Resolving the Dilemma between Organizing and Services: Los Angeles ACORN’s Welfare Advocacy

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The issue of providing individual services historically has been a major dilemma for social action, Alinsky-style community organizations. Empirical evidence suggests that most action organizations that moved into service provision lost mass-based participation, militant tactics, and a power-building orientation. The author presents a case study of Los Angeles ACORN’s combination of direct action organizing and providing individual advocacy services to welfare recipients in a campaign organizing general relief recipients. In this case individual service provision supported rather than diminished organizing. Based on evidence from this case study, the author presents a model to help organizations balance the tension between organizing and providing services: Establish an organizing model and identity first, hire new staff to implement services, engage in strategic planning, and use services to create new funding streams.

KEY WORDS: ACORN; advocacy; community organizing; social services; welfare

The issue of providing individual services historically has been a major dilemma for social action, Alinsky-style community organizations (COs). The literature is replete with examples of confrontational COs that lost their militant edge and mass base and became little more than government-funded social services agencies after engaging in services provision and development activities (see Bobo, Kendall, & Max, 2001; Gittell, 1980; Perlman, 1979; Piven, 1966; Stoecker, 1995a). Most empirical evidence and practice wisdom suggests that COs wishing to maintain a direct action focus should avoid providing individual services. Although some literature suggests that COs can provide services and maintain a political focus (Rubin & Rubin, 2001), this literature offers scant detail on how this is done and few empirical examples of successfully combining Alinsky-style community organizing and services.

For much of its 35-year history the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) followed the warnings in the literature and maintained its focus on direct-action confrontational organizing to empower low- and moderate-income citizens. ACORN’s original organizing model did not include services as a significant part of the model (see Delgado, 1986; Kest & Rathke, 1979; Staples, 1984). Because most literature documents ACORN’s first 15 years rather than its past 18 years of organizing, it is not widely known that ACORN’s model has grown more complex and now incorporates services and development activities in many of its offices.

This article addresses the question: How can a direct-action CO provide individual services without losing its organizing focus and militant edge? To document ACORN’s approach, I present the case of Los Angeles ACORN’s recent workfare organizing. From 1997 to 2001 Los Angeles ACORN organized general relief (GR) recipients around a variety of workfare issues. In 1998 ACORN began providing individual advocacy services by means of a telephone hotline for welfare recipients with case problems. From 1998 to the present, ACORN has maintained this these services while organizing direct-action campaigns on welfare issues, tenants rights, predatory lending, child care subsidies, and numerous other issues. The primary aim of this article is to document how ACORN maintained this two-pronged approach.
without having the services provision take over, redirect, diminish, or fundamentally change their direct-action organizing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tension between providing services to oppressed populations or organizing them to challenge the power structure has been a fundamental dilemma since the beginning of social work. The language of the debate has changed over the years from wholesale versus retail social work (Richmond, 1930), to cause versus function (Lee, 1937), to clinical versus community (Specht & Courtney, 1994), to services versus organizing (Bobo et al., 2001). Although terminology has changed over the years, the fundamental issue is whether it is best for social workers to provide direct services to address immediate problems, or to bring large numbers of oppressed peoples together through organizing and pressure the power structure (typically government bodies or corporations) to make policy changes that will ameliorate individual suffering.

A parallel question running through the debate was whether one organization (or social worker) can successfully provide services while organizing for institutional change. Much of this debate has taken the form of a polarized dichotomy, and social workers typically had to decide if they were going to learn and practice macro or micro social work. Although some argue that this is a false dichotomy (Fisher & Karger, 1997; Lewis, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2001), most schools of social work have reflected the dichotomy and either specialized in clinical or community practice or offered different tracks within a school. Agencies and organizations also have reflected the macro–micro dichotomy and offered either services to clients or organized oppressed populations to challenge the power structure to win reforms and policy changes.

Most of the literature on combining services and organizing discusses an agency either moving from organizing to services or vice versa. Historically, moving from services to organizing was described as difficult if not impossible; and moving from organizing to services, though much easier and more common, came with a stiff price: Organizations typically abandoned their organizing programs. Observing antipoverty organizations in the early 1960s, Piven (1966) found that organizations that initially provided services with the intention of moving into organizing became overwhelmed with service provision and never made the transition to organizing. In the 1980s and 1990s, the growth of empowerment practice created a trend of service agencies moving toward an organizing orientation. Cohen (1994) analyzed a direct service agency’s attempt to empower its homeless clients by establishing a consumer advisory board. Her analysis suggested that it remains difficult for organizations to move from services to a social action model.

