to allow the Democratic political establishment in Ohio to consider the minimum wage ballot initiative proposal and hopefully move forward in getting their support.

OOC staff organizers presented information about what they had done so far to explore the viability of doing a minimum wage ballot initiative. At a previous convening they had done an in-depth presentation of the polling results. At this meeting, OOC staff presented updates about progress on fundraising and their proposals for how to collect signatures to get the wage increase on the ballot. Allies from policy organizations, Center for Community Change, and fundraisers supported the plans being presented by citing research and work that they had been doing to support the initiative. For instance, Khaled Salehi of America Votes expressed support for the initiative and talked about how
the OOC and Stand Up for Ohio (the c(4) sister organization of the OOC) had been thinking strategically about signature collection and data analytics with partners at the America Votes table.

Potential coalition partners asked questions throughout, primarily about how much the campaign would cost and the contents of the bill. Kirk and other OOC staff intentionally emphasized throughout the convening that there were many decisions that had yet to be made about the campaign. They understood that their leadership could be seen as an unwelcome imposition because the OOC had not taken such a strong role in shaping a major statewide campaign before.

As discussed above, OOC leaders hoped to influence the message that Democratic candidates would adopt during the 2016 election. During the stakeholder convening, Kirk and a staffperson from CCC discussed the messaging strategy they hoped to pursue.

*Kirk: We have been doing work with CCC who have been spending lots of resources trying to figure out why we aren’t just cleaning up around income inequality. Focus groups and polling around the country and in Ohio... Can we create an echo chamber around economic fairness in the minimum wage, Strickland and Hillary campaigns? Obviously all legally appropriate with c(3), c(4)...

*CCC staffperson: Some of research that has been done by Celinda Lake and neurolinguists is about how we can be bolder and bigger in campaigns to confront poverty among working people in America. The messaging used today tries to please everyone, it is too bland and abstract. We have developed
messages that challenge dominant conservative notions, create a clear us and them, and move target constituents to action. These messaging principles allow us to talk about jobs and work, making sure that people describe lived experience as opposed to abstractions like inequality. We can lead with progressive values, family, freedom and fairness. Also, we should name causes of harm: say ‘CEOs decided,’ ‘Leaders chose’ rather than a passive construction like ‘Jobs were lost’. Emphasizing the deliberate causation of economic conditions rather than just describing it like the weather.

Kirk’s proposal to the leaders of Democratic and progressive organizations in Ohio was to create an “echo chamber around economic fairness” in three core campaigns in 2016. His proposal was reinforced by a CCC staffperson who spoke about research that CCC had done to develop stronger messaging around economic justice. His recommendations were couched in language that would sound alien in a meeting with OOC organizers and leaders; for instance, saying that their message was designed to “move target constituents to action.” This way of talking about political mobilization frames the message as the stimulus that elicits the desired response of showing up to vote. CCC thus credentialed the OOC’s approach by citing research and using professionalized language to bolster the OOC’s claim to leadership within the political establishment.

Both this example and the previous one showcase how the OOC’s allies in national intermediary organizations support the OOC and help to bridge the gap between the ‘field’ and political elites. CCC and PICO staff provide a bridge between the
assumptions and culture of community organizing and the established way of doing
business in the NPIC and electoral industry. Joy Cushman helped OOC organizers
integrate expert advice about messaging with community organizing tactics for
motivating people to act. The CCC staffperson helped them speak to political operatives
in their language about taking a stronger stance on inequality. Moving the Democratic
Party and other organizations to take a stronger and louder stance on poverty and income
inequality is a goal that the OOC and CCC share, and CCC experts are able to support
this with credible research and language that signals legitimacy and authority on the
issue.

Ultimately, the OOC failed in their attempt to put minimum wage on the ballot in
2016. This was a bitter loss for Kirk Noden, particularly because he played a role in
pushing this issue nationally. Other people’s organizations around the country were
ultimately successful with their minimum wage campaigns. There was frustration in his
voice as he described the scenario:

“We were way out front in terms of other states around the country. We were the
ones who put together this proposal to do $10 an hour and raise it 50 cents every
year to get to 12 and simultaneously eliminate tipped wages at the same time.

And that same proposal is what Maine, Colorado, and Arizona used. They all
took our exact proposal language, they all put it on the ballot and they all won.”

Based on the polling numbers, the minimum wage increase would have had a good
chance to pass in Ohio as well. Why did it not happen? I will discuss this in depth in the
next section. The bottom line is that labor unions in Ohio did not support the effort.
Because of their dependence on outside sources of funding, the OOC was unable to proceed without a supportive coalition.

Why the 2016 Minimum Wage Ballot Initiative Did Not Happen in Ohio

When I stopped observing OOC meetings in the fall of 2015, the plan to put minimum wage on the ballot was still in motion. However, by the time the 2016 election took place, there was no minimum wage ballot initiative. I did follow up interviews with Kirk Noden and Molly Shack to find out what happened. Kirk gave several reasons, which are outlined below:

“There was not a critical mass of players in-state that were willing to advance it. And we essentially were left at the end of the day with the choice of whether we were going to advance it completely on our own. And we had a million dollars. I raised a million dollars for it. But you really need like 6 million dollars to do it. And there were people in particular labor unions that were not just not supportive of it; they were actively working to try to stop it from happening.

OOC leaders saw the minimum wage ballot initiative as an opportunity for their organization to have more of a voice, to move the Democratic Party and other powerful progressive institutions to abide by a more populist political logic. Ultimately, the political establishment did not agree to support the minimum wage ballot initiative. Because the OOC did not have the ability to finance the campaign without the help of labor unions, they were not able to move forward. It is probable that a significant part of
the reason for this was rejection of Kirk’s leadership and not accepting the OOC as a legitimate standard bearer of a major progressive campaign.

