

What Happens When Communities Organize Through a Crisis?

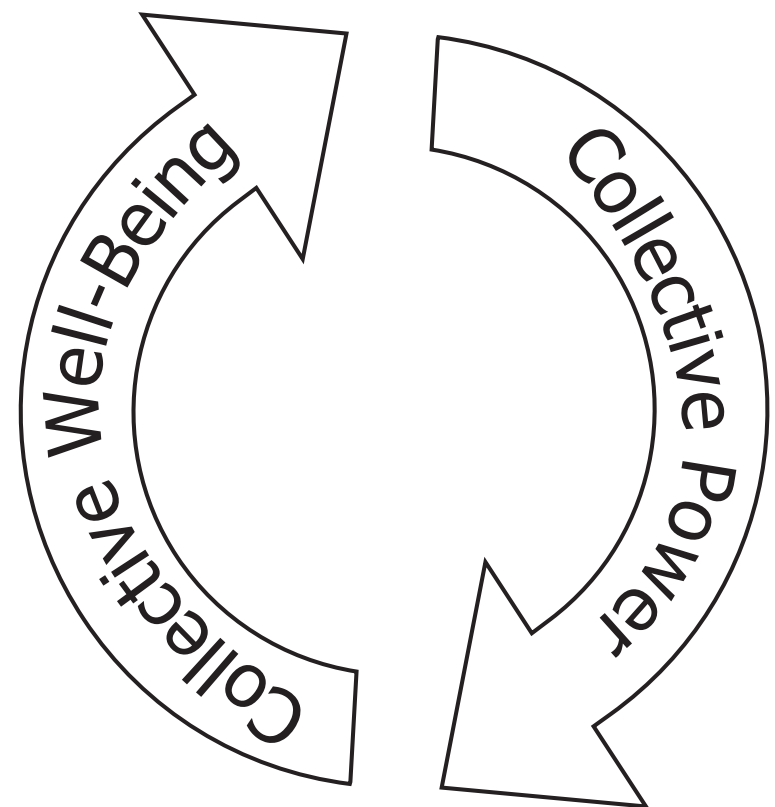
May 2020

The New York Foundation has always believed in the power of New Yorkers to speak out—to identify what’s not working, to say what they need, and to problem solve. The city is at its best when its energy is fueled by our sense of purpose and collective power.

We know from recent experience—September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Sandy—that neighborhoods where residents felt connected to one another, communities that were organizing around common concerns and building power, fared significantly better than those that did not. Grassroots and neighborhood-based organizations hold connections to the pulse of their communities, and in a time of crisis, become hubs for support, care, and solidarity.

But not only are they centers of mutual aid—these organizations are mobilizing New Yorkers to advocate for systemic changes needed to address the root causes of inequity that have been multiplied by this pandemic.

The problems that made New York vulnerable to this crisis are not new—it is only that they are becoming apparent to more New Yorkers. The solutions that we will need to get through this echo demands communities have been articulating for years, including action to protect low-income workers, support to people who have lost employment, releasing people from correctional facilities and immigrant detention, reducing excessive policing and criminalization, ensuring that homeless New Yorkers are housed safely and cared for, transparency of law enforcement and government surveillance, debt and rent relief, and moratoriums on evictions, among other critical interventions.



Since the early days of the pandemic, we have heard from grantee partners about the many ways they are providing immediate relief in their communities. Mutual aid taps into our desire to be here for one another. And while mutual aid is addressing immediate needs and reinforcing a sense of community, it is also a way for organizations to build power, to name and address the root causes of widespread pain and loss, and most importantly to give expression to the kind of city we want to see.

The stories shared here illustrate the ways community members are caring for one another while also using strategies that engage and activate people to win a more just and equitable city. By securing collective well-being, these groups are building collective power.

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Stories

Strategies

Potential Wins

Laal's census coordinators adjusted their outreach plans to initiate phone calls to all Laal members and a broader base of families in the Norwood neighborhood of the Bronx. In addition to providing support, these hour-long calls document the financial and medical needs of families and connect them to immediate help. The calls also provide a way for Laal to educate families about why Census 2020 is the foundation for representation and advocacy for Norwood's Sylheti community on a government level.



