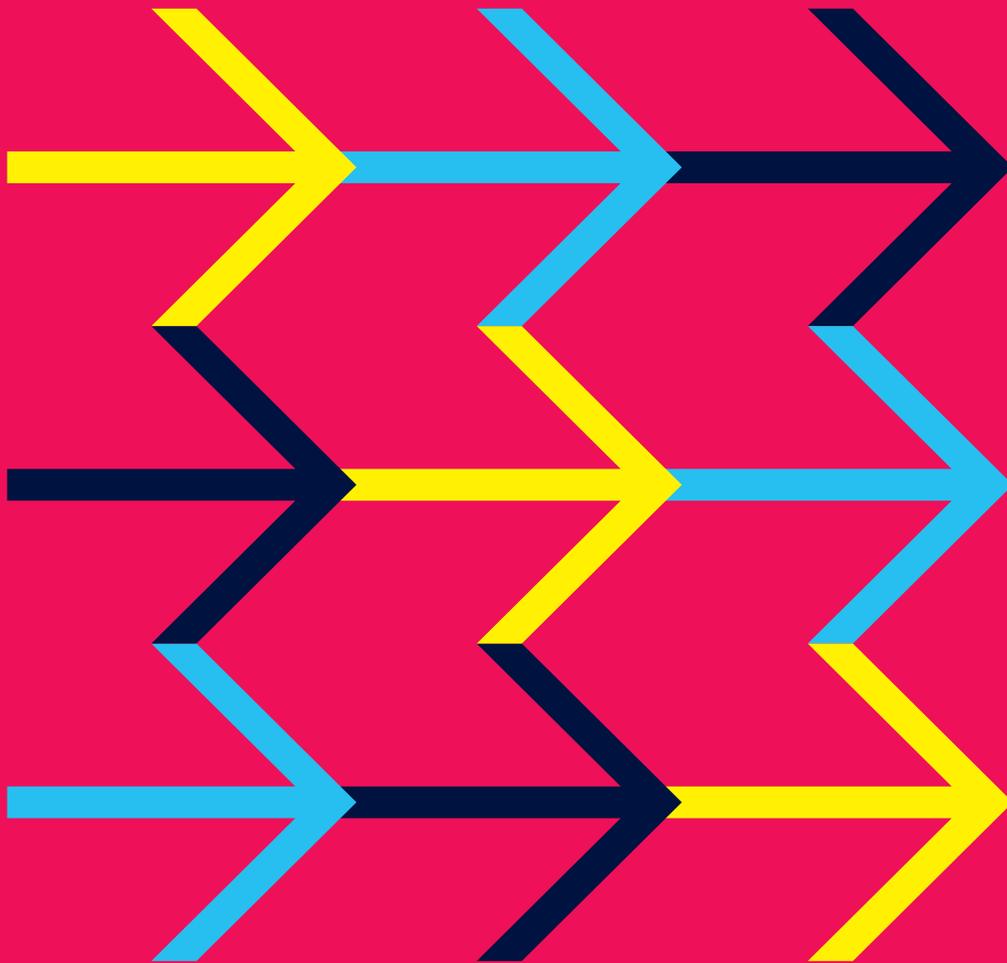


Making a way forward

Community Organising and
the Future of Democracy in Europe



Community organising works.
Increased and more strategic investment, plus accelerated learning among funders and organisers, would strengthen democracy, human rights, and social justice in Europe.

Who We Are

Ariadne is a European peer-to-peer network of more than 550 funders in 23 countries who support social change and human rights. Ariadne helps those using private resources for public good achieve more together than they can alone by linking them to other funders and providing practical tools of support.

European Community Organising Network (ECON) is a network of NGOs engaged in community organising in Europe. ECON provides training and mentorship to community organisers, facilitates greater strategic alignment between regional and national organising initiatives, engages in re-granting, and coordinates resource development for the community organising sector.

Ariadne and the European Community Organising Network thank the Open Society Foundations for their financial support.

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Copies are available for download at www.ariadne-network.eu and organizeeurope.org.

[@AriadneNetwork](https://twitter.com/AriadneNetwork)
[#CommunityOrganisingWorks](https://twitter.com/CommunityOrganisingWorks)

What will you find in this study?