The OOC, as an independent group that is outside of the Democratic political ‘establishment,’ is perceived with mistrust by political insiders. Throughout the planning process, OOC leaders were nervous that they would be perceived as usurpers. It is unusual for an independent 501c(3) nonprofit community organization like the OOC to try to take ownership over a major statewide initiative. Usually, labor unions and the Democratic Party are in front and in control of the campaign, and they provide small grants to organizations like the OOC to help with outreach. In March of 2015, Kirk Noden sent a reflection to the OOC core team that illustrates this:

“In a recent meeting, [a person] told me that [they had been hearing] a lot of grumbling about me. [This person] feels so awkward about it that [they] asked me for advice on what to say to these people. [A former staff member] used to constantly tell me that everyone in Columbus felt that I was arrogant and that I should move to Columbus to spend more time in those circles... And finally, perhaps the best accusation to date is that I am running a cult – that the OOC is totally wrapped up in my cult-like personality and blind followers...

I view the message of all this feedback as, ‘this is not your place.’ You can’t be a leader unless you play by our rules, are subservient to our agenda, and you don’t belong here because we didn’t put you here. I also see this with philanthropy – leaders are accepted only if they buy into the entire myth and submit to the power dynamic.”
The ‘grumbling’ and delegitimizing rumors about Kirk among political operatives indicate that many did not accept his leadership. Part of this may be due to the fact that the OOC did not go through the appropriate gatekeepers, did not spend enough time in the right circles of Democratic political elites in Columbus. Kirk believes that this is a case of “you don’t belong here because we didn’t put you here.” The OOC, in trying to lead a campaign, was trying to shift the power dynamic with labor unions and Democratic political operatives. However, their leadership was not accepted.

Wolin (2008) sheds some light on this dynamic, saying that in managed democracy, “control rests with a favored guardian group, the ‘right people,’ who have been preselected by the conquerors and rewarded by being the first to gain a foothold in power… They are expected to produce the political structures of a democracy in which power is distanced from the people in whose name it is to be exercised” (142). While the guardian group of political operatives likely do not view it this way, the impact of their technocratic political logic is to center power among a technically literate and professional elite; this elite happens to be overwhelmingly white and male. Kirk Noden and the OOC are working to interrupt this dynamic, but they are attempting to do so within a set of structures that are set up to create a managed democracy like Wolin describes. The OOC jumped through some of the appropriate hoops, such as hiring a prestigious Democratic pollster to establish the legitimacy of the campaign. However, OOC leaders had not established themselves as part of the core team of people who run Democratic politics in Ohio, and were shut out when they tried to take a leadership role.
The OOC makes political operatives uneasy because they have their own agenda that is separate from the agenda of the Democratic Party. Leaders like DaMareo Cooper are not going to automatically support a Democratic politician out of party loyalty. Community organizers view themselves as accountable to the people in their base rather than allies in the political elite. In fact, OOC organizers and leaders regularly criticize and create trouble for Democrats in local government. For instance, an Ohio Student Association voter guide in 2015 made critical comments about Democratic candidates and lamented that the Columbus city government was not very “small d” democratic because the elections are uncompetitive.

Of course, those who may have been against the minimum wage ballot initiative based on the reasons described above did not necessarily state that directly. One reason that was explicitly given for not moving forward was that 2018 would be a more strategic year to use a minimum wage ballot initiative to drive turnout because there will be a governor’s race that year. This is an example of technocratic political logic: decisions are made based on what experts determine is a strategic use of resources. Also, Ted Strickland, the Democratic candidate for Senator, did not support the minimum wage increase. This further hurt the OOC’s chances of getting labor unions on board.

Molly Shack explains some of the reasoning that was offered to her about why the minimum wage ballot initiative would be more strategic in 2018. She says,

“There are the powers that be that want the governor to be elected, they want to take power back in 2018, that’s an extremely important year. We have a governor up, we have the apportionment board, which is like the AG and
Secretary of State. If we don’t get those seats, we can’t control the process of redistricting. And the process of redistricting has been fucking us and our ability to actually vote and have power in that vote. Our votes are like being hacked in terms of their influence. And so the understanding that that year is crucially important is very much there.

The argument that we’re making is if... we want to win in 2018 with people who are aligned with our values, we need to identify them now, they need to be people’s champs on this issue in 2016 and need to build a name for themselves off of the merit of the work that they’re willing to put in on the issues that affect people in the state. So that when 2018 rolls around, we’re not in that same situation where we’re trying to convince people that some dude is the one who’s going to bring leadership into the state. It’s not about the person. [We need to build] the infrastructure and the capacity of people to advocate for themselves and to decide for themselves what they want and what matters to them.”

Ohio has a major gerrymandering problem. Widely acknowledged as a ‘purple state,’ Republicans have 12 of 16 US House of Representatives seats from Ohio. Many districts involve a large rural area annexed to a small urban area; this creates many ‘safe’ Republican seats. Democratic political operatives were thus correct to identify 2018 as an important election strategically speaking. They argued that a minimum wage ballot initiative could be used to drive turnout in 2018, and since 2016 is a presidential election
year, higher turnout is already expected. This is an example of technocratic political logic, the strategy formulated by political experts is what drives decisionmaking.

Molly articulates the OOC’s counterargument to this, that it is important to continuously build social movement infrastructure of leaders prepared to take action and mobilize people. The way to do this, in the OOC’s view, is for political leaders to “build a name for themselves off the merit of the work that they’re willing to put in on the issues that affect people in the state.” This is an example of populist political logic, political leaders should be evaluated and supported to the extent that they actually improve the lives of ordinary people and deliver needed resources to communities.

Kirk Noden’s reflection on this further reveals the fundamental difference between a populist political logic and a technocratic political logic:

“A lot of these electoral operatives... they see regular people as pawns on the chessboard... they would be like, “Well maybe it’s better to do this in 2018, then that will help the person who’s running for governor, that’s more important. Hillary Clinton’s got it all sorted out, she’s going to win anyway.” And I would be like, yeah, but what about the actual people though? That we’re supposed to be representing? That would get the raise? They’ve got to wait 2 years!? You think it might be better for some Democratic political strategy. What about putting people and what they need at the center of politics and an agenda? But that’s not the way that many of these political operatives think.”