In contrast to the difficulty experienced by service organizations moving into organizing, the path from organizing to services has been much easier but with serious costs. Political, economic, and fiscal pressures tend to push agencies from organizing toward services. Perlman (1979) studied 60 community organizations and found a distinct trend of action organizations moving into services. Perlman summarized the dilemmas of moving from organizing to services:

The problem is that this move from protest to program [services] often leads to new forms of dependency and to the demise of the original participatory structure and mass base of the organization. As the energies, resources, and leadership skills of the organizations are focused on ‘hard’ programs, the role of the ‘soft’ community side tends to diminish and may wither away altogether. (p. 410)

In an empirical study of 16 social action organizations, Gittell (1980) found that most had moved from organizing to services. The reasons given were the time required by large numbers of people to maintain long-term organizing projects, and the inability to raise money internally. She found that most organizations took external money to survive, and relying on outside funding caused the organization to move from organizing to direct service provision. The organizations often rationalized taking external money in exchange for services as the only way to survive. Similar to Piven’s (1966) finding, Gittell found that the quest for money and the time required to maintain services became all-pervasive and left little time and energy for organizing.

Recently, there is less literature on combining organizing with services, but some literature about combining organizing with development activities. In two case studies Stoecker (1995a, 1995b) found
a tendency for organizations to move from an organizing to a development agenda. In both cases, as development activities increased, organizing activities decreased. Collective mass participation declined with an organization’s frequency of engaging in confrontational tactics against outside targets. Stoecker (1995a) noted “Indeed, based on observations of other cases around the country, the shift from an organizing to a community-based redevelopment focus has been widespread, and the problems described here seem to be common” (p.17).

Other recent literature documents a growing trend of hybrid organizations. In a macro analysis of women’s and racial or ethnic identity organizations from 1955 to 1985, Minkoff (1995, 2002) found much faster growth rates in the number of advocacy and hybrid service—advocacy organizations than in the number of organizations providing services only. Over this 30-year period, there was no measurable growth in the number of protest organizations; only 2 percent of the 975 organizations studied engaged in protest activities. According to Minkoff (2002), the number of hybrid organizations grew because the dual approach increased both legitimacy and access to resources.

In a trenchant critique of the nonprofit literature, which tends to dichotomize nonprofits into either bureaucratic organizations or voluntary grassroots associations, Hyde (2000) analyzed six feminist social movement organizations (FSMOs). The structure and function of the organizations Hyde (2000) analyzed did not fit neatly into either the bureaucratic or grassroots forms. Her analysis suggested that a continuum is a more accurate reflection of the complex hybrid nature of FSMOs.

Compared with the traditional community organizing literature cited earlier, feminist literature has a different analysis of the weaknesses and strengths of combining services and organizing (see Ferree & Hess, 2000; Hyde, 1995a, 1995b; Riger, 1994). According to Hyde (2000) service provision is not viewed as diminishing a confrontational or political approach to change, but rather “the provision of services is another means of challenging mainstream methods” (p. 53).

At least one recent CO text reflects the traditional CO concern about the pitfalls of combining organizing and services. In the widely used text Organizing for Social Change, Bobo and colleagues (2001) argued that an organization needs to be clear on a mission of service or organizing and should not attempt to combine the two. They cited an empirical example of a housing organization that was unclear whether its model was organizing or services and, therefore, was unsuccessful at either serving clients or organizing them to build power.

Rubin and Rubin (2001) offered a more positive perspective, claiming that ACORN and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) successfully moved from organizing to services without losing militancy or the ability to build power, but they did not give examples or explain how either organization accomplished this. Similar to Rubin and Rubin, Minkoff (1995, 2002) and Hyde (2000) argued that hybrid organizations are viable structures for social change organizations, but neither analyzed the intra-organization tensions and dynamics involved in maximizing this organizational structure. This article attempts to address these gaps in the literature.