This study is a collaboration between the Ariadne Network and the European Community Organising Network. It reflects a dialogue – started in the summer of 2018 – between people in the funder community and in the world of community organising. This study seeks to illuminate insights, challenges, and resources for funders who are interested in developing a more robust practice of community organising in Europe.

Europe is at a critical point in its history. This study finds that community organising can play a dynamic role in combating the authoritarianism and right-wing populism that are increasingly shaping policy and public discourse. Rather than a methodology or a project, community organising is an investment into a new concept of civil society, where people take responsibility for the future of their communities and influence policies through democratic organisations.

Built around issues selected by local groups, community organising offers a new frame and a vital strategy for funders to support efforts to reclaim the democratic space. Whether fighting for housing as a human right in Ireland, or against nationalist

movements in Slovakia, it is an approach that emphasises participation, leadership development, and building power.

This study provides a definition and case studies of what community organising is. It explores opportunities to build a stronger civil society through community organising and the role that funders can play in this process. Additionally, it looks at what we can learn from the experience of funders in the United States who, starting about a decade ago, began a strategic conversation of why and how to better support the community organising sector.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the interviewees and everyone involved in preparing this report and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

Julie Broome
Director, Ariadne

Steve Hughes
Coordinator, European Community
Organising Network

Civilizáció, a coalition of Hungarian NGOs demonstrated the organised support of more than 100 organizations in April 2017 in a mass protest against the Anti-NGO Bill. The organising process was coordinated by a community organiser and supported by social movement organisations. ©Bence Járdány



The challenge

The vision of a peaceful and open Europe is threatened by rising nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, and xenophobia. This did not “just happen.” It is, in part, the product of radical right-wing activism and intense coordinated action.¹ In Hungary, for example, the European poster child for this phenomenon, a growing conservative civil society was built around nationalist organisations and churches who organised a powerful civic network known as the Civic Circles. This propelled Viktor Orban’s Fidesz-KDNP party to its landslide victory in the 2010 elections.²

The erosion of democracy and the shrinking civic space threaten not only the integrity of liberal civil society actors but donors as well. This threat became tangible with the exit of the Open Society Foundations from Hungary to Germany and the unrelenting global media attacks against philanthropist George Soros. Other funders face similar pressures both in Europe and other regions.



“If you want to create change and have people involved in politics, you need these organising tools.”

Romy Kraemer, Managing Director,
Guerrilla Foundation



Participants share a laugh at a seminar on European Romani women’s activism at the Central European University in Budapest.
© Akos Stiller for the Open Society Foundations

¹ Caiani, Manuela, *Radical right-wing movements: Who, when, how and why?*, Sociopedia.isa, 2017

² Greskovits, Béla, *Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through Civil Organisation and Contention: The Civic Circles Movement*, EUI Working Papers, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Badia Fiesole: European University Institute, May, 2017.

The Opportunity

SLOVAKIA: organising to defeat the populist right

In Slovakia the “new right” had been growing its electoral power in regional elections in the area surrounding the city of Banská Bystrica. At the same time, this region has a long history of community-based organising. Since 1998, the Centre for Community Organising (Centrum komunitného organizovania, CKO) has worked in neighbourhoods, large blocks of flats, Roma villages, and with interest groups to win achievable battles, teach leaders to work together, and negotiate to build power.

In 2013 local leaders and activists were surprised by the (mostly rural) mobilization that led to the election of one of the country’s most extreme right-wing leaders, Marian Kotleba, as regional governor. Based on its 20 years of work in the region, CKO convened a coalition of the opposition under the banner Not In Our Town (Nie v našom meste) leading a six-month pre-election campaign called Together We Are More (Spolu je nás viac). They led a positive campaign to articulate the values and policies that contrast with messages of fear, division, and extremism. CKO exercised power both by having the capacity to coordinate the diverse and sometimes conflicting local interests within the opposition, as well as by getting the opposition candidates to “play nice” with one another, thus avoiding fissures in the coalition. Notably, CKO accomplished this while never endorsing a candidate in the race.

The coalition increased turnout in the election by 60% above average, winning decisively. CKO has now scaled up its community organising work to include new projects in smaller rural communities in the region.



