

Who is Working Well Together?

Marguerite Casey Foundation

Seattle-based grantmaker builds regional networks of organizations working to engage low-income families as advocates for change.

Quick Grantmaker Stats

Type of funder	Private Foundation
Geography/Issue Area	Seattle, Washington
When founded	2001
Total assets (as of FY 2013)	\$698,175,241
Annual giving (as of FY 2013)	\$26,833,157
Number of staff	25
Website	www.caseygrants.org
Brief description of the program/ practice being discussed	Supporting networks of organizations as a strategy to build movements.

1. Describe the situation or practice.

Marguerite Casey Foundation works to nurture a movement of families advocating for change. As one of its core movement-building strategies, the grantmaker has created networks in four of its grantmaking regions to build collective capacity to mobilize and engage low-income families.

“Our philosophy is that organizations on the ground can accomplish so much more when they connect across issues, geography, race and egos,” said Luz Vega-Marquis, president and CEO of the Seattle-based foundation.

2. What have you tried to do differently?

Marguerite Casey Foundation’s network-building approach is part of its broader strategy to support a movement of low-income families. In 2008, the foundation and its grantees engaged approximately 30,000 people across the country in the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign to create a national platform to identify and advance the issues and policies needed to improve the economic well-being of all families. The campaign resulted in the development of Equal Voice networks, a national online newspaper (www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org), and subsequent convenings, including an online convention in 2012 during which families updated the national family

platform. Over the past six years, the Marguerite Casey Foundation has helped to develop 12 vibrant Equal Voice networks across the country. An example is the Equal Voice for Southern California Families Alliance, which includes 17 Marguerite Casey Foundation grantees and one non-grantee group. Participants range from the Los Angeles-based Asian Americans Advancing Justice to the Parent Institute for Quality Education to the YMCA of Greater Long Beach.

While each organization has different constituencies and issue priorities, through the network they agree to work together to promote civic participation on core economic justice topics. Network activities include surveys and focus groups, regional convenings to inform activists and families about the effort, leadership development workshops for Equal Voice leaders in the region and get-out-the vote campaigns and other grassroots actions involving the whole network.

Starting in 2009 and spanning three years, the foundation provided mini-grants to support building and growing the networks. Foundation support for the Southern California group totaled \$90,000 over two years. These funds supported both network-wide activities and the work of participating organizations to advance the goals of the broader group among their constituencies.

While the mini-grants provided the resources to support the building of the networks, it is the network weavers who have ensured that the networks continue. The foundation recognized early on that the networks needed a super-connector or someone who could manage the networks and facilitate the flow of information to build trust. The foundation provides financial support to each network to hire and manage network weavers.

Based on the success of Equal Voice, the foundation and its grantees are exploring the possibility of creating a national family-led membership organization to support a constituency of poor families that has the political power to influence policy. The foundation recently awarded grants to several networks and individual groups in each region to test approaches to recruiting and retaining members.

3. What has been the result?

Vega-Marquis said Equal Voice continues to demonstrate that movement building can be a powerful strategy for grantmakers to achieve their goals. The foundation conducts an annual survey of grantees to assess their progress on five indicators of movement building. The most recent report cites the following results of the foundation's support:

- Eighty-eight percent of grantees deepened relationships with existing partners, and 74 percent expanded the number of partners.
- Grantees provided leadership training to approximately 75,000 people nationwide and developed 48,000 core leaders who were actively involved in local movement work.
- Grantees achieved policy victories on issues from wage theft and raising the minimum wage to ending employment discrimination against the formerly incarcerated.

For more results, see <http://caseygrants.org/resources/assessment-research/assessment-report/>.

A Foundation's Movement-Building Framework

Marguerite Casey Foundation has developed a framework for movement building that identifies clear roles for the grantmaker, its grantees and the families they are working to engage in the movement. For more information see: caseygrants.org/.

- The **foundation's role** is to invest in infrastructure and ideas; provide multiyear general operating support to cornerstone community organizations; encourage collaboration across regions, issues and race; convene networks; fund issue education, activism and advocacy; and deploy strategic communications to advance issues and a unifying message.
- **Grantees**, in turn, work to build a base of families; promote intergenerational grassroots leadership; develop their own organizational capacity; collaborate and partner as networks; engage in issue education, activism and advocacy; and conduct research and analysis.
- **Families** are an engaged and informed constituency who advocate on their own behalf for policy changes to improve the economic and social well-being.

4. What are your key insights from doing the work?

Vega-Marquis said the Marguerite Casey Foundation's approach to movement building requires an understanding among trustees and staff that the work will take time to bear fruit. She added "Equal Voice requires that we Ask, Listen, Act and allow people to find their own path forward and accept that their choices may be different from ours."

Vega-Marquis added that she and her staff are very deliberate about keeping the foundation's trustees informed as the work progresses about both the successes and the challenges they are encountering.

"I have a board that is very inquisitive and very much committed to learning along the way. They hold the staff and me accountable for regularly coming to them with evidence that this is working and, if it's not, with plans for recalibrating and adjusting the work," she said. What never changes, Vega-Marquis added, is the broader vision of building a movement of low-income people who can advocate on their own behalf.

"There is no question that 'capital' as it is traditionally defined — the financial assets that allow us to make grants and help build the infrastructure for a national movement — is central to our work. But without the 'capital' that an empowered constituency of poor families brings, our assets will never be enough to sustain social change."
— Luz Vega-Marquis, President and CEO