

Unions, Community-Based Organizations and Pre-Apprenticeship Programs: Partners respond to the question, What brings these partnerships together?

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“In this new era of high worker mobility, organizing needs something more than a worksite as a base...[T]he community itself has become the new ‘unit’ for labor-organizing campaigns.”

Janice Fine, *Community Unionism in Baltimore and Stamford*
WorkingUSA 2000-2001, page 61.

Introduction

Jobs in the unionized construction trades are sometimes referred to as “the last good jobs in America.” These jobs, which are accessible mainly through apprenticeship programs, have been hard for women and minorities to get. But these same unions face a plunging loss of membership (down to 18% of construction workers in 2002) and recognize that they must make a commitment to broaden practices of access and organize. Community-based organizations (CBOs), seeking stable jobs and career ladders for their communities, have built partnerships with unions to give people from minority communities access to these apprenticeship programs. These partnerships create pre-apprenticeship programs that provide a step toward the actual apprenticeship programs.

These partnerships involve complex relationships that take time to build and are by no means trouble-free. In March, 2003, a conference called *Community and Labor Partnerships for Strength and Inclusion in the Construction Industry* was held at the University of California, Berkeley. A joint project of the U.C. Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education (CLRE) and the University of Illinois Chicago Labor Education (CLEP) program, it brought together construction trades unions and community organizations to talk about what they had achieved.

“These partnerships between labor and community have had important positive impacts,” read the invitation from Carol Zabin, Director of the CLRE and Bob Balgenorth, President of the California Building Trades Council. “But they have also been fraught

with difficulties, tensions and obstacles. We hope to have a frank discussion about what has worked and what hasn't."

This paper synthesizes a portion of the work that led up to that conference and the discussions that took place at the conference itself. It focuses on the array of obstacles and solutions to those obstacles as acknowledged by people who are engaged in these partnerships. It notes some of the recent research and writing on labor-community partnerships, raising the question of the different implications of the terms "social movement unionism" and "community unionism." It offers a general comparison of unions as membership organizations formed for the purpose of leveling the field between workers and owners, and CBOs as non-membership organizations formed for the purpose of addressing a particular issue, noting that CBOs formed to bring jobs into low-income communities have basic shared interests with unions. It then gives examples of the kinds of statements made about opposite partners, examples of partnerships that are being attempted at the present time, and then lists the obstacles and solutions brought forward at the conference.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the discussion at the conference in order to make better known the variety of efforts, some successful and some not, that have been put forth to make effective partners out of these two very different types of organization. This is news because the historic image of labor union has been that they are resistant to entry by women and minorities. (For a history of the civil rights litigation against unions between 1935-1985 see Frymer 2003). The unions that came to the table at this conference were investing money and staff in establishing structures that would bring women and minorities into the trades. As will be evident from the quotes from the various partners on both sides, this was rarely a smooth process. But while the implementation of these partnerships ranges widely, there is a motivation common to all of them. The fact that these partnerships take so many forms and draw on such a variety of agreements, contracts, strategies and funding arrangements suggests that the political will is present on both sides – both union and community-based organization. However, the impact of that political will has yet to be realized.

"Social movement unionism" and "community unionism"

The terms "social movement unionism" and "community unionism" are both helpful for trying to understand what is going on when labor unions and community based organizations get together for some purpose. However, neither term is really definitive. These partnerships are varied enough in form that one might say they have little in common except purpose, yet it is by their form – their ability to construct an organization that can implement that purpose – that they will survive or fail.

Historically, labor union organizing was one and the same with community organizing. People familiar with the type of organizing that took place in the 1930s, such as the Unemployed Councils, that built a social movement sufficient to lead to the establishment of our contemporary industrial relations system, will find it symptomatic of the isolation today of organized labor from the mass of working people that it is even

necessary to strategize how to bring unions and CBOs together on issues such as jobs. It is too soon to tell if these partnerships reflect a resurgence in another form of that pre-NLRA-era approach to organizing. It may be that they are too staff and organization-driven rather than grass roots. Nevertheless, they bear looking at.