Advocacy



Participatory Action Research




Popular Education



Budgetary



Democratic Participation



Neighborhood Change



Oversight

Neighbors Together has adapted their soup kitchen, now an entirely to-go operation, to provide hot, fresh, and healthy meals to hundreds of members each day. Through its Community Action Program, participants have become leaders in organizing campaigns and advocacy efforts that aim to transform public policies that compound rather than relieve hunger and poverty. Neighbors Together members are active leaders in the #HomelessCantStayHome campaign.



Advocacy



Base Building



Leadership Development



Budgetary



Democratic Participation



Neighborhood Change




Legislative

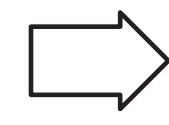


Oversight


Launched soon after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Red Hook Initiative (RHI)** now provides critical "real-time" information to Red Hook residents about COVID-19 resources, programs and related services. Its Red Hook Farms now acts as a hub for distributing fresh food and PPE supplies, and its existing Community Building Team has stood up a Community Health Worker operation that refers residents to health professionals. RHI has also taken its data collected from its COVID-19 community survey to advocate for essential services with officials at City Hall, City Council, NYC Housing Authority and the NYC Health Department that includes: the expansion of wifi-access for public housing residents, a Red Hook referral system to a major NYC health system, restoration of summer employment for young people following the city's elimination of the Summer Youth Employment Program, and even temporary laundry services.




Advocacy




Leadership Development




Participatory Action Research




Strategic Communications




Budgetary



Democratic Participation

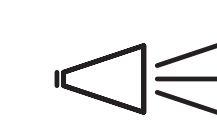


Neighborhood Change




Oversight

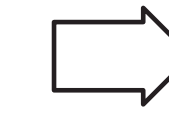
Desis Rising Up and Moving's (DRUM) Power and Safety through Solidarity (PaSS) campaign not only meets the immediate needs and concerns of their members and communities but also builds power by bringing in new people and developing the leadership of their members. Phone calls and online trainings have given members opportunities to lead and to organize the broader community. Through DRUM's platform, toolkit, and social media campaigns, members elevate their experiences to draw public attention to the need for affordable, fair housing policy, a rent moratorium, and protections for immigrants.




Advocacy



Base Building



Leadership Development



Strategic Communications



Budgetary



Democratic Participation

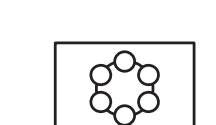


Neighborhood Change

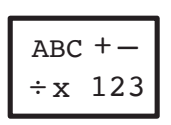


Oversight


MinKwon Center for Community Action operates a Korean language hotline to inform Queens residents not only about COVID-19, but also Census 2020, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and the new law that permits undocumented immigrants to get drivers licenses. In response to a widespread need for language assistance applying for unemployment, MinKwon Center translated the entire NYC unemployment website and FAQ page, and created Korean-language video guides for applying for unemployment insurance. They revise these resources each time there is an update to the government services' process. The group is also pressing the NYS Attorney General to urge the Supreme Court to delay a decision on DACA due to the devastating effect it could have on immigrant families.



Coalition Building



Popular Education



Strategic Communications



Democratic Participation



Neighborhood Change

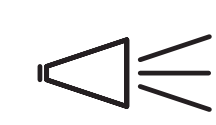


Legislative




Oversight


At the start of the pandemic, **CAA AV's** intergenerational member base immediately went into action to bring neighbors and friends into the CAA AV network. Personal protective equipment is being distributed as a way to expand the group's base and to invite residents to join its #CancelRent campaign. CAA AV's needs assessment deepens these relationships and plugs new members into campaigns that address those needs. In collaboration with Housing Justice for All on the #HomesGuarantee platform, they organized a statewide rent strike on May 1st that included direct actions like banner drops and social media publicity campaigns.



