CASE STUDY: MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

"I do not possess the words to tell FACT how profoundly important this process is to our work, to our development, to our organizational sustainability, to our unleashing of potential, and to our personal well-being. It means everything to us at this point, and the entire organization here wants to thank you for having the insight, the forethought, and commitment to make this possible."

— Gihan Perera, Executive Director, Miami Workers Center, December 2004

FACT MAP Budget

$30,175 consulting time

$14,632 travel and expenses

Duration of Consultancy

12 months

Work Accomplished

- Consolidated and implemented new financial and administrative systems
- Strengthened organizational management
- Developed a human resources and administrative plan for organization
- Initiated a two-year strategic plan and established the basis for a more comprehensive plan

The Need

Created in 1999, the Miami Workers Center (MWC) is building the political leverage of Miami's disenfranchised residents. MWC initiates and supports the development of low-income, people of color organizations in communities across the city. Under the umbrella of MWC, these organizations develop a common set of values, political education and analysis, and a shared strategy for change. In this way, MWC is uniting residents to speak in a powerful voice to the public and to policy-makers.

When MWC requested help through the FACT Management Assistance Program (MAP), the five-year-old organization was coming to the end of its start-up phase. MWC had grown from a volunteer-run organization based out of its founders' home to a staff of four occupying a storefront office in the heart of the African-American neighborhood, Liberty City and was confronting the limits of its internal planning capacity. The organization and its members had achieved some victories but, despite a more ambitious vision, the organization hadn't grown beyond an active base of support in the Liberty City neighborhood. Its staffing level hadn't grown, despite having money in the budget to add new positions. High turnover and the difficulty of recruiting organizers with experience in Miami and the South were significant challenges.

MWC was at a cross-roads. It asked for help to assess its strengths, its opportunities for growth, and expert advice on how best to grow and sustain an interconnected group of community-based, member-driven organizations.

Consultants Utilized

Carol Cantwell is an expert in designing financial systems and teaching financial literacy to staff and board members. Carol approaches budget and finances in a holistic manner, endeavoring to create a culture of transparency that ensures a clear understanding of the relationship between finances, budget, pr ogram and administration.

Emily Goldfarb is an organizational development generalist with years of experience serving as an Executive Director of a non-profit organization, consulting with philanthropic organizations and advising community-based organizations. She is knowledgeable regarding a variety of organizational models, common problems, and a spectrum of possible solutions.

Developing the Workplan

The consultants led the MWC staff through a comprehensive assessment process, which confirmed the needs MWC identified and revealed additional issues. These included:

- A high level of consensus related to the organization's mission. A lower level of clarity with regard to the implementation of short-term strategies undertaken to achieve the mission.
- A knowledgeable staff with a deep level of commitment, all of whom were seriously over-worked.
- A lack of clear and consistent expectations for staff participation in the organization.
- An on-going frustration with the difficulty of recruiting, retaining, developing and managing new staff.
- A highly-developed theoretical underpinning to guide the work, but less attention to and knowledge about operational practices and structures.
- A shared commitment to a set of social and political values, but no explicitly-stated values to govern day-to-day operations or staff development.
- A fast-paced work environment that demanded constant reprioritization and a lack of criteria and process for determining priorities.

Challenges

MWC tapped FACT's Management Assistance Program because it was confronting significant organizational challenges that it did not have the expertise to answer. Nonetheless, the organization was skeptical that outside consultants could understand its internal dynamics and culture.

Adding to that challenge, the consultants were based in San Francisco. Distance and budget constraints meant that much of the work happened from afar. More time in-person with the consultants would have facilitated the process.

Also, it was hard to balance the staff time and attention that is required for longer-term planning with the demands on staff time created by members who knock on the organization's door every day and with the daily exigencies of current campaigns.

Outcomes

As a result of its engagement with MAP, MWC understands the value of utilizing external organizational development consultants who see similar problems in many non-profit organizations and are versed in a range of potential solutions. MWC now realizes that it is not as unique (either in culture, problems confronted, or practice) as it believed at the outset of this project. The organization shifted from uncertainty that external consultants would be capable of understanding and working effectively with member-directed, grassroots groups, to being an evangelist for FACT's MAP program.

Outcome Highlights

- Developed and implemented a staff transition plan that enabled the organization to grow from four to nine full time employees and from one neighborhood-based organization to two.
- Created a new administrative position with a well-defined job description to ensure the smooth operation of administration, finances and human resources. Recruited and hired a qualified candidate for the job.
- Modified the financial chart of accounts, transitioned to an accrual system of accounting, created budgetary templates and developed a financial system, with reporting features that reflect and serve the organization's programs.
- Revised the organization's mission, developed a statement of the organization's values and principles of operation, established organization-wide understanding of the strategies by which MWC and its members will build power and create change.
- Developed a short-term strategic plan with concrete goals, objectives, strategies and timelines for a two-year period (2006-2007) that identified key strategic questions with which the organization will grapple as it develops its five-year plan.

Next Steps

MWC is excited to embark on the second phase of its organizational development process.
Its next steps will include:

- Evaluating the impact of each of its programs.
- Strategic planning for 2008-2010.
- Continuing to improve its administrative infrastructure (including revising its personnel policies, developing an operations manual, revising recruitment, orientation, training and retention strategies, and mentoring for the new administrative staff person.)
- Examining the relationships and governance between MWC and its grassroots neighborhood-based organizations.
- Continuing Board development including role clarification, recruitment, orientation and training.

Engagement with the FACT MAP program underscored the imperative of integrating organizational development processes and planning as a continuing part of MWC's overall work. Many questions raised during the MAP process were not answered, either because MWC didn't have the capacity to address them in the moment, or because they were outside of the scope of the approved MAP workplan. Ultimately, MWC found it valuable to have identified the questions that could not be addressed within the time and budgetary constraints of both the MAP program and the pressing demands of its programmatic work. MWC is committed to creating organizational space to address these issues in the future and understands organizational development to be an on-going process.