The two terms that dominate the discourse about the appearance of partnerships between unions and CBOs are “social movement unionism” and “community unionism.” It is useful to look at their separate implications, because this may shine some light on the problems that these partnerships encounter.

Bruce Nissen, in an article in *Labor Studies Journal* (2003b), documents the research on these partnerships since the late 1980s and early 1990s, when there were many studies of community responses to plant closings. The term he uses for these forms of unionism that link community organizing and unions in these contexts is “social movement unionism.” Nissen contrasts social movement unionism with labor-management cooperation strategies (Nissen 2003a, 2003b). He calls the forms of unionism that link unions and businesses in labor-management cooperation strategies “value added unionism” because they propose that having a union adds value to a business (2003a); the social capital generated by the presence of the union is a benefit to the business as a whole. In this view, unions and business management share a common interest. By contrast, social movement unionism presumes that unions share a common interest with communities (and by extension, CBOs) and that this is an interest that business management and unions do not share. Unions and CBOs, in this view, are both working-class formations. Nissen offers social movement unionism as an alternate strategy to labor-management cooperation strategies which were frequently put forward in the 1990s. An example of this kind of cooperation strategy would be that argued by Barry and Irving Bluestone in *Negotiating the Future* (1992), in which they propose a union and management “enterprise contract.”

A recent book by Dan Clawson also makes this distinction based on whom unions form their alliances with: “The key to labor’s revival,” he says in *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements*, “and to improved conditions for American workers, is...for labor to form alliances with other social movements; for those groups, not employers, to have cultural and political momentum; for a mass movement, not staff, to be taking leadership” (Clawson 2003, 16).

Janice Fine uses the term “community unionism” instead of “social movement unionism.” She does not speak directly to the issue of whether CBOs are working class formations or not (and therefore natural allies of labor organizations), but recognizes other kinds of differences between CBOs and unions. In her article on Baltimore and Stamford, Connecticut, Fine comments:

Also, just as lobsters have one claw that is larger than the other, labor-community collaborations seem to always have a dominant claw as well—either the community group of labor partner – and this has a strong bearing on the culture and practice of the organization.” (2000, 83)

Altering traditional organizing priorities means changing allocation of resources. Fine notes:

Despite Stamford's success, the geo projects [general economic organizing] have been extremely controversial among international unions from the start. Some internationals believed that the project would take them off their industrial strategies. In addition, some question the federation's direct involvement in multi-union drives, period. (2000, 81)

Most of the writers who look at these partnerships note the challenges involved in these partnerships and mention that these are both significant and expected. Gordon Lafer points out that historically, CBOs and unions were considered to be in competition with labor unions to be the supplier of training to low-income communities (Lafer 176) and in many places, this is still the case (much of this as a result of implementation of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998).

Where partnerships have developed, the obstacles to working together include differences in power, differences in culture and approach, and differences in the terms in which the tasks are conceptualized and described.

Mike Miller and Michael Eisenscher describe the cultural barriers encountered by members of the ORGANIZE! Training Center in their efforts to link CBOs and unions:

Those of us... with lengthy union experience were at times unconsciously influenced by the very culture of which we were so critical. And those of us without deep labor experience were sometimes mechanical in applying an approach born out of experience with religious congregations, community groups, government agencies and/or business." (Miller and Eisenscher 2000, 23)

Although Fred Rose, in *Coalitions across the Class Divide* (2000), considers CBOs to be typically middle-class rather than working-class organizations, and attributes much of the static in these partnerships to this class difference, he warns that complexity should be taken for granted:

Coalition-building is a localized process which requires face-to-face relationship building and dialogue....[n]o single framework will serve as a unifying agenda for an emerging national working-and-middle class coalition (217).

This paper does not attempt to settle the question of what it means for a CBO, which may or may not have its roots in the working class or middle class, to be allied with labor unions. Instead, it notes the difference between the implications of the two terms, "social movement unionism" and "community unionism" and focuses on the practical challenges of forming these partnerships.