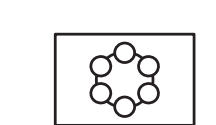
Advocacy



Base Building



Direct Action



Coalition Building



Democratic Participation



Neighborhood Change



Legislative



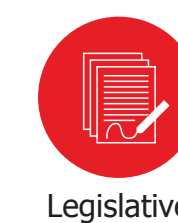
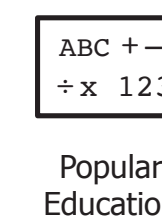
Oversight

Stories

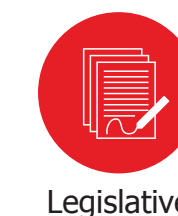
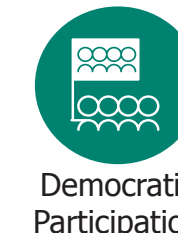
Strategies

Potential Wins

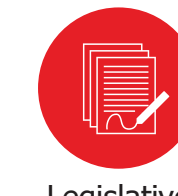
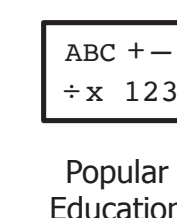
Black Womens' Blueprint is mobilizing doulas, midwives and birth workers on their trauma-informed mobile healing unit, the Sistas Van, to meet the health care needs of Black women in Central Brooklyn, one of the neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19. Its members also organize and advocate for policies and laws that promote gender and racial justice.



VOCAL-NY is providing its members, who are at-risk of contracting coronavirus because they have underlying health issues and lack places to live, with masks, gloves, personal hygiene supplies and food. With help from legal service allies, they are securing temporary housing for a limited number of people at extremely high risk and leading a campaign to force the city to make hotel rooms available to people without a place to live. Through direct relief services like clean needle exchanges, a bathroom and sink for folks experiencing homelessness, helping individuals access their stimulus checks, wellness calls and more, VOCAL-NY is able to identify the key issues impacting their members, and has quickly turned those issues into campaigns they advance through media actions and digital tools.



Rockaway Youth Task Force's Urban Farm is a critical resource for Rockaway residents. Garden plots are available to families to grow food, the farmstand provides fresh produce to hundreds of residents from July to November, and the Rockaway Roots program offers paid positions to low-income youth. Rockaway Youth Task Force youth leaders have successfully advocated for an expansion of the Urban farm, now a full acre, thereby increasing access to fresh and healthy food in the community, and are demanding the restoration of the City's Summer Youth Employment Program, which was eliminated due to budget cuts.



Community Voices Heard is distributing food to families by purchasing meals from Black- and Latinx-owned restaurants in the communities where members live. The vast majority of the group's members have very limited access to the internet through smartphones and to bridge the digital divide, Community Voices Heard is distributing computer tablets with internet access. Its leaders are expanding the group's membership base; leading a campaign to preserve and improve public housing conditions; and advocating for affordable housing. As part of the Housing Justice for All coalition, Community Voices Heard is calling for the government to pass policies that support people who cannot afford rent and mortgage payments during the COVID-19 crisis.



It will be a loss if mutual aid becomes vacated of political meaning at the moment that it begins to enter the mainstream—if we lose sight of the fundamental premise that, within its framework, we meet one another's needs not just to fix things in the moment but to identify and push back on the structures that make those needs so dire.
Solidarity Not Charity, Social Text, March 2020 Dean Spade

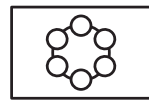
TYPES OF STRATEGIES



Advocacy: A strategy that raises or rallies public attention or action, in order to bring issues into the realm of public concern and effect policy change.



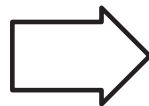
Base Building: Building a base of directly affected individuals through outreach and then engaging them through developing relationships based on vision for change.



Coalition Building: Various organizations and stakeholders come together to build power to win a campaign.



Direct Action: A collective effort to move power, and or demonstrate the organizations strength. It could be a meeting where demands are being laid out to a person with power, accountability session, a sit-in, etc.



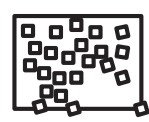
Leadership Development: An intentional process to develop the skills and political consciousness of community members so we can better understand the world around us and how to change it.



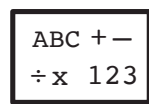
Litigation/Community Lawyering: Lawyering that is done in partnership with community groups in support of broader advocacy and organizing efforts.