The “Together We Are More” campaign led by the Centre for Community Organising in Slovakia, successfully mobilized to defeat the rightwing populist party in regional elections. © Centre for Community Organising

At the same time, recent protests in France, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, and the successes of the municipalist movement in Croatia, Portugal and Spain, indicate that there is a base for a progressive civil society. Many people may be alienated from European institutions and sceptical of elites, but they continue to want to participate civically.

Although it has been below the radar for many people, the growth of a European community organising sector is therefore a hopeful sign for democracy. The strength of this sector flows from its demonstrated ability to move large numbers of people into public life. Community organising offers a tested and systematic approach to outreach into communities even at times of social demobilization. It enhances the capacity of organisations and movements to mobilise a large base of ordinary people.

Financing a community organising sector, which has the scale and sophistication to counterbalance the organising of the radical right, can be a vital strategy to reclaim democratic space for progressive civil society—one in which local groups are linked together around a larger vision of the future, engaging people through real life policy issues, and giving them the capacity to shape the future of their communities, societies, and Europe as a whole.

What is community organising?

Many funders in Europe are unfamiliar with the term “community organising.” It is a concept that is often confused with other complementary and valuable forms of community intervention such as community development, or general support for movements and activism. The roots of community organising trace to the United States where the sector has reached a relatively high level of sophistication and broad social base.



“(Community organising) is about citizen power and what democracy looks like in the 21st century, in a context where most people see the institutions at the national and EU level are hollowed out, where the voices of ordinary citizens are absent.”

Donal Mac Fhearraigh, Senior Programme Officer,
Open Society Initiative for Europe

Locals in Walthamstow, England, gather during a *More In Common* weekend by anti-racist organisation Hope Not Hate. As every Sunday in summer, the street is closed off for two hours for children to play safely. ©Adam Patterson/Panos for the Open Society Foundations

WHAT DEFINES COMMUNITY ORGANISING?

There are variations in community organising practice, but people who define their work as “community organisers” typically employ a number of very similar tools in their work. For example, community organising consistently prioritises one-on-one, face-to-face outreach with local residents. This often takes the form of going door to door in a particular area or housing settlement, or in places where they are known to gather, for example reaching out to unemployed people outside of job centres, or people of faith in their houses of worship. This can be difficult and time-intensive work, but community organisers would agree that there is no shortcut around this essential piece of the organising process.

A fundamental goal of community organising is to develop local leadership. Often organisers measure the progress of their work by the number of leaders involved in a campaign. Community organising rewards leadership styles that emphasise listening to others, as well as appreciating and encouraging the contributions of the many, not the few. Leadership in a community organising context often comes from unexpected places and the role of an organiser is to cultivate leadership in people who themselves feel they have no agency and who society does not immediately see as leaders.



IRELAND: translating a human rights framework into local organising

Dolphin House is the largest social housing flats complex in Ireland with almost 1,000 residents. It is a tightly knit, almost entirely white Irish community. The housing stock, dating from the 1950s, is very poor and residents have lived with incessant mould and damp, as well as sewage invasion over decades. A promised regeneration of the complex was put on hold indefinitely due to the financial crisis in 2008.

Funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and others, the Community Action Network (CAN) began holding weekly meetings with local residents in an effort to break the impasse in 2009. CAN's organising approach involved several phases:

1. Breaking the silence: getting residents to open up about their lived experiences and overcome isolation and shame.
2. Inside out analysis: training and leadership development that allowed those affected by social injustice to develop their own understanding of systems that perpetuate inequality.
3. Imagining a better future: helping local residents move from understanding what they are up against to having hope that things can actually change.
4. Moving together: taking positive collective action and developing sustainable broad-based partnerships.

CAN describes their work as a process of "translating" the discourse of human rights into something people can relate to their everyday lived experience. Besides winning real improvements in the housing estate, the work that began at Dolphin House in 2009 laid the groundwork for a broad coalition of organisations to successfully file a collective complaint against the Irish government to the European Committee on Social Rights in 2017. Additionally, due to the trust and relationships built in the community, CAN was able to engage the community in exploring how it, and other communities like it, can prepare for the growing ethnic diversity on the housing lists to avoid potential racist incidents.

FOUR KEY FEATURES OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING:

1. Leadership of those most directly impacted by injustice, so people are fighting for changes from which they will benefit.