Creating a "table" where partners could meet and share experiences

Margaret Weir's short paper, *Metropolitan Coalition-Building Strategies*, provided several concepts basic to both the design of the conference and this paper. She lists four factors which "appear consistently in successful and durable collaborations" (Weir, *Metropolitan Coalition-Building Strategies*, 2001, 2): relationship-building; the ability to reframe problems; access to information and the capacity to analyze it; and the ability to function in the political arena. She also provides the metaphor of the "table", the space, physical or virtual, at which the parties can sit and work together and negotiate. She adds a warning: "...tables' move, they may disappear, they may be purposely invisible or they may not exist at all" (33).

The conference was an experiment to see if a generic "table" could be created, if only for a day. It was conceived at the 2002 UALE (United Association for Labor Education) Conference, where this author and the Rev. Anthony Haynes were on a panel with David Cormier and Mark Robbins, who presented a report on a labor-led workforce development effort in Grant County, Indiana. We described a project in Chicago that brought unions together to support a pre-apprenticeship program based in churches in minority communities under the aegis of the Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues (Worthen and Haynes 2002). Carol Zabin attended this panel and suggested that a conference devoted to the idea of these collaborations might serve to sum up similar experiences around the country, enable us to identify lessons learned and perhaps provide a mechanism for carrying on future dialogue.

Some motivations for these partnerships are apparent from the outset: Construction unions engaged in these partnerships have models for training, expertise in negotiation, worker representation skills, the ability to mobilize, some resources, and enemies. Unions need greater control of the labor market, improved public images, strong relationships with communities, and hefty public works projects. CBOs, on the other hand, have access to communities of faith, ethnic and minority populations; expertise in organizing, lobbying and mobilizing, freedom from some of the laws that regulate unions (for example, laws against picketing), and the potential to be a threat or even an enemy of unions. CBOs need allies in the fight for economic justice, resources, and a way to relate to labor. Most of these motivations were named explicitly by the different partners in the course of the pre-conference questionnaire and follow-up interviews.

But just because opposite partners have what the other needs and a partnership would make sense does not mean that the partnership can overcome historical obstacles and work together effectively and be sustainable in the long run. The motivation has to be strong and the conditions right for negotiations to proceed. At the conference, we would look for examples of ways in which these strengths and needs were being negotiated.

Method: How we prepared for and designed the conference

Six months before the date of the conference, planning the agenda began. This work was carried out by the author (CLEP) and Carol Zabin and Steven Pitts from CLRE. We

agreed that getting the endorsement of the leaders of the West Coast and California building trades was primary; after the various state and county Building Trades Councils (BTCs) had signed on to the conference, we opened up recruiting to groups and individuals referred to us by word of mouth. To pave the way for informed discussion, a ten-item questionnaire was sent to all potential participants, followed up by telephone interviews where needed. Responses to this questionnaire helped us focus more tightly on the differences between unions and CBOs, the motives that brought them together, the obstacles to working together and possible ways to get around those obstacles. Invitations to attend the conference were extended by word of mouth. Some funding was available to support travel. Some participants backed out because of the war situation, fear of traveling and other less unusual circumstances. Participants were still being recruited up to within two weeks of the conference. A list of people who were interviewed, responded to the questionnaire, or came to the conference is found in the Appendix.

As the responses to the questionnaire came in, it became clear that what brings an organization to the table is not the same as what it brings to the table, nor are these mirror images of each other. It is these differences, and the way these differences are expressed in the words of the participants in the conference, that we will focus on here. In some cases, the same goals will bring different organizations together and these common goals will make the partnership possible despite wide variation in resources and power. In other cases the goals are different but it is the means or the process that the partnerships can be built on. To bring out these distinctions, we set up the logic of the conference agenda to look, simplified, like this:

1. What do unions want? What do unions bring to the table? (spoken by union representatives);
2. What do community groups want? What do community groups bring to the table? (spoken by CBO representatives);
3. Experiences from around the country (panelists selected on the basis of their responses to the questionnaire; we were looking for a range of experiences);
4. Key issues: Funding and organizing (again, selected on the basis of questionnaire; here we were looking for commonalities);
5. Difficulties, tensions and obstacles (this session consisted of small groups with facilitators chosen on the basis of responses to questionnaire; each group addressed a specific problem area identified by vote from participants, followed by report backs);
6. Full conference comments on problems and offers solutions.