DEFINITIONS AND METHOD

Because the terms used in this article have multiple definitions, the following definitions (from the literature) are offered to support conceptual clarity of this article. Organizing refers to collective mobilization of oppressed people to build power and win issues by challenging the power structure (that is, government and corporations) with confrontational tactics. Rothman (2001) called this social-action organizing (For overviews of organizing see Alinsky, 1971; Bobo et al., 2001; Boyte, 1980; Fisher, 1994; Kahn, 1991; and Perlman, 1979). Services are “tangible goods and/or benefits, such as health care, financial aid, individual legal representation, and vocational training” (Minkoff, 2002, p. 398). Los Angeles ACORN provides advocacy services for welfare recipients who have a dispute with the welfare department. In this case study advocacy is a service. This should not be confused with the definition of advocacy in the nonprofit literature, such as Jenkins’s (1987) definition of advocacy as “any attempt to influence the decisions of an institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest” (p. 297).

I collected data from ACORN campaign files; interviews with organizers (including the lead organizer of the workfare campaign and the head organizer of Los Angeles ACORN) and case advocates; and participant observation at a direct action, a negotiating session with DPSS, and a membership meeting. Los Angeles ACORN campaign files contained research reports, campaign brochures, press releases, articles from newspapers, meeting
case example

Founded in 1970, ACORN organizes low- and moderate-income citizens into democratically run organizations that engage in direct-action tactics to win issues such as tenant rights, living wages, lifeline utility rates, affordable housing, access to bank loans, elimination of predatory lending, and numerous other issues. ACORN’s organizing model is well documented in the literature (see Adamson & Borgos, 1984; Delgado, 1986; Fisher, 1994; Kest & Rathke, 1979; Staples, 1984; Stein, 1986; also see www.ACORN.org for current activities). Although parts of ACORN’s organizing model are shared by other COs—such as direct-action tactics with IAF—two parts of ACORN’s model stand out: organizing unorganized populations and a federated structure giving ACORN the ability to simultaneously organize on neighborhood, city, state, and national issues (Atlas & Dreier, 2003). Departing from the Alinsky tradition of organizing people through institutional networks (typically churches), ACORN goes door-to-door and signs up members regardless of their institutional connections. ACORN codified this doorknocking model into what is called an “organizing drive.” Probably the most creative aspect of ACORN’s organizing model, and what sets it apart from all other COs, is the comprehensive blend of factors: work on a variety of issue campaigns and activities; the ability to work on issues ranging from neighborhood to national; direct involvement in electoral politics; organizing the unorganized; a multiracial membership; combining direct services with direct action; ownership of two radio stations; and 33 years of consistent growth.

Although the majority of ACORN’s organizing has been geographically based in low-income neighborhoods, ACORN has considerable experience in constituency-based organizing such as organizing unemployed workers or welfare recipients. ACORN evolved in 1970 from the National Welfare Rights Organization, but in the early 1970s began a “majority strategy” of organizing in low-income neighborhoods (Kest & Rathke, 1979). For the past 34 years, ACORN has replicated its neighborhood organizing model such that today it has offices in 81 cities constituting more than 700 neighborhood organizations and 150,000 dues-paying members. For most of the 1980s and early 1990s ACORN did not organize welfare recipients, but after President Clinton signed welfare reform in 1996 ACORN felt mandated to “go back to the future” and, once again, organized major campaigns focusing on welfare issues (Rathke & Schur, 1999)” (Brooks & Brown, in press)1.

“ACORN organizers analyzed the new welfare law and predicted that the unprecedented work requirements would result in widespread workfare programs across the nation. Because Los Angeles and New York City had massive workfare programs in place, ACORN attempted to pre-empt welfare reform-inspired workfare programs by launching major union-style organizing drives in the two biggest U.S. cities.”1 (For details on the New York workfare campaign see Krinsky, 1998. For analysis of the Los Angeles campaign see Brooks, 2001, and Reese, 2002.) Los Angeles County required all able-bodied GR recipients to work 40 hours a month in return for their $221 monthly cash assistance. In a typical month between 10,000 and 15,000 GR recipients were required to complete a workfare assignment to receive their check. After talking to workfare workers at some of the 500 workfare cites in Los Angeles County, ACORN organizers found numerous issues to organize around. Workfare workers complained about feelings of stigma; the injustice of earning only one-half or one-third as much as salaried employees performing the same job; and civil rights issues such as not having proper gloves, uniforms, or equipment to perform a job; and civil rights issues such as not being able to use the same restrooms or cafeterias as salaried employees. After a few weeks of recruitment, members formed an organizing committee and began meeting weekly to strategize a campaign with targets, demands, and actions. Over the next four years ACORN got signed authorization cards from 10,000 workfare workers, had more than a dozen confrontational actions (involving 100 to 400 demonstrators) at

1For details on the New York workfare campaign see Krinsky, 1998.
which members and allies made demands on DPSS and/or the County Board of Supervisors around workfare policies and reforms. They eventually won most of their demands, including the first grievance procedure in the United States for workfare workers, improved health and safety procedures at numerous work sites, priority hiring lists at many workfare sites, and a major policy victory making workfare voluntary rather than mandatory when the county revised the program in response to welfare reform. ACORN’s workfare organizing is largely credited for blocking DPSS’s attempt to require workfare for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients whose time limits had expired (personal communication with J. Jackson, lead organizer, ACORN, Los Angeles, September 8, 2000).