Kirk is deeply frustrated by political operatives’ prioritizing their 2018 political strategy over the needs of people in Ohio who are making minimum wage and could use a raise.
sooner rather than later. He is generally a jovial person, but you can hear the anger in his voice whenever he talks about regular people being discounted, screwed over, or patronized.

I am not trying to argue that a populist political logic is more correct than a technocratic political logic. There could be circumstances in which it might be strategically unwise to pursue a populist strategy; where the long-term greater good could be served by prioritizing expert tactical decisions. However, it is also true that the “floating world” quality of political elites means that they are not likely to be as in touch with people’s concerns as those who regularly talk to people and hear their stories. A political apparatus that is more focused on talking ‘at’ people, on determining the perfect message to elicit a voting response; this kind of system might not be able to correctly read the constituencies they rely on. This is arguably part of what happened in the 2016 presidential election, which completely shocked political elites.

At the end of the day, it all comes back to how the OOC is funded. The OOC needed the cooperation and support of labor unions to move forward with the minimum wage ballot initiative because they did not have their own financial reserves to draw on. Kirk explains, responding to me asking about his takeaways from the minimum wage ballot initiative:

“I think a lot of my reflections go back to like just the reality about our supply lines... I mean I think we were too dependent on needing [unions] as part of an alliance and a coalition to move forward. And we had some problems with one of the core foundations that was funding it... [Foundations] are easily rattled...
by the bloodsport that politics are... it’s not a good place to have most of your
supply lines coming from... I’ve been thinking about for a long time, how do we
really have independence, how do we really build economic power that is really
independent from small foundations and labor and anonymous progressive
donors?

Yeah I don’t know, I mean in terms of what we would have done
differently? I’m not sure. I think it was just like humbling, we were pretty
committed and pretty excited about doing it. I think it was humbling (laughs).
Nothing like experiencing the power analysis map by having your ass kicked on it.
Part of understanding how much power you have or don’t have is you’ve got to
go out and test it. And that was a big test.”

Because they were not completely in control of their own money, the OOC needed union
support to move forward with the minimum wage ballot initiative. Kirk noted that part of
the problem with relying on foundations to fund the minimum wage ballot initiative is
that foundations are “easily rattled” by political controversy. He points out that part of
what the OOC’s experience with the minimum wage ballot initiative demonstrated is that
the OOC did not have enough power to achieve their ambition of setting the political
agenda in the state. They were unable to move forward on their own, and they failed to
convince the Democratic political elite in Ohio to support the campaign.

Molly Shack also offered a reflection about this issue, getting to the heart of the
problem the OOC faces due to being embedded in the NPIC:
“Ultimately, if our funding doesn’t come from the people who we’re talking about owning the work, then there is a variable that’s not their voice. Right? So like, we can talk about building independent political power, we can talk about building bases of people who care about issues and are committed to an organization. If it’s not their money and our money collectively getting put into those decisions and into those entities then there are going to be limitations as to what we can do. And I forget who said it but there was a Civil Rights leader who said... I forget the quote exactly but the worst thing that happened to the Civil Rights leadership is that they taught them how to write grants.”

Outside funding, whether it is from foundations, labor, or anonymous political donors, introduces a variable that is not reflecting the “voice of the people” that the OOC hopes to capture and project. She points out that this leads to a disconnect between what the OOC says it is doing and what they are actually able to do given the rules they agree to abide by within the NPIC. Leaders of social movements on the left, including the Civil Rights Movement, have for a long time been wrestling with the issue of how to bring resources into organizing while still reflecting the voice of “the people.”

**Conclusion**

In the wake of the 2016 election, much of what Kirk Noden and the OOC were advocating for with the minimum wage ballot initiative seems prescient. It is clear that the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, and Ted Strickland failed to capture the imaginations of people of color and white working class people in Ohio. Would that
have been different if her candidacy had been attached to a strong message about inequality and an energetic campaign to raise the minimum wage that highlighted the gendered nature of income inequality? It is impossible to know. However, the resonance of Bernie Sanders’ candidacy, particularly with young people, indicates that there is popular hunger for leaders to take a firm stand on income inequality. Donald Trump won the presidency with a populist message that scapegoated racial minorities and strayed away from traditional conservative ideas about cutting government programs. Democratic political experts were not able to predict this outcome and struggle to understand why it happened. OOC organizers were less surprised, likely because they are embedded in communities and have many in-depth conversations with ordinary people who are angry, pessimistic, and deeply disillusioned by politics.

Cultural critic Franklin Foer writes: “Technocracy — which defines so much of the modern liberal spirit — doesn’t have a natural grasp of psychology and emotion. But if it hopes to stave off the dark forces, it needs to grow adept at understanding the less tangible roots of anger, the human experience uncaptured by data, the resentments that understandably fester.” The key weakness of institutions governed by a technocratic political logic is they can easily become floating worlds of elites, disconnected from the experiences and feelings of everyday people. Community organizing, on the other hand, is all about engaging with emotions like anger and sadness related to poverty and oppression. Organizers encourage people to think about and articulate what they are

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34 [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/books/review/age-of-anger-pankaj-mishra.html?_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/books/review/age-of-anger-pankaj-mishra.html?_r=0)
angry about and why. They coach people to bring those emotions into the public arena, to express to public officials how policies that take resources away cause pain and suffering in communities.

Thus, while organizers are adopting some of the voter mobilization, data and messaging practices that political experts advance, they try to use those tools to allow ordinary people to express their anger at the system. This can be contrasted with the technocratic approach that seems to view ordinary people as passive vessels that can be mobilized using data targeting and an appropriate messaging strategy informed by polling. The OOC and other community organizing coalitions are working within the NPIC to combine voter mobilization tactics with community organizing tactics. They are doing this to take advantage of resources available for voter mobilization, and to expand their power and influence with political elites and elected officials. The example of OOC’s failed attempt to put a minimum wage increase on the ballot in 2016 shows how deeply limited the organization is because of its funding sources.