The conference itself was reported and a typescript of the general discussion was made available. This report is based on the questionnaire, the telephone interviews by the author with participants prior to the conference, actual participation by the author in the conference and the typescript of the conference.

Challenges to partnerships: Overall differences between unions and CBOs

We were already familiar with the challenges facing construction trades unions and CBOs when they try to work together, but reviewing the questionnaires brought these challenges to life again.

These challenges can be partly accounted for by combinations of history and geography. We might begin with the deep historical differences between an organization built to control the economics of the market for high-skill work, imbued with traditional AFL craft unionism, and an organization built to implement the political will of a traditionally excluded community. In addition, old jurisdictional disputes between trades – for example, between carpenters and laborers, or carpenters and electricians – were not forgotten. Then there is the political environment of a given locality which can affect how these partnerships are implemented (for example, Prop. 209 in California eliminated affirmative action programs; pre-apprenticeship programs are therefore treated as a “pool” that gets priority access if a certain percentage of the people in the pool are women or minority). Geography here also means the geography of the construction industry, the location of residential versus commercial construction: commercial jobs last longer, often require different and often higher skills which does not match the geography of minority inner-city and majority (white) suburban communities. On top of this, training is trade-specific; access provided by one type of apprenticeship is to that trade only, not to all construction trades. This means that on the one hand, there is competition among unions for applicant pools; on the other, there is reluctance to invest in a training program that may pay off for another trade, not the investing trade. Finally, organizing is rarely coordinated, not all trades are in the organizing mode, and only a few trades (carpenters and laborers, especially) link organizing and training explicitly. There are national and local differences regarding this policy, too. Thus the world of the trades is full of competition and discontinuity; what is true of one trade may not be true of another.

This table contrasting the internal structures of unions and CBOs makes clear that many concrete differences exist which guarantee that there will also be cultural and historical differences between these types of organizations which have to be negotiated:

UNIONS	CBOs
Run by an elected leadership – organization moves through electoral cycles at least every three years. Possible paid staff.	Run by a board of directors; paid staff depending on budget
Supported by worker’s dues; how dues are spent a matter of concern to members and accountability for money spent is an issue.	Supported by donations, fundraising, grants; accountability to supporters is not required except in the sense of reports to funders.
Membership organization; members vote, elect leadership, participate. Difference between member and non-member is a bright line involving access to jobs, benefits.	Usually not membership; the organization is typically a mailing list plus people who come to meetings
Primary mode of action is direct action such as strikes, picketing, solidarity,	Primary mode of action is much more information and meeting-based: lobbying,

confrontation with employer at various levels; sometimes NLRB or Dept of Labor complaints/charges	informational picketing, education, networking. Issue-based organizing.
Regulated by LMRDA, shaped by labor law	Regulated by laws governing non-profits
Relationship to funding sources: very unlikely to get grant funding. Usually unlikely to get WIA funding.	Often depend on grant funding. Can get WIA funding.

Given these sharply differing structures, it is unlikely that these types of organizations will ever combine. What they are going to have to bring each other is where they complement, not parallel, each other.

What union people said about their CBO partners

Now, if only to illustrate the way people engaged in these partnerships think about their experience, here are some quotes from each side (union and CBO) made during the conference itself. We put these forward for the purpose of laying the groundwork for discussion, to make manifest how each side appears from the perspective of the other side. Remember while reading these quotes that these are the success stories – these quotes are made by leaders of unions that are already committed, some quite deeply, to these partnerships. Thus some of these remarks (“I’ve never tackled anything so difficult in my life”) are coming from someone who nevertheless is trying to tackle it.