“Although ACORN found workfare workers’ issues ripe for organizing, a barrier to organizing was the fragile, often unstable (close to being homeless) living situations of GR recipients. In addition to workfare issues, recipients described problems obtaining food stamps or cash benefits with DPSS. Organizers quickly discovered that providing individual case advocacy to GR recipients would enhance their ability to organize the workfare constituency. If ACORN could help secure a benefit that stabilized a recipient’s life, that individual would be more capable of getting involved in the workfare campaign. Early in the campaign ACORN demanded a program whereby GR recipients with a case problem could call ACORN, and ACORN could identify the problem and call a DPSS liaison to resolve it. DPSS responded that they already had such a system in operation with Legal Aid of Los Angeles County and with Public Counsel. They agreed to add ACORN to the list of organizations that could call special liaisons to solve recipient case complaints (personal communication with A. Schur, head organizer, ACORN, Los Angeles, May 15, 2003)” (Brooks, 2001; Brooks & Brown, in press). For a couple of months an ACORN organizer took the calls and advocated on behalf of individuals. The two employees assigned to take case complaints are former welfare recipients who joined ACORN in 1997 through the workfare campaign. “After being involved as members for a year their knowledge and expertise of the system was sufficient to warrant hiring them to advocate for other welfare recipients with case complaints” (Brooks & Brown, in press). For the past five years the two advocates have helped 150 to 200 welfare recipients per month. The majority of calls involved an applicant trying to receive a benefit (for example, cash assistance, food stamps, or Medicaid) she believes she is qualified for. “The ACORN advocate takes the details of the complaint from the caller and clarifies what the person did in relation to the welfare rules and procedures; then she calls a special liaison at the appropriate DPSS office” (Brooks & Brown, in press). Liaisons are required to consult the caseworker and the client’s record and give ACORN a response the same day (personal communication with N. Hernandez, case complaint advocate, ACORN, Los Angeles, May 13, 2003). More than 65 percent of case complaints are resolved in the clients’ favor, resulting in a benefit. A client satisfaction survey conducted by Brooks and Thompson (2003; see also Brooks & Brown, in press) found that recipients were very satisfied with ACORN’S advocacy service. Eighty-eight percent of recipients surveyed who had phoned in case complaints directly to DPSS said that ACORN did a better job than DPSS in responding to their complaint.

**ANALYSIS**

Since 1998 Los Angeles ACORN has maintained the individual case advocacy while simultaneously organizing welfare recipients to reform GR and TANF policies. As described earlier, ACORN conducted more than a dozen militant actions targeting either DPSS or the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. ACORN organizers reported that during campaign strategy sessions the advocacy program was never mentioned as something that might be threatened if ACORN’S tactics angered DPSS administrators. ACORN organizers said they never entertained the idea that DPSS might cancel the case advocacy program in retaliation for being targeted by ACORN. For their part, DPSS officials never threatened to end the program during negotiations with ACORN around changes in workfare policies (personal communication with A. Schur, head organizer, ACORN, Los Angeles, May 15, 2003).

Not only has ACORN maintained individual services and direct-action organizing, but they have used the case advocacy program to build the organization. ACORN uses the list of people who call in case complaints as a recruitment tool. ACORN calls recipients who phoned in case complaints and
invites them to a meeting or action. Although ACORN has not kept records on the number of members recruited this way, they estimated that during the busiest two years of the workfare campaign 100 to 200 people from the case complaint system got involved in the organizing campaign. Some of these recruits became loyal dues-paying members and have been involved in many of ACORN’s non-welfare campaigns (personal communication with A. Schur, head organizer, ACORN, Los Angeles, May 15, 2003).

