Growing the Grassroots  
Tips & Tools to Build Your Organization’s Capacity

Report on the 2010 
Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund  
California Wildlands Grassroots Fund  
Annual Grassroots Grantee Convening

October 1, 2010  
David Brower Center  
Berkeley, California

The 5th annual convening of grantees of the Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund and the California Wildlands Grassroots Fund was held on a sunny fall day at the new David Brower Center in Berkeley. Attendance exceeded all expectations, but the larger facility allowed us to accommodate everyone, with only a few logistical challenges (like a shortage of tables and very limited kitchen facilities for the caterer). All told, 122 activists from 63 small grassroots environmental groups attended the convening.

People came from as far away as Crescent City in the north, to Fawnskin near San Bernardino in the South. Travel stipends and hotel reimbursements helped defray costs for people who were coming from a far (85% of evaluation respondents said that the stipends covered the cost of their travel). Spanish translation was available throughout the day (and some of the speaker handouts were available in Spanish), and all sessions were professionally recorded and can be played or downloaded from the Rose Foundation website.

The conference was very close to being zero-waste, as we rented plates, cups and flatware to avoid waste, and the green conference center provided both compost and recycling stations throughout the building. We also worked with a green caterer – Saul’s Restaurant and Delicatessen, who served sustainable, locally-grown, and organic food. To offset the carbon footprint of the event, we made a donation to Solar Richmond, which provides job training and solar installations to low-income residents of Richmond. To encourage networking between groups, we had hosted a wine, beer, cheese and fruit reception outside on the terrace at the end of the day.

Overall, the convening received high marks from participant evaluations: 80% said the convening was great, and 20% said it was good. (We received 66 evaluations, of 122 attendees.)

What people liked most about the conference was quality and substance of the workshop presenters, the opportunity to network with colleagues and funders while refreshing old skills and learning new. Here is a sampling of grantee’s comments:

• Everything was executed perfectly, workshops were riveting, and panels were very interesting.

• Inspired sessions, great networking, good take home resources. I leave with many ideas I can explore and/or implement soon.

• Well-organized, excellent speakers. Good use of my time – worth traveling for.

• Important topics & lots of good audience participation/questions/interaction.
The convening opened with a plenary entitled “3 That Grew” that featured 3 grassroots leaders who helped their groups grow so big that they are no longer eligible for a Grassroots Fund grant. The panel was moderated by Tim Little, Rose Foundation executive director. Panelist shared their experiences working with volunteers, choosing a fiscal sponsor, incorporating as a nonprofit, developing and managing a board and the challenges and rewards of fundraising. 47% of evaluation respondents said the panel was “great,” 33% said it was “good,” and 17% said it was “average.”

- This was the most relevant and productive session I have attended ever.
- Inspiring to hear about their success stories.
- I simply admired the three speakers who were so giving and humble about their experiences.
- A great start for the day, inspirational! I like the way you handled questions, so maximum focus was on the three presenters.
- There was value in the session, but too much time was spent on start-up activities rather than the key issues of organization capacity and growth.

Jan Masaoka’s session on Building a Strong and Active Board was the most popular, according to the evaluations (83% said it was “great,” and 17% said “good”). Her frank, yet funny delivery provided insightful and practical advice that often challenged conventional wisdom about nonprofit boards. As one grantee said, “The presenter articulated issues I didn’t even realize our board had. It was truly illuminating and provided multiple practical suggestions.”

- Best presentation I have ever heard on the topic – fun, accessible, immediately usable.
- Very dynamic speaker, knowledgeable. Full of good ideas to help and improve our board.
- I appreciated that she started with audience questions, gave thorough explanations and even example dialogue, and pulled questions out of jargon and into detailed and personal situations.

Another favorite workshop was Connecting Fundraising to Values, by Nisha Anand of the Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training – 69% said it was “great,” and 31% said it was “good.” Nisha outlined the strategy and methods of an effective fundraising campaign. She reminded us that individual donors give almost 6 times more to nonprofits than foundations, and that 85% was given by families with annual income of less than $60,000. She assured us that “you already know all the people you need to know to raise all the money you need to raise.” She guided the audience in filling out a case statement worksheet for their organization, which “makes the case” for why their organization deserves funding, and had people practice asking each other for money.