2. Membership organisations that are inviting people to join in face-to-face meetings and teams.

3. Power-building focused on building the long-term capacity of marginalized communities to negotiate their interests with government and private institutions.

4. Direct action, meaning that while groups engage in tactics ranging from research to public education, they're also willing to confront and challenge policy-makers.

WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY ORGANISER?

Community organisers, whether working as a volunteer or in a professional capacity, often emerge from communities where the organising is happening. This is important and should be encouraged as part of the leadership development process. At the same time, good organisers are also able to apply their skills in varied settings and build trusting and accountable relationships in communities not their own, even across intersecting lines of difference. For example, as part of a recent organising project in the UK, an organiser of South Asian descent successfully organised people in majority white coal communities in the British Midlands. In short, organising is a craft that must be learned, and this requires a long-term investment in training, mentorship, and living wage salaries for the organising profession.

HUNGARY: Winning progressive reforms in an authoritarian environment

OSIFE helped forge a model for collaboration between funders and an intermediary organisation supporting community organising in Hungary. By providing support to the Civil College Foundation (CCF), OSIFE was able to support scores of local organising projects in every corner of the country.

In 2018, a community group of caregivers, Step So That They Can Step, doubled the caregiver's allowance for parents who stay at home with their children with severe disabilities. Over a six-year campaign, a group of affected parents fought to change national policy by submitting budget proposals, mobilising hundreds of people to write letters to their MPs, sharing their parenting experiences with decision-makers, creatively using the media, organising protests in front of parliament, and disrupting a parliamentary committee meeting. The campaign coordinated online activism, working closely with the aHang ("The Voice") digital platform to mobilise 50,000 petition signatures from supporters around the country. As they increased the pressure, decision-makers eventually came to the negotiating table and ultimately increased the social benefit in October of 2018.

Behind this effort were community organisers. Anett Csordás, herself the mother of a child with a disability, and someone described as a "black belt" organiser, was trained and mentored by CCF. In turn, Anett's efforts resulted in the emergence of more local leaders. Even in some of the most difficult of political conditions, community organising took root and eventually grew into a movement with enough collective power to change national policy in Hungary.



Anett Csordás, a local leader in the successful campaign to change the care allowance in Hungary, is described as a "black belt" community organiser. © Gabriella Csoszó

COMMUNITY ORGANISING CAMPAIGNS

Good community organising leads to campaigns that address issues identified by local residents during one-on-one outreach in the community. Members of the community conduct research to find out who has power to solve the issue they care most about, while also recruiting new people and teaching their members to take leadership roles. Eventually the community is ready to directly engage officials, speak to the media, and bring in more people and outside allies.

In all of this, the community organiser continues to play an important role, but good organisers share leadership and demonstrate an awareness of the privilege they carry based on their institutional position and their ability to shape the strategic direction of the campaign.

Organising groups use different strategies and tactics – including putting pressure on the decision-makers when necessary – in order to generate collective power, to negotiate changes in public policy and social systems, and to shift the public narrative in support of equity and inclusion, and social, economic and environmental justice.

GROWING CAMPAIGN CAPACITY

While organising groups are rooted in localities, their issues are increasingly linked to a larger vision of the future – one committed to social justice and human rights in Europe. The capacity to act on this broader vision is "baked in" at every step of the organising process through popular education (i.e. in one-on-ones, in group meetings, in trainings).

While community organising is rightly associated with local, bottom-up change, Europe is seeing the growth of larger-scale organising institutions that have the capacity to lead multi-year policy change campaigns at the local and national level, often in close partnership with specialised policy and advocacy organisations. For example, the Civil College Foundation in Hungary has 13 full-time staff, provides financial and mentoring support to 30 organisers in the field, and hosts a large-scale digital organising programme.

Lessons from the pioneers

While the context (and scale) differ, the challenges facing community organising in Europe and the US are similar: how to increase the sector's scale and influence without losing touch with the disciplined relationship building that makes organising vital to protecting and advancing democracy. This section summarizes lessons for funders from the efforts to grow the revenue base organising in the US over the past decade. It also discusses the work funders have done to shift funding toward long-term, general operating support and capacity building.