Participatory Action Research: Action-oriented process in which community members are central to the design, administration and analysis of the research and research is used engage elected officials, garner media attention and advocate for socially just policies.



Participatory Planning and Design: A process to engage community stakeholders and gather their input on land-use planning so that the community can have an informed voice in how their neighborhood looks and feels.



Popular Education: Making complex issues accessible to everyday people through training, visual materials or other communication or teaching methods.



Strategic Communications: The process of presenting ideas clearly, concisely, persuasively and systematically in a timely manner to the right people. Strategic communications is about maximizing available resources and positioning your organization to be proactive instead of reactive.

TYPES OF WINS



Budgetary: Funding changes such as increased or decreased funding for a particular program or community or opposition to budget cuts. (Example: the Governor allocated \$20 million dollars for affordable housing programs).



Democratic Participation: Increased public and citizen participation or democracy in an issue or government body. (Example: a city council member launches a participatory budgeting process in their district).



Enforcement: The enforcement or implementation of laws that already exist on the books but may not be implemented in practice. (Example: the Department of Labor increases enforcement of violations of the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights).



Legislative: Involves changing existing laws or introducing new laws. These laws can be local laws, state laws or federal laws. (Example: the Mayor and City Council pass Paid Sick Days legislation).



Neighborhood Change: Concrete improvement to a neighborhood (Example: a playground is built).



Oversight: Monitoring and oversight over a particular issue, agency or program from either governmental or citizen committees or individuals. (Example: the Mayor appoints an independent monitor to oversee the police department).

List of Mutual Aid Activities

- Access to health professionals
- Cash assistance for bail bonds
- Cash assistance to meet urgent needs
- Coordinating transportation
- Distributing fresh and hot food
- Distributing handmade care packages
- Distributing medical supplies and personal protective equipment
- Distributing supplies to detainees and people who are incarcerated
- Expanding broadband and digital support
- Grief counseling
- Gynecological and doula support
- Local and urban farming
- Navigating government benefits and health insurance
- Organizing laundry services
- Providing sanitation facilities
- Quarantine accomodation for domestic violence survivors
- Quarantine accommodation for immigrant detainees
- Survey community needs
- Traditional healing practices
- Translating vital information into multiple languages
- Virtual therapy
- Wellness check-ins

Acknowledgements

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Adelante Student Voices
 Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice
 African Communities Together
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 Alliance of Families for Justice
 American Indian Law Alliance
 Arab American Association of New York
 Black Women's Blueprint
 Brandworkers
 Brooklyn Movement Center
 CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities
 Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC
 The Center
 Centro Corona
 Chhaya Community Development Corporation
 Churches United for Fair Housing
 College & Community Fellowship
 Columbia County Sanctuary Movement
 Community Voices Heard
 Damayan Migrant Workers Association
 DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving
 Eastern Farm Worker Association of Long Island
 Eastern Farm Worker of Central New York
 Equality for Flatbush
 Good Old Lower East Side
 Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County
 InterFaith Works
 Jahajee Sisters
 Justice for Migrant Families WNY
 La Colmena
 Laal
 Laundry Workers Center
 Long Beach Latino Civic Association
 Make the Road New York
 Masa-MexEd, Inc.
 Mekong NYC
 Midtown Utica Community Center
 MinKwon Center for Community Action
 Mixteca Organization, Inc.
 National Mobilization Against SweatShops
 Native American Community Services of Erie and Niagara Counties
 Neighbors Together
 New Immigrant Community Empowerment
 New Sanctuary Coalition
 New York Communities Organizing Fund
 New York State Youth Leadership Council
 North Folk Spanish Apostolate
 Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition
 OLA of Eastern Long Island
 The POINT Community Development Corporation
 Project Hajra
 PUSH Buffalo
 Queer Detainee Empowerment Project
 Red Hook Initiative
 Refugees Helping Refugees
 Rockaway Youth Task Force
 Rural Migrant Ministries
 SEPA Mujer
 Seven Dancers Coalition
 Street Vendor Project
 Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition
 United We Dream Network
 VOCAL-NY
 Voces Ciudadanas
 Worker Justice Center of New York
 Workers' Center of CNY
 Worker's Justice Project

*List in formation