Ultimately, it is impossible to truly be a “people’s organization,” an organization owned and run by ordinary people, within the NPIC. The OOC and its member organizations are caught in a paradox. On the one hand, OOC organizers have many impressive accomplishments; their efforts to develop leaders, strengthen activist social networks, and win victories for progressive causes have done much to build social movement infrastructure in Ohio. Kirk Noden has orchestrated an influx of resources into organizing low-income black neighborhoods. These resources have been used by
black organizers and leaders to create independent political organizations in their communities.

However, OOC organizers and leaders must work within and be instruments of a system that operates according to a technocratic political logic that prioritizes the opinions of white elite experts about how to best create social change. Working within the NPIC requires that the OOC reproduce aspects of technocratic political logic within the organization; Kirk Noden makes strategic decisions about where to put organizational resources based on his expertise in organizing and fundraising. Instead of reaching out to the OOC’s base to determine their support for a minimum wage campaign, he commissioned a poll. The OOC can promote a populist political logic around the edges of the political system, they can try to get political elites to bow to their demands, but their power to do so is deeply limited by their lack of financial independence.
Conclusion

Saul Alinsky (1946) believed that poor people are their own best advocates. He writes, “The fights for housing, economic security, health programs, and for many of those other social issues for which Liberals profess their sympathy and support, are to the Liberals simply intellectual affinities. They would like to see better housing, health, and economic security, but they are not living in the rotten houses; it is not their children who are sick; it is not they who are working with the specter of unemployment hanging over their heads; they are not fighting their own fight” (155). Alinsky wrote this in the 1940’s, but it is still deeply relevant today. In the non-profit industrial complex, predominantly white elites set the standards for how non-profit organizations must function and what their goals must be. In order to obtain funding from foundations, those who want to work for social change must submit to this power dynamic and prioritize elite-driven agendas, often at the expense of agitating for changes that poor people are desperate for.

OOC organizers make consistent efforts to act in line with their stated mission to be an organization made up of ordinary people fighting to combat corporate and elite dominance. However, they are often stymied by their need to meet funders’ demands. The resources they receive from foundations come with strings attached. Most funding comes in the form of short-term issue-based grants. This puts nonprofit organizations in
the position of having to constantly market their work to funders. This in turn puts strain on organization leaders who must spend a large proportion of their time fundraising.

The structure and practices of the NPIC indicate that funders are not interested in downward redistribution of power, they are interested in advancing their agendas and shaping society in line with their vision. Even if one agrees with the goals that a funder advances, the fact remains that philanthropy is fundamentally about funders exercising power, not sharing it. Organizations like the OOC struggle to work in and through the non-profit industrial complex to achieve a purpose for which the NPIC was never intended: the redistribution of power away from elites and to marginalized people.

The fact that the organization is dependent on gaining favor with elites creates structural problems within the OOC. White, educated leaders have more power to set the organizations’ agenda than working class constituents and people of color. Organizers are told that they must convince people that the organization is devoted to pursuing issues that are of interest to them while at the same time they are directed to keep funders happy by delivering on outcomes of interest. These are incompatible directives. Under these conditions, it is very difficult for organizers to build trusting, authentic relationships with grassroots leaders.

The focus on issue ‘wins’ as the outcome of interest for social movement organizations is one of the most problematic aspects of the NPIC. First of all, telling oppressed people that they need to focus only on issues that are ‘winnable’ only allows for a narrow vision of what is possible. James Hayes’ reflection about issue wins being floorboards in the slave cabins is perceptive. Small, incremental changes can help move
toward the goal of true freedom, but the NPIC insists that those small changes are what leaders should be spending their time and energy on. The overriding emphasis on issue wins in the NPIC encourages and incentivizes people to settle for what they can get rather than to push for real, fundamental change. Change that would actually result in redistribution of wealth and power away from elites and toward the masses of ordinary people that are struggling under the current system.

Emphasizing issue wins is part of the “game” within the NPIC. This game involves positioning oneself to advance and achieve more status and prestige based on a track record of success. One outcome that funders are interested in is whether an investment will allow them to produce a glossy report that touts a win. Can they demonstrate that their investment resulted in impact? It is a game of status played amongst elites. The hoops that that organizers must go through to receive funding, the glossy reports, the networking amongst elites who pat them on the back for their good work, all of this obfuscates what is really going on. People in the NPIC are not honest with each other because they are driven by competition and the need to preserve their slice of the pie. A people-powered progressive social movement cannot be governed according to this logic and maintain the authenticity needed to rally people across race and class to the cause.

The picture is not completely bleak. The OOC has used funds from foundations to build progressive social movement infrastructure in Ohio. The organizers are committed to building a social movement for change. They educate ordinary people and encourage them to become involved in their communities. Resources have been invested in building
the political capacity of communities of color, and there are many examples of leaders in OOC organizations who have had their lives transformed through their involvement with organizing.

All of this raises a question: are the compromises that OOC leaders make to keep their organization funded worth it? There is a contradiction at the heart of the OOC, which is that white professionals are disproportionately empowered relative to low-income people and people of color in the organization. An argument can be made that this is necessitated by the structure that the OOC is embedded in, which requires establishing legitimacy according to standards set by a white elite. Most people of color and low-income people are unable to navigate this system. White professionals are able to move in elite spaces and acquire resources that leaders of color would struggle to access alone.

At the end of the day, OOC leaders are navigating the ‘world as it is.’ And the world today is wrestling with white supremacy and extreme disparities of wealth and power. To ask social movement organizations to perfectly reflect the world that they are trying to create is likely asking the impossible. No organization is immune from isomorphic pressures or from being impacted by social structure. OOC organizers and leaders have taken responsibility for trying to build a better world. That they are hampered by elite power is not surprising.

Future research should examine questions raised by this account using both quantitative and qualitative methods. There should an update of Jenkins and Halci’s 1999 assessment of the nonprofit sector from the perspective of social movement
organizations. How much time do social movement leaders spend raising funds from elites and what impact does that have on their work? What role do foundations’ priorities play in shaping leaders’ plans, including what campaigns they choose to pursue or what tactics they use?