We begin with comments made by union representatives, organizers and building trades council leaders, about their CBO partners and the difficulties the union people faced in building their projects and their relationships with their partners.

“When we first tried doing this I felt like a weenie at a weenie roast. Labor is racist, nepotism is alive in its ranks – this has been a real premiere for the building trades. But now the building trades and environmental groups are meeting monthly.”

“I’ve never tackled anything so difficult in my life. The ministers tell me that there will be barriers that we don’t foresee. I know transportation is a big one [for apprentices from the inner city]. But these people need to learn the ability to manage money through bad weather: chicken today, feathers tomorrow.”

“Unless you’re a big, wealthy district it’s an extravagant expense to set up a pre-apprenticeship program. You start a program and there’s no success for a year. Also, a lot of unions aren’t made up to accept people of different cultures. You start to get blacks, Indians, Hispanics – for some leaders, it’s more than they can take. But the idea is that you got to get to the point where the ethnic makeup of the union is reflected in the leadership.”

“We don’t like to have anyone tell us how to do our job. When we stay insulated, we have more power and clout. When you are in a partnership of some kind, you have to pay another piper. The partner has to answer to a lot of other people. There are strings and outside forces.”

“The CBO has to have placement results. That’s how they get their funding. We do that for them. Here’s what they do for us. Young people come in with a myriad of problems – drugs, kids. You must have a vehicle for case management. Unions don’t have a case management program. But CBOs have one.”

“The question is, is there enough money involved in a job? If it’s a \$700,000 or \$800,000 dollar job, it’s not a lot of money – is it worth a pre-apprenticeship program? It’s tough, creating these programs.”

“Organize” is a bad word. People think it means the union is going to do things. The other problem we had, people didn’t know what the union was all about.”

“Two years ago I approached a tribe in Lake County. They said, ‘Get off the reservation.’ But I came back a year later. There was casino and motel work going on. I said, ‘Why aren’t you doing this work?’

“The leadership of this country is on us to self-destruct. It scares the hell out of me. Assaults on funding, meeting, speaking – this is the fruit of the tree we planted. Now we have to plant something different.”

The last of these union-side quotes suggests that when working on these partnerships, both sides should be looking beyond each other at higher-level public policies that are working on a divide-and-conquer strategy:

“We have enemies. How much of the obstacles to these partnerships are the strategies of our enemies?”

Notable about these comments is the evident willingness to acknowledge past history and begin from a different, explicitly anti-racist position; an appreciation of the needs and capabilities of the CBOs; awareness of the financial limitations of organizing through these partnerships; and a linking of the big political context with the microcosm of the partnership. When both sides acknowledge that they have “enemies,” and agree on who the enemies are, a lot can get done.

What CBO people said about their union partners

On the other side, the view of organized labor and their partnerships through the eyes of CBO people is not flattering, but it is hopeful. A legacy of distrust is evident in these remarks, yet the intensity of the feeling should not be either unfamiliar or unwelcome to the labor people. This intensity should be viewed as a resource by labor. When a CBO staffer says that he wants to “kick down the door,” labor should remember that it was not

that long ago, after all, that labor wanted to “kick down a door.” Furthermore, if a union is looking to organize, what could be better news than that there are people who want to kick down a door? Among these CBO people there is less emphasis on real labor history, however. Many CBO staffers are young and few of them seemed to have in mind the kind of industrial and community organizing in the 1930’s that changed the face of American labor. In fact, at the time of the conference, most of these CBOs were only a few years old, created to address this particular issue.

Here are some of the comments of CBO spokespersons:

“We want to not just crack open a door, but kick down a door.”

“There is within the community some reluctance to deal with unions. We’ve been lied to and cut out for so long. But we are a forgiving people. People can change. But some unions are reluctant, some are still out there.”

“For a long time there was a lack of personnel in