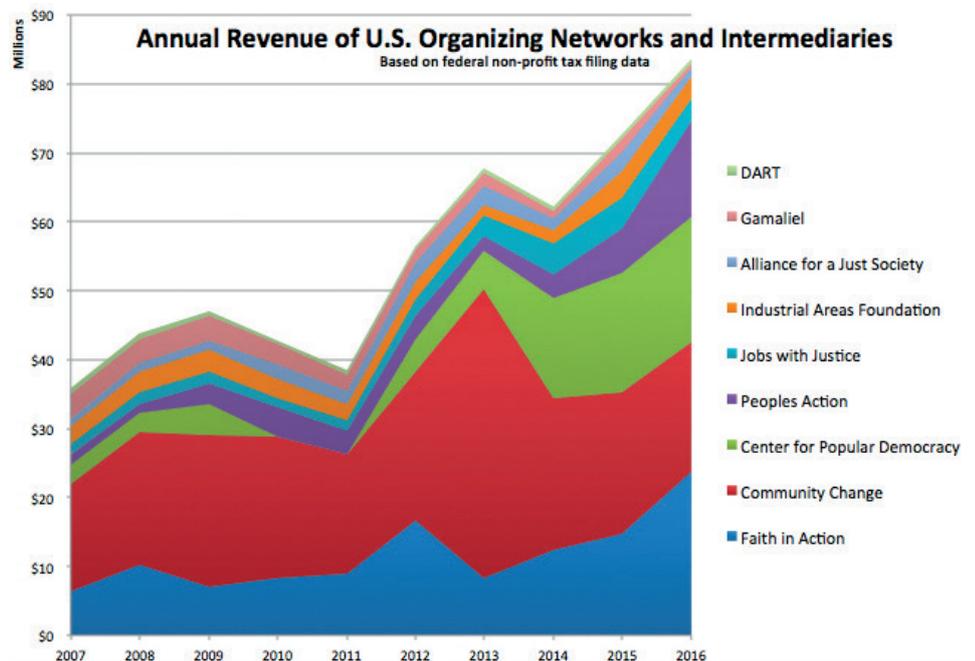
"You have to talk to people in communities to find out what they need from funders....by definition community organising is locally driven."

Gara LaMarche, President, Democracy Alliance, USA

GROWTH OF THE US. COMMUNITY ORGANISING SECTOR

Community organising in the US. has deep roots in the African-American freedom struggle, as well as the labour movement. Today, there are approximately 332 local and state organisations in the US. that are tied together by national networks. The ten US. national community organising networks and intermediaries alone raised \$83 million dollars in 2016. This is more than double what they raised ten years earlier. Taking into account fundraising by state and local affiliates, the total size of the sector is estimated to be over \$200 million annually.

Each year organising groups engage several million people, knocking on their doors, calling them on their phones, or meeting them in houses of worship. For example, in 2018 Faith in Action, the largest faith-based organising network in the US, recruited and trained more than 10,000 volunteers who had well more than a million conversations with people generally ignored by political parties, candidates, and mainstream advocacy groups.





Faith in Action is the largest faith-based community organising network in the United States. © Faith in Action

KEY LESSONS FROM THE US EXPERIENCE

The growing size and impact of community organising in the US. has come through close partnerships between organisers, funders, advocates, and scholars. Over the past decade a number of national foundations, including Ford, Open Society and Kellogg, have invested significant resources in community organising alongside their long-standing investments in policy and advocacy organisations. There are several important lessons from these efforts:

- **Organising works for many different issues:**

At its best, community organising brings a strong theory of change to discussions about advancing policy and system changes that promote equity and inclusion. Many US. funders see investing in organising as a way of building public will to overcome persistent obstacles to change in specific policy areas. Foundation staff whose work cuts across issues view organising as a way to make public institutions more democratic and responsive to communities.

- **Organising builds leaders both in the community and in philanthropy:** By and large programme officers are sympathetic to the idea that people most directly impacted should lead change. They are rooting for organising. But it takes leadership among funders to overcome institutional barriers to supporting organising groups. Explaining the value of multi-issue organising and power building to programme staff and foundation leadership takes long-term leadership from both funders and organisers.