This analysis also highlights another important gap in the sociological literature on social movements: very little research has looked at the role of national intermediary organizations in funding and mobilization structures. How many of these organizations are there? Are there any patterns that can be identified about how they operate? How much funding do they receive and how much funding do they provide to local/state SMOs? How do these organizations influence the agendas of local organizations? In what ways are they subject to elite influence? How do national intermediary organizations influence funders and elites?

There are also broader implications of this work. US democracy is in danger. In 2016, voters elected a demagogue with authoritarian tendencies to the US Presidency. There is a huge and growing wealth divide and widespread distrust of elites. There is deep anger in many parts of the country that have been left behind by the same economic forces that have made a few people very wealthy. Political discourse has been degraded and there is an increasing risk of political violence. The NPIC, as it is currently structured, is unlikely to help this increasingly dangerous situation because it reinforces the structures that cause inequality and division in the first place. Foundations are made possible by the increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. They are not
built to undermine elite dominance, they are built to enact it. In this context, the work of organizations like the OOC is extremely important.
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266


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Appendix A: Methods

This is an ethnographic study of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC). I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews, over 330 hours of participant observation, and collected over 1300 documents. In this appendix I will detail my methods and my analytical strategy.

I used a feminist methodological approach in this project. Verta Taylor (1998) identifies four key qualities of feminist methodology in social movements: 1) attention to gender inequality, 2) focus on women’s experiences, 3) reflexivity, 4) participatory methods, and 5) social action. Taylor (1998) describes how she was influenced by her own experiences of depression in her work on women’s self-help movements. She also discusses the importance of centering the experiences of research subjects. I used semi-structured interviews, which allowed my respondents to guide the discussion to topics and stories that were most salient to them. Semi-structured interviews are useful in the study of social movements because it is important to know how activists understand themselves and their movement (Blee and Taylor 2002). It was particularly helpful to ask about obstacles to building movement from their perspective; this allowed me to get a
sense of how organizers perceive their organizational environment and how they make
decisions in light of the challenges they face.

When I started this project, my initial goal was to study collaboration and coalition building among social movement organizations. The OOC is a good case to study this topic because the organization intentionally builds alliances among progressive social movement organizations in Ohio. I knew about the OOC because of my work with a similar organization called ISAIAH in Minnesota. ISAIAH is a faith-based community organization (FBCO) that includes over 100 churches and is affiliated with PICO. I was on ISAIAH’s staff as an organizer from 2009-2010. I met Kirk Noden and other OOC organizers at ISAIAH’s weeklong trainings in 2010 and 2011. I reached out to Kirk Noden in the fall of 2014 with an email explaining that I wanted to do a case study of the OOC with a focus on understanding collaboration among social movement groups. I had several research questions. Why do progressive groups work together? What are the main challenges that arise? How do they share resources and knowledge with one another? I wanted to better understand structure of progressive social movement infrastructure in Ohio. The OOC core team discussed my proposal and decided that they would allow me to move forward.

I met with Kirk to discuss the project in April 2014 at a tea shop in downtown Columbus. We discussed the field of community organizing and rivalries and dysfunction in national networks. Kirk brought up the relationship between foundations and community organizing and introduced me to the term “non-profit industrial complex” in that initial conversation. He said that some of what creates tension between organizations
is that they are competing for the same grants. He also argued that one problem with contemporary community organizing is that the industry of organizing can be disconnected from the struggles of ordinary people. Kirk noted that he and Doran Schrantz (executive director of ISAIAH) were having an ongoing conversation with one another about their struggle with what it would mean to be a social movement leader instead of a nonprofit leader. I recount this meeting to show that my research subjects, particularly OOC organizers, played an important role in helping me develop my project and analysis. From the outset it was clear that the dynamic between funders and organizations would be an important part of the analysis.

When I started collecting data, it quickly became clear that while collaboration among movement organizations was occurring, the central tension that organizers were experiencing had to do with non-profit funding structures. Throughout the course of the interviews and observations, it became apparent that issues related to securing funding were foremost on many organizers’ minds. Funding was a core topic in meetings of OOC’s top leadership; in particular organizers wanted to try to develop alternative fundraising streams (an ongoing discussion they pursued without much traction or success). When I asked organizers about the challenges they face, many spoke about the difficulties associated with having their funding contingent on issue-based grants. And it became clear that some of the groups that OOC member organizations were working with (such as the Center for Community Change) had a funder/grantee relationship with the OOC. As I collected data, I gradually expanded my focus in interviews and observations to interrogate the relationship between the OOC and funding agencies.
My position as a former staff organizer with ISAIAH was very helpful in terms of gaining access and establishing trust with OOC leaders. I had a strong relationship with ISAIAH’s executive director and staff members from my time there. ISAIAH organizers and OOC organizers often work closely together, particularly on training and fundraising. It is doubtful that I would have been allowed the level of access that I had without my connection to a trusted organization like ISAIAH. When I first started attending OOC meetings, people joked about me being a spy or one of ‘the Feds.’ I noticed that Kirk made sure to credential me by emphasizing that I was an organizer with ISAIAH. I started to follow his example and I had a sense that when I mentioned that I was an organizer with ISAIAH, people who had worked with ISAIAH before (e.g. OOC organizers and representatives from national organizations) were more relaxed and open in my presence. OOC staff allowed me open access to attend meetings and events, including core team meetings where there were often sensitive and tense discussions about the organization. I was able to move in “organizer-only” spaces, like the trainers’ room at weeklong training, which is only open to those who have already been through the week.

Following feminist and critical race scholars (Collins 1989; Taylor 1998), I do not believe it is possible for a person to be truly objective, especially when it comes to ethnography, which involves embedding oneself in a social context and building relationships with research subjects. It is important to be reflexive and consider how one’s perspective and social location influence data collection and analysis. I had two main goals in this regard: 1) to maximize the benefit of my insider knowledge as a former
organizer while minimizing unhelpful bias and 2) to make sure that I was considering the voices of diverse constituencies within the OOC, not just those that I am most similar to.