- Funny and friendly took the fear and/or reluctance out of asking for money.
- Core message very powerful. I received help from people at my table. I got a lot out of this workshop to take back with me – interesting blend of small group interaction into the presentation.
- Exelente - me dio mas animos para poder seguir adelante con nuestras recaudaciones (Excellent – it gave me the incentive to follow through with collecting donations.)
- Very vibrant & knowledgeable presenter. Great hints about reassessing our approach.
- Nisha broke down the taboos behind money.
John Kenyon lead a lively and fast-paced workshop entitled *Managing On-line Communications on a Shoestring*, which discussed effective online tools for nonprofits including email fundraising campaigns and ways to make your website more compelling. He also shared tips for using social media to advance your mission, and reminded us that online communications is a conversation and not just a place to broadcast your message. (61% great, 32% good, 7% average)

- Very stimulating relevant timely info. This was a crash course for the 21st Century nonprofit.
- High energy/fast paced – just like modern media. Very relevant – I’d like to do it again.
- Fine for me, but clearly went too fast in some topics, could have spared later slides.

Nisha Anand of the Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training lead the *How to Ask People for Money* workshop. She had participants work on a fundraising plan specific for their group and then had them share the plan with the audience to get feedback. She also discussed major donor campaigns and how to research prospective donors. Finally she gave us tips for how to get over our fear of asking people for money; and then had breakouts so people could practice asking for money. (54% great, 42% good, 3% average)

- Good ideas that gave me new ideas about funding from individuals that I had ignored previously.
- I felt inspired to do more asking, would have liked to do more role-play.
- A well thought out presentation, and audience participation with total relevance.
- Great specific financial/asking planning tools.

We ended the day with a lively *Ask the Experts* panel that included the 3 workshop presenters of the day: John Kenyon, Nisha Anand, and Jan Masaoka. The session was moderated by Tim Little.

- Good dialogue – good leading questions by moderator.
- Really helpful & obviously relevant to the participants. Covered lots of ground.
- Liked the humor & straight talk of the experts.
- Excellent & good that we got to see the presenters whose talks we missed.
- Jam packed good session – good timing. Enjoyed the lively interchange.
- I really liked the close – each panel member shared one important message.
- Dynamite!

**Logistical Issues**
89% of evaluation respondents thought that the meeting space was great. 68% liked the time and date of the meeting. 91% said the registration process was great (this is the first year we had online registrations, and all but 6 registered online.) 74% thought the food was great. When asked where we should hold the meeting next year, 20 said the same place or East Bay, 5 said Sacramento or foothills, and the rest recommend various place throughout California. 20 people thought that the fall was the best time to hold the convening, 2 said winter, and 2 said “not summer.” Of those who filled out an evaluation, Friday is the best day of the week for the convening, by far.
Other general comments:

- I appreciated y’all picking a restaurant who values local, healthy food.
- Need gluten/wheat free options. (2 people said this)
- Wonderful, very helpful, thank you!
- Pleased there was a close hall to our overnight stay.
- Holding it in early October is perfect because summer’s over and it’s time to buckle down seriously – this really helps!
- Being in a room full of other small projects reminded me that I am a part of a huge network of incredibly dedicated and amazing, small projects.
- Inspired sessions, great networking, good take home resources. Great feisty moderation by Tim.

What people liked least:

- Audience participants who monopolize conversation.
- Our group is all volunteer & lack the bandwidth to do much of what we have learned – but it is very useful in charting the road ahead.
- I liked it all, but I feel we need to address how to cope better with these overwhelming tasks that never end.
- This isn’t a dislike – but I’d love more time w/ other groups. I guess this was too much on getting money.
- Choosing between panels.
- Difficult to sit for so long.

Topics for next convening
Working with or recruiting volunteers (6); partnerships with other organizations (3); board (2); major donors (2); media / messaging (2); planning (2); e-communication and website (2); burnout / renewal (2); fundraising (2); issues related to starting a new group (2); 501c3 do’s and don’ts; working with difficult people (2); member recruitment and mobilization; event planning; and marketing.

Other topics:

- Effective strategies for doing local work that is progressive in very conservative counties.
- Effective ways organizations have found to create dialogue.
- How to change status quo of an organization that’s been around for a long time but needs to be energized.

For full details on each session
You can listen to audio recordings of all sessions, and download handouts at the Rose Foundation’s website: http://www.rosefdn.org/2010conveningresources. For more information about the Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund, please contact grassroots@rosefdn.org, or call (510) 658-0702.