- **Organising thrives with multi-year general operating support and capacity building:**

Several US funders now make multi-year, general operating grants to organisations with whom they have strong relationships. Examples include Needmor (an early supporter of organising), Ford (through its BUILD programme), Sandler Foundation, and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. These and others are supporting cross-cutting capacity building for organising in the areas of communications, policy research, and fundraising.

- **Organising benefits from coordinated funding strategies:**

The US. organising sector is both large and fragmented. So a major focus of funders has been promoting and incentivising collaboration, both within the sector and between organisers and advocacy organisations.

Further resources from the US experience

- The Neighbourhood Funders Group published its guide, [“Community Organising Toolbox: A Funder’s Guide to Community Organising.”](#)
- Grantcraft, a service of The Foundation Centre, published a guide titled [“Funding Community Organising – Social Change through Civic Participation”](#)
- The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy published [“Leveraging Limited Dollars.”](#) which found \$1 invested in organising and advocacy led to \$115 in tangible benefits to local communities.
- The Centre for Evaluation Innovation, in their briefing [“Evaluating Community Organising: What to consider and capture.”](#) provides sample benchmarks and data collection.

Building an ecosystem to support community organising in Europe

We interviewed funders in both Europe and the US. about what it takes to build a strong funding ecosystem to support community organising. They cited challenges ranging from the difficulty to find local partners able to implement a community organising strategy, to the informal nature of many of the groups currently operating in the sector, to the extended timelines and challenges of measuring success using traditional metrics.

“WE CAN’T AFFORD NOT TO”

Funding for community organising in Europe is a fairly young endeavour and, according to one funder, is often perceived as “not very sexy.” It may not seem like the quickest route to impact. However, many of the donors who have started on this journey see it as a key piece of the funding armament that can bring about longer lasting and deeper change in Europe, reinvigorate democracy, and build more active citizenship.

While the opportunity may be there, it is not necessarily the easiest step for funders to take. In spite of the challenges they have faced, the donors we spoke to agree that supporting community organising is worth the effort and the investment of resources. In fact, Renata Cuk from OSIFE believes it is something philanthropy can’t afford to step away from, that “it’s costly not to invest in community organising. Look at Grenfell tower in London....their complaints went out the window, the community wasn’t united enough. Bringing people together allows stronger collective bargaining power.”



“There is a lack of understanding around impact...Why would you choose to fund community organising over a community kitchen or a refuge? How do you measure, recognise and demonstrate the impact that community organising can have? There is a disconnect. The true level of impact can be difficult to measure, attribute, or happens years after.”

Hannah Patterson, UK Portfolio Manager,
The National Lottery Community Fund

TOWARDS OPERATIONALIZING COMMUNITY ORGANISING IN EUROPE: WHAT EXPERIENCED FUNDERS TOLD US

- **Strengthen funder practice:** a number of elements that apply to other emerging areas of funding are relevant to community organising, such as funding individuals or informal groups, or enabling smaller funding over a longer, sustained period of time. Catherine McSweeney of EEA/Norway Grants reports: “We make sure programmes have flexible grant size, so less formal and less experienced groups can have a chance to access the funds.”
- **Offer non-financial support:** strategies should consider offering non-financial support for groups themselves to build their capacity. “We found a strong need to bring organisers together for a retreat, to provide them with safe spaces to organise,” says Nadejda Dermendjieva of the Bulgarian Fund for Women. “We place equal weight on building capacity of the sector as well as funding projects,” adds Catherine McSweeney of EEA/Norway Grants.
- **Educate boards:** there is a lack of understanding around the impact of community organising. Boards or living donors may be more familiar with traditional change models, such as litigation or advocacy. “You need a base of support in order to pass policies and hold people accountable, like we did with the Affordable Care Act,” Gara LaMarche notes, based on his experience of building support for national health care legislation in the US. Raising awareness about the time involved in building grassroots support may be required to enable foundations to move forward.
- **Build support for intermediaries:** few funders are going to be able to fund at the ground level. There is a need for intermediary institutions that can link up, study local needs, and coordinate actions. For example, grants from EEA/Norway include additional financial support to their local partners to enable them to reach out more widely to the most marginalised, weaker organisations outside major cities. Increasingly there are concrete examples of donor/intermediary collaborations to support community organising such as the work between OSIFE and the Civil College Foundation to support organising in Hungary.
- **Support donor coordination and learning:** a learning group of donors could help new entrants into this space. A pooled fund to help learning about the initiatives was also identified as lacking. “Creating more spaces to discuss, showcase, and support community organising initiatives is needed,” argues Renata Cuk of OSIFE.
- **Be prepared to take risks:** community organising efforts may be less formal, and sometimes more volatile, than other civil society groups. They quite often lack professional expertise to undertake detailed policy analysis. The people involved in these efforts often come from local communities and learn about policy processes as they progress in their campaigns. Willingness to accept a level of greater risk is a threshold question for funders looking to support community organising.