Besides being a recruitment tool, taking 200 calls a month from welfare recipients is a research tool informing ACORN about common problems and trends in welfare issues. Although the case complaint system was established to help GR recipients with case problems, after a year in operation ACORN began receiving an increasing number of calls from TANF recipients. Time limits were expiring for TANF recipients and DPSS wanted to move all TANF recipients who had not found work into workfare positions. Because ACORN was in the middle of the GR workfare campaign, they easily expanded the campaign to include TANF recipients. In a campaign titled Everyone Who Works Deserves a Paycheck, ACORN blocked DPSS from expanding workfare to tens of thousands of TANF recipients (personal communication with A. Schur, head organizer, ACORN, Los Angeles, May 15, 2003).

Doing case advocacy has solidified ACORN’s credibility and commitment on the issue of welfare in Los Angeles County. At the beginning of the workfare organizing campaign, ACORN was relatively new to Los Angeles and did not have a track record in Los Angeles welfare issues. Some of the targets of the campaign claimed that ACORN was not committed to the constituency, but was exploiting them for the organization’s political gain (Rivera, 1997). After taking case complaints for the past five years and helping some 2,000 people a year secure a welfare benefit, such attacks on the organization’s credibility are impossible to make today.

Having direct services support and complement the organizing is a departure from the traditional literature, but supports findings from the feminist literature. The action organizations that Gittell (1980), Perlman (1979), and Piven (1966) observed in the 1960s and 1970s were unable to maintain organizing and services, much less have the services support the organizing. This also contradicts the advice given by Bobo and colleagues (2001), that organizations typically should not combine services and organizing. However, ACORN’s experience of combining organizing and services supports Minkoff’s (2002) finding that hybrid organizations are more viable because the dual focus expands access to resources and increases organizational legitimacy. ACORN’s experience also supports the feminist analysis that services and political approaches are not inherently incompatible (Ferree & Hess, 2000, Hyde, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Riger, 1994).

**FACTORS IN ACORN’S SUCCESS**

**Organizational Identity**

Most of the organizations studied by Piven (1966) and Perlman (1979) were relatively young and did not have firmly established identities as social action organizations. Piven noticed a trend of organizations that began with services intending to transform themselves into action organizations, but became overwhelmed with services and never made the transition. ACORN’s organizing model and identity were well established in the 1970s and 1980s as a militant, direct-action organization. By the time ACORN began blending organizing and services in the 1980s, its organizing model was so firmly established that it was not easily altered by service provision. Even though the organization began combining organizing with services in the 1980s, this has largely been undocumented in the literature. The most commonly referenced works about ACORN’s model make no mention of service provision (Delgado, 1986; Staples, 1984). The lack of documentation of ACORN’s blended model has resulted in most external observers of ACORN having a one-dimensional perception of ACORN as only a direct-action organizing group.

**Strategic Planning**

ACORN organizers are trained to implement ACORN’s traditional organizing model, which does not include service provision. Staff hired as organizers typically do not cross over to service jobs in the organization. ACORN implements services on a case-by-case basis, based on the opportunities presenting themselves and a strategic cost–benefit analysis of how providing the service will affect the organizing. In some cases, such as housing development and loan counseling, ACORN sets up a new
nonprofit corporation with a new charter, bylaws, budget, and staff. In the case of the workfare campaign, ACORN found it difficult to organize the constituency without providing a direct service to help stabilize the lives of welfare recipients. In addition, the case complaint hotline was a demand from the GR recipients who had joined the organization. When ACORN analyzed the benefits and costs of providing individual advocacy they concluded that individual advocacy would improve the organization’s ability to organize the constituency and become a tool for membership recruitment and research on trends in welfare issues. In addition, helping thousands of individuals a year secure welfare benefits would support the organization’s credibility on welfare issues. If ACORN hired new staff and found funding for individual advocacy, the service would not be a drain on the organization.

Division of Labor
One way ACORN protected the integrity of the organizing program while providing direct services was by hiring new employees rather than redirecting organizing staff. The case complaint advocates have their own job descriptions, hours, salaries, and job responsibilities. Resolving case complaints is the primary responsibility of the two case complaint advocates and is not the responsibility of anyone else in the office. This clear-cut division of labor has been crucial to halting mission drift from organizing to services.

Related to the division of labor is ACORN’s culture of organizing. Within ACORN organizing is the job that has the most prestige and status. Although organizing salaries are modest compared with other organizations’ pay scales, ACORN’s culture values organizing more than anything else. When service job descriptions are created they are not designed to have more status, prestige, or power compared with organizing. The case complaint advocates work fewer hours and have lower wages compared with organizers. ACORN does not build into service job descriptions incentives that would make the job more attractive than organizing. This is a distinct departure from the status organizing jobs have in many other organizations. Within much of organized labor, organizing positions are the lowest status positions in the labor bureaucracy (personal communication with W. Rathke, chief organizer, ACORN, New Orleans, September 9, 2003).