My brief experience as an organizer also influences my perspective and understanding of community organizing. I have worked closely with people whose lives have been transformed through their involvement in community organizing. I have opinions about organizing methodology based on my experiences as an organizer and as a researcher. I am generally sympathetic to organizers’ worldview and analysis of social problems. While these qualities likely helped me to gain trust and access, they also influence my perspective and analysis. Thus, while my perspective as a former organizer provided significant benefits, it also came with challenges and limitations. For instance, my predisposition to be sympathetic to organizers comes with blind spots, and I recognize that there are times when I am not as critical of community organizing as an outsider might be. Also, I sometimes got distracted during meetings with thinking about the problems being discussed as though I was part of the organizing team instead of a passive observer.

I addressed the limitations of my perspective in a couple ways. First, I cultivated an intentional self-awareness of my role as a researcher rather than a participant and reinforced it regularly. This meant spending a few moments in reflection prior to each observation; I would think about and jot down what I most wanted to gain from my time in the field. This helped me remain centered on the task of capturing as much information as possible. I refrained from participating in meetings and events as much as possible.
Also, my advisor, Korie Edwards, was an invaluable sounding board throughout the data collection and writing process. She challenged me when she thought that I was overidentifying with the organization and allowing my perspective as an organizer to overshadow my role as a social scientist. This triangulation of perspectives helped me recognize and correct places where my personal bias was overtaking a sociological analysis. I also had colleagues read and provide feedback on draft chapters, and the questions they asked me sometimes caused me to question assumptions I was making or to ask different questions than I otherwise would have thought of asking. My experience with this project has led me to the conclusion that for a researcher with an insider perspective, it is very important to solicit advice and criticism from outsiders who are willing to challenge and hold one accountable.

Ultimately, I view my research agenda as an ongoing dialogue with community organizers. Community organizers are public intellectuals (Wood and Fulton 2015) and applied sociologists. They teach and use sociology every day. Organizers conduct small-scale social experiments on a regular basis; they are consistently trying to create and improve upon methods to get ordinary people to take political action together. They are also qualitative researchers in a sense because they spend their time meeting one-on-one with community members and hearing about their struggles. I have significant respect for organizers’ knowledge about their communities and their craft.

My ongoing conversations with organizers have helped shape my analysis in many ways. This project should not be read as the objective observations of a neutral observer of human behavior but rather as an attempt to understand social structure.
through the experiences and perspectives of a particular group of people: organizers and nonprofit staff who are attempting to build social movement infrastructure. Given how salient the NPIC was for participants in this study, it is honestly somewhat baffling to me how little there is in the sociological literature on social movements about how activists deal with funding structures. I believe that my approach has allowed me to uncover and interrogate issues that other researchers have not addressed regarding the internal contradictions within social movement organizations.

Next, I will discuss each of my data collection methods in turn: interviews, participant observation, and archival data. Then, I will outline my analytical strategy and describe how I approached reporting the data in this account.

**Interviews**

I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with organizers and staff members of OOC member organizations as well as organizations allied with the OOC. I used purposive sampling and snowball sampling. My goal was to interview people with a variety of perspectives about the OOC and the field of community organizing. For the most part, the interviews are with staff members of nonprofit organizations and foundations. The interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes and they were conducted in person and over the phone. All interviews were transcribed.

I started by interviewing OOC organizers. During each interview, I asked organizers to describe their partnerships with other organizations at local, state, and national levels. After each interview, I asked the organizer if they would be willing to provide me with contact information for staff members of organizations that they are...
allied with. There were separate interview guides for OOC staff, national organization staff, and local organization staff. I made a distinction between local and national allies because the type of collaboration that occurs is often different depending on the type of organization. National organizations tend to be larger and often have a funder/grantee relationship with the OOC while organizations based in Ohio collaborate on local campaigns and initiatives. The interview guides are included in Appendix B.

I had several goals in mind when recruiting interview respondents. I wanted the sample to include all of the OOC organizers that were on staff for over a year, representatives from labor unions that work with the OOC, staff of national organizations that the OOC works with, staff of philanthropic foundations, and a variety of local and state-level allies that the OOC works with to advance its aims. Overall, I achieved my aims. My interviews allowed me to gain a variety of perspectives on the OOC and movement building work at local, state, and national levels.

I interviewed 17 OOC staff, 6 foundation staff, 8 labor union staff, 10 national intermediary organization staff (4 of these are from community organizing national networks), 8 staff from local nonprofit allies, 2 staff from policy organizations, 2 staff from peer organizations similar to the OOC (statewide organizing collaboratives), and one nonprofit consultant. The racial composition of my interview sample is: 35 white (63.6%), 15 black (27.3%), 2 Asian (3.6%), 2 Arab (3.6%), and 1 Latino (1.8%). The sample includes 34 men (61.8%) and 21 women (38.2%). Of the 17 OOC staff interviewed, 9 were black, which accounts for 60% of all black respondents.
One limitation of my interview sample is that people who responded to my request tended to have or at least express positive views of the OOC, its staff, and its activities. There are individuals and organizations who are very critical of the OOC, but I mostly heard about these perspectives secondhand during observations. I reached out to a few individuals who were known to be critical of the organization, but they did not respond. Thus, my interview sample does not reflect the full diversity of perspectives about organizing and philanthropy, and nearly all of my respondents were supportive of the OOC and organizing as a field.

**Participant Observation**

I conducted over 330 hours of participant observation of OOC sponsored activities. I attended events hosted by the OOC statewide organization as well as events hosted by OOC member organizations. I started observing OOC meetings in May 2014 and continued through October 2016.

Because the OOC and its member organizations are all very active and host many meetings and events, I placed particular emphasis on observing on the activities of a couple groups, while also attempting to attend a variety of meetings. I primarily focused on the activities of the Ohio Student Association and the emerging team working on the issue of mass incarceration. I chose the Ohio Student Association because of their role in the emerging Black Lives Matter movement; early on during observations it became clear that there was something interesting happening with youth leadership of racial justice movements and I wanted to make sure to capture that. I chose mass incarceration
because it was the main organization-wide initiative happening and so it was a good chance to see people from different organizations collaborate on a campaign.