“Community organising answers two current critical challenges in Central and Eastern Europe: it can assist local communities to be active and organised, as well as to develop and follow a progressive, constructive agenda.”

Péter Nizák, consultant to OSIFE, former leader of Soros Foundation Hungary, and OSIFE's CEE Programme

MEASURING ORGANISING, MEASURING PROGRESS

Based on experiences in the US. and Europe, there are at least four metrics that funders can use to measure the impact of community organising: **1) civic engagement and leadership development**, including the number of people involved in events and volunteers recruited; **2) the value of policy changes**, i.e. the number of people impacted and total value; **3) narrative impact** including earned media stories; and **4) examples of structural changes that make governance systems more transparent and democratic**, though these take time but are an important end goal.

To measure the volume of funding in Europe, the concept “community organising” simply doesn't exist in the European data compiled by the Foundation Center, though some funders included it in their keywords when they submit their data. There are differences in spelling, which itself causes problems, and it's clear that beyond the specific phrase, many more grants are supporting the activity, though call it something else. As a starter, the Foundation Center should allow an explicit sub-category of “community organising/ community organising” and encourage funders to use this language when they submit their grants data in order to better track funding trends.

'Community,' 'community organising,' or something else?

- Searching in *Foundation Maps* the phrase “community organising” by recipient produces 8 grants in 3 countries in Western Europe, excluding the UK, with a total value of \$795K. Change the spelling to an ‘s’ and we find 3 grants totalling \$1.8 million, only in the UK (recipients anonymous). Nothing is identified from Central or Eastern Europe.

- Searching the phrase “community” produces 89 grants, \$10 million USD.* Example: Civic Initiatives, Belgrade. Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.
- Searching the phrase “civic” brings up 109 grants, \$13.3 USD* Example: Participatory City, Barking and Dagenham, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

* Not all would be considered community organising, but many would.

Source: Foundation Center, Civic and Political Participation 2016–2018.

Without common measures and common categories, it will be difficult to understand the needs of community organisers in Europe and their impact. Additionally, there is much more to understand about the community organising space. A more detailed mapping of the current local and national groups and intermediaries in the space, as well as a qualitative understanding of any regional differences that exist in terms of approach and impact would be helpful.

In addition to a deeper analysis of the raw funding numbers, a review of the scale of different grants and gaps in available resources is called for. Finally, a clearer review of the current or potential connections between community organising and wider social movements, specific campaigns, or even online platforms would help us better understand a broader context in which to support community organising.

DO's and DON'TS: insights from European funders in the community organising space

1. DO focus on how to measure process:

“We should not limit ‘success’ to specific outputs such as a concrete policy change, but appreciate the impact of the process itself. And we should not be impatient, social change takes time.” says [Renata Cuk](#) of OSIFE.

2. DON'T think small scale = small impact:

“A recent homecare campaign around pay and home care in Hungary started at the local level and became a huge success...they amended the law in Parliament to pay for home care in Hungary,” observes [Andreas Hieronymus](#) of OSIFE.

3. DO invest in time to spend with the community: Community organising is not the same in every context and there are many local contexts to contend with. “Watch a space for a while before you have a conversation about funding,” suggests [Romy Kraemer](#) of the Guerrilla Foundation.

4. DON'T get hung up on language:

“We fund lots of things that could be described as community organising but they often don't use

that language to describe themselves when they come to us for funding. The language that is used often reflects things like asset-based community development, or People in the Lead, which reflects back to us our strategy,” explains [Hannah Patterson](#) of UK National Lottery Community Fund.