Funding Sources
Social action organizations historically have had difficulty finding money to support organizing (Abowd, 1997; National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1995). This difficulty in finding secure funding was considered a primary cause of organizations moving out of organizing and into services, because services were easier to fund. Founded in 1970, ACORN was established when it was common for organizations to move from organizing to services and never move back. Wade Rathke, the founder of ACORN, had observed several Alinsky organizations (such as the Woodlawn Organization) abandon organizing to pursue services and development activities (personal communication, New Orleans, September 9, 2003). Rathke thought these organizations had tragically lost their way, so he built into ACORN’s model the ideal of financial self-sufficiency. ACORN did not seek or take government money. It raised most of its budget internally through membership dues, fundraisers, and door-to-door canvassing. The remainder of the budget came from the few foundations that supported grassroots organizing. Although this stringent policy may have had its negative side (for example organizer salaries were very low, making it difficult to recruit staff), it protected the independence and integrity of the social action model of organizing.

Another part of strategic planning around new services provision is to find a funding stream to support it. ACORN successfully pursued foundation funding for the case complaint hotline. ACORN’s director in Los Angeles reported that foundation funding for case advocacy covers the expenses for the program (personal communication with A. Schur, head organizer, ACORN, Los Angeles, May 15, 2003). During the first few years of case complaint advocacy, one advocate was paid through a Section VIII welfare-to-work-program. Ironically, ACORN was able to employ her as an advocate for welfare recipients. ACORN’s experience funding the advocacy program offers support to Minkoff’s (2002) finding that hybrid organizational structures attract more resources than do single-function organizations.

Although federal and California budget deficits make it unlikely that ACORN would ever obtain government funding for case complaint advocacy, philosophically, ACORN can argue that they are
doing a job the welfare department should be doing: helping people obtain benefits they are entitled to. If government money were offered, it would put ACORN precariously in the middle of the age-old dilemma for social action organizations. If ACORN grew dependent on the government money, would this diminish its direct-action, confrontational approach to challenging DPSS policies? Thus far ACORN’s success at finding foundation support for case complaint advocacy has been the perfect solution to maintaining individual services without taking resources from organizing.

CONCLUSION: A MODEL FOR COMBINING ORGANIZING AND SERVICES
The evidence presented in this case study challenges the traditional CO literature and practice wisdom from the 1960s and 1970s suggesting that one organization could not engage in direct-action organizing while providing individual services to the public. Los Angeles ACORN’s experience suggests that, at least in the case of welfare organizing and individual case advocacy, it is possible to do both, and even have the service provision support the organizing. ACORN’s experience appears to support the position of feminist literature suggesting that services and organizing are not inherently opposed (Hyde, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Based on the analysis of this case, the following model is offered as guidance for organizations desiring to provide services while maintaining mass-based, direct-action organizing.

Organize
A new organization considering blending organizing and services should organize first and begin individual service provision after establishing a clear organizing model, identity, and reputation. The organizing model should be written and codified so that all staff are clear on the model. It might be helpful to just organize for several years to establish an organizing identity internally and externally.

Engage in Strategic Planning
An established CO considering moving into services should conduct a thorough cost–benefit analysis. The organization should analyze how providing services will contribute to or diminish the organization in membership, staffing, finances, and politics.

Hire New Staff
Organizations should not reassign organizers to service positions; new staff, preferably from the constituency being organized, should be hired to provide the services. To maintain a culture of organizing, new job descriptions should be carefully formulated to ensure that new service jobs do not have more status, prestige, or pay than organizing jobs.

Create New Funding Sources
The organization should take an entrepreneurial approach to funding services. Rather than take resources from its organizing program, the organization should pursue private foundation funding for the new service. The hybrid nature of the organization is likely to expand the pool of potential funding sources.

Because this is a case study, future research should test the generalizability of the findings. This study found parallels between ACORN and macro analyses of feminist social movement organizations. Future research should compare the internal organizational dynamics presented here with those of feminist organizations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that other community organizations, such as the IAF, have successfully balanced services and organizing (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). Future research should see if findings in this study apply to IAF and other organizations that have successfully combined organizing and services.

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