I also observed meetings and events of The Amos Project, Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC), Miami Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC), and Akron Organizing Collaborative (AOC). Events sponsored by the statewide organization that I attended included quarterly 2 day all-staff meetings, weeklong training in organizing skills, 7 OOC core team meetings, and the 2015 OOC staff retreat in Myrtle Beach, SC.

I was able to take detailed field notes using my laptop. I would often attempt to capture peoples’ words as they spoke, so direct quotes that appear from observational data are recreated from these notes. Also, I kept my field notes as objective as possible; I described what occurred in as much depth as possible without adding analysis or commentary. This helped me maintain distance from the subjective aspects of my experience when analyzing the data, which often happened months or even years after the initial observation. After meetings, I would add details to the notes. I also wrote analytical memos where I reflected on my feelings about the meeting as well as themes that were emerging.

**Archival Data**

My final source of data is over 1300 archival documents from the OOC. These documents include historical documents detailing the evolving organizational structure of the OOC over time as well as grant applications and reports. I uploaded all the documents into NVivo to be coded alongside field notes and interviews.
The historical documents allowed me to get a sense of the evolution of the OOC from 2008 through 2014. The organization is very fluid, with leadership structures and staff configurations changing every year. The grant applications and reports were very helpful for understanding the sheer amount of work and effort that is put into raising money in the NPIC. The grant applications and reports also helped me understand what kinds of expectations funders place on grantees. While I did not quote the archival data at length in the text, I did use it to confirm dynamics being described by interviewees.

Analytic strategy and data use

I used NVivo software to organize, code and analyze data. I coded data by broad topic first, and then created more specific codes as necessary. For instance, I created a code (NPIC) for any time something relevant to nonprofit organizations or nonprofit funding came up in an interview, observation, or document. Then, I created sub-codes with more specific areas of analysis.

When analyzing the data, my goal was to ensure that the conclusions of the analysis were reinforced by multiple data sources. Quotes that appear in the text are often representative examples of sentiments and ideas I heard expressed in other interviews and observations as well as the existing literature. Also, I attempted to triangulate multiple perspectives about the NPIC. For instance, I wanted to make sure that I had a sense of the funding process from the perspective of both organizers and funders. I also paid attention to how perspectives varied according to race, gender, and social class.
In general, I worked to ensure that this work accurately reflects the experiences of the research subjects. It is my hope that community organizers and other non-profit professionals will recognize the portrait of the NPIC that appears in this text.
Appendix B: Interview Guides

Interview Guide for OOC Staff/Leader

Demographic information:
First I would just like to ask you a few basic questions about yourself before talking more about your involvement with OOC:
  • What is your educational background?
  • What is your occupational background?
  • What is your age?
  • How would you describe your racial/ethnic background?

Involvement History:
Now I would like to ask you some questions about your involvement with OOC as an individual.
  • How long have you been involved with OOC?
  • What is your job/role in the organization? What are your main responsibilities?
  • How did you get involved with OOC? Why do you continue to stay involved?
  • How did you get involved with organizing?
  • Have you had other experiences with organizing? Where was it and what did you do? Were there differences between that experience and your experience organizing with OOC? Can you tell me more about those differences?
  • How would you describe the mission of OOC? What is the OOC trying to accomplish?
  • Have you done or participated in anything working with OOC that stands out to you or that you are particularly proud of? What was exciting or rewarding about that experience?
  • Have you faced any difficulties being involved with OOC? If so, what has been most difficult about being involved with OOC? Can you give me an example?
  • What are you hoping to gain from your involvement with OOC? Do you have future career plans or goals in mind? [If yes] Can you say more about those goals?
About OOC:
Now I want to know more about your perspective on OOC as an organization.
- What do you think are the main strengths of OOC? What do you think OOC does really well?
- What, if anything, do you think are the weaknesses of OOC? What would you like to see OOC do differently?
- Do you have any ideas about how OOC could improve? [If so] Please describe what you think would help.

Organizational Collaboration:
- In your capacity as [position/role] with OOC, have you worked with other organizations?
- What organizations have you [personally] worked with locally? [write out list]
  At a statewide level? [write out list] A national level? [write out list] Do you work with organizations that fund the work of the OOC? [If so] what organizations do you work with?
  o Which of these partnerships would you identify as most important? Why?
- [For each organization listed or listed as important] What did you do together? Please describe your experience working with [organization]. What sorts of activities did you do together?
- [For each organization listed or listed as important] Did you find anything useful or rewarding about working with [organization]? If so, what?
- [For each organization listed or listed as important] Did you find anything to be difficult or challenging about working with [organization]? If so, what?
- Out of the organizations that you have worked with, which of these partnerships have you spent the most time cultivating? Why?
- Are there organizations that you wish you could work more closely with? Why?
  o Do you perceive that there are barriers to your organizations working together? If so, can you identify those barriers?
- Do you have any general thoughts/reflections about organizations working together?

Field of Organizing:
- How long have you been an organizer/involved with organizing?
- Do you think that organizing is important? If so, why? What do you think that organizing accomplishes?
- Have you seen the field change since you first became involved? [If so] Could you describe those changes?
- What, if anything, would you say that the organizing you have seen is getting right or doing particularly well?
- Do you have any criticisms or critiques of organizing?
- Do you have any general thoughts/reflections about the field of organizing?
Interview Guide for National Affiliated Org Staff/Leader

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your views and experiences about organizing and collaboration among organizations in this field. I am interested in knowing what you honestly think, feel and do. There are no right or wrong answers.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that your participation is entirely voluntary, you may discontinue the interview at any time and if there is any question that you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not have to answer that question.

All of this was summarized in the informed consent form that I mailed to you, did you get a chance to look at that? Did you bring it with you? (If not, I will hand them 2 copies, one to sign and one to keep). Please sign one copy of the form, the other is yours to keep. Do you have any questions before we begin? Is it ok if I record this interview?

Demographic information:
First I would just like to ask you a few basic questions about yourself before talking more about your involvement with [your organization]:

- What is your educational background?
- What is your occupational background?
- What is your age?
- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background?