5. DO support projects that involve 'intersectionality': “It's important to bring different people together, like a local mosque participating in a climate march, not just an anti-racist demonstration,” states [Romy Kraemer](#) of the Guerrilla Foundation.

6. DON'T think money is everything:

“Just providing grants doesn't reach communities... funding needs to be accompanied by a lot of support for the individual's organisation capacity and the sector as a whole,” says [Catherine McSweeney](#) of EEA/Norway Grants.

7. DO let go of power:

“Supporting community organising requires a lot of trust and delegation of power,” observes [Donal MacFhearraigh](#) of OSIFE.

Next steps: realising the potential of community organising in Europe

The current crisis in Europe is a wake-up call for civil society organisations, and an opportunity for funders to re-examine the efficacy of their funding strategies. The challenge for funders is not only to increase the resources flowing into community organising, but to support the sector in a way that is most likely to grow its impact. That will require longer-term funding commitments tied to building capacity and growing the constituency base of organisations rather than to short-term policy outcomes. Organising umbrella groups can help funders provide financial and technical support to smaller, more local organisations, and help link those groups together around a larger vision for Europe.



“In Bulgaria, we experienced backlash against women’s rights as a result of the propaganda against the Istanbul convention. They labelled it ‘gender ideology.’ Yes, people can come together online to respond, but people in communities, and community organising, will be the most effective tool for preserving democracy and human rights.”

Nadejda Dermendjieva, Executive Director,
Bulgarian Fund for Women

Challenges remain before the full potential of community organising can be realised in Europe. These challenges are in some cases technical and they are sometimes more deeply entrenched within funding organisations’ culture, risk aversion or biases toward more professionalized civil society organisations.

CONCRETE NEXT STEPS:

- 1. For individual funders:** open up more opportunities for community organisers by creating explicit “community organising” funds and ensure flexibility for how community groups can use and access these funds.
- 2. For funder collaboration:** establish an ‘Organising Learning Agenda’ with study, site visits and additional research goals; consider establishing a pooled fund to seed some short-term investments to help advance the field.
- 3. For collaboration with donors and community organisers:** convene a Community Organising Leadership table of donors and practitioners who share the agenda of promoting community organising and help to prioritise needs in Europe.
- 4. For the data gatherers:** use and apply common definitions of community organising and capture these when tracking funding data.

The threats to European democracy are real, but community organising offers a powerful tool to counter the challenges of popular disillusionment that create fertile ground for the rise of nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, and xenophobia. Fortunately, we already have useful experiences to draw upon and we are only starting to realise the impact of what sustained investment in the European community organising sector can achieve.

Study contributors

Dave Beckwith is the principal consultant of the Great Lakes Institute, based in Toledo, Ohio. He has worked since 1971 as a community organiser, trainer and consultant, including ten years as Executive Director of The Needmor Fund, a leading foundation funding community organising in the US.

Deborah Doane is a writer and consultant working on social justice and human rights issues. Most recently, she was the Director of the Funders' Initiative for Civil Society (FICS), and now works in a portfolio capacity with a range of clients in philanthropy and civil society. She is a partner of RightsCoLab, a think tank where she works on the future of civil society.

Steve Hughes is an organiser and educator with two decades of experience working in both the United States and Europe. In his role as Network Coordinator of the European Community Organising Network he initiated a discussion between organisers and funders which led to this publication. He served as chief editor of the study.

Bernadett Sebály is a community organiser, trainer and mentor with the Civil College Foundation in Hungary. She is the editor of the book titled *The Society of Power or the Power of Society? The Basics of Community Organising*, a compilation of studies of American academics, and the author of many articles. She currently studies at CEU's School of Public Policy.

Anna Striethorst is Ariadne's European Programme Manager. A volunteer for social justice and equality causes since young age, she has over a decade of experience in EU advocacy of foundations. Prior to joining Ariadne, she served as Senior Policy Officer of the Open Society Roma Initiatives Office. She assisted in editing and publishing the study.

Gordon Whitman is Senior Consultant to Faith in Action, one of the largest grassroots organising networks in the US., with growing work internationally. He opened Faith in Action's Washington, DC office in 2008 and led the network's effort to develop national campaign capacity on issues ranging from health care to immigration and is the author of *Stand Up! How to Get Involved, Speak Out, and Win in a World on Fire*.