Involvement History:
Now I would like to ask you some questions about your career and your involvement with and thoughts about [your organization].

- How long have you been involved with [your organization]?
- What is your job/role in the organization? What are your main responsibilities?
- How would you describe the mission of [your organization]? What is [your organization] trying to accomplish?
- What do you think are the main strengths of [your organization]? What do you think your organization does well?
• What, if anything, do you think are the weaknesses of [your organization]? What would you like to see [your organization] do differently?
• How did you get involved with [your field]?
• What do you find most rewarding or exciting about your work?
• What would you say are the most difficult or challenging aspects of your work?

**About OOC:**
Now I want to know more about your perspective on OOC as an organization.
• Why do you work with OOC? What do you do together?
• What do you think are the main strengths of OOC? What do you think OOC does well?
• What, if anything, do you think are the weaknesses of OOC? What would you like to see OOC do differently?
• Do you have any ideas about how OOC could improve? [If so] Please describe what you think would help.

**Organizational Collaboration:**
• In your capacity as [position/role] with [your organization], have you worked with other organizations?
• What organizations have you [personally] worked with?
  o Which of these partnerships would you identify as most important? Why?
• [For each organization listed or listed as important] What did you do together? Please describe your experience working with [organization]. What sorts of activities did you do together?
• [For each organization listed or listed as important] Did you find anything useful or rewarding about working with [organization]? If so, what?
• [For each organization listed or listed as important] Did you find anything to be difficult or challenging about working with [organization]? If so, what?
• Out of the organizations that you have worked with, which of these partnerships have you spent the most time cultivating? Why?
• Are there organizations that you wish you could work more closely with? Why?
  o Do you perceive that there are barriers to your organizations working together? If so, could you identify those barriers?
• Do you have any general thoughts/ reflections about organizations working together?

**Field of Organizing:**
• How long have you been an organizer/involved with/aware of organizing?
• Do you think that organizing is important? If so, why? What do you think that organizing accomplishes?
• How does organizing relate to the mission of [your organization]?
• Have you seen the field of organizing change since you first became involved/aware? [If so] Could you describe those changes?
• What, if anything, would you say that organizing is getting right or doing particularly well?
• Do you have any criticisms or critiques of organizing as a field?
• Do you have any general thoughts/ reflections about the field of organizing?

Conclusion:
• Is there anything that I didn’t ask about or that we didn’t cover that you would like to tell me about?
• Is there anyone else in your field that you think I should talk to?
• Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Guide for Local/State Affiliated Org Staff/Leader

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your views and experiences about organizing and collaboration among organizations in this field. I am interested in knowing what you honestly think, feel and do. There are no right or wrong answers.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that your participation is entirely voluntary, you may discontinue the interview at any time and if there is any question that you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not have to answer that question.

All of this was summarized in the informed consent form that I mailed to you, did you get a chance to look at that? Did you bring it with you? (If not, I will hand them 2 copies, one to sign and one to keep). Please sign one copy of the form, the other is yours to keep. Do you have any questions before we begin? Is it ok if I record this interview?

Demographic information:
First I would just like to ask you a few basic questions about yourself before talking more about your involvement with [your organization]:
• What is your educational background?
• What is your occupational background?
• What is your age?
• How would you describe your racial/ethnic background?

Involvement History:
Now I would like to ask you some questions about your career and your involvement with [your organization].
• How long have you been involved with [your organization]?
• What is your job/role in the organization? What are your main responsibilities?
• How did you get involved with [your organization]? Why do you continue to stay involved?
• How would you describe the mission of [your organization]? What is [your organization] trying to accomplish?
• What do you think are the main strengths of [your organization]? What do you think your organization does well?
• What, if anything, do you think are the weaknesses of [your organization]? What would you like to see [your organization] do differently?
• How did you get involved with [your field]?
• What do you find most rewarding or exciting about your work?
• What would you say are the most difficult or challenging aspects of your work?
• What are you hoping to gain from your involvement with [your organization]? Do you have future career plans or goals in mind? [If yes] Can you say more about those goals?

About OOC:
Now I want to know more about your perspective on OOC as an organization.
• Why do you work with OOC? What do you do together?
• What do you think are the main strengths of OOC? What do you think OOC does well?
• What, if anything, do you think are the weaknesses of OOC? What would you like to see OOC do differently?
• Do you have any ideas about how OOC could improve? [If so] Please describe what you think would help.

Organizational Collaboration:
• In your capacity as [position/role] with [your organization], have you worked with other organizations?
• What organizations have you [personally] worked with locally? [write out list] At a statewide level? [write out list] A national level? [write out list]
  o Do you work with organizations that fund the work of [your organization]? [If so] what organizations do you work with?
  o Which of these partnerships would you identify as most important? Why?
• [For each organization listed or listed as important] What did you do together? Please describe your experience working with [organization]. What sorts of activities did you do together?
• [For each organization listed or listed as important] Did you find anything useful or rewarding about working with [organization]? If so, what?
• [For each organization listed or listed as important] Did you find anything to be difficult or challenging about working with [organization]? If so, what?
• Out of the organizations that you have worked with, which of these partnerships have you spent the most time cultivating? Why?
• Are there organizations that you wish you could work more closely with? Why?
  o Do you perceive that there are barriers to your organizations working together? If so, could you identify those barriers?
• Do you have any general thoughts/reflections about organizations working together?

Field of Organizing:
• How long have you been an organizer/involved with/aware of organizing?
• Do you think that organizing is important? If so, why? What do you think that organizing accomplishes?
• How does organizing relate to the mission of [your organization]?
• Have you seen the field change since you first became involved/aware? [If so] Could you describe those changes?
• What, if anything, would you say that organizing is getting right or doing particularly well?
• Do you have any criticisms or critiques of organizing as a field?
• Do you have any general thoughts/reflections about the field of organizing?

Conclusion:
• Is there anything that I didn’t ask about or that we didn’t cover that you would like to tell me about?
• Is there anyone else within OOC or that you know has worked with OOC that you think I should talk to?
• Do you have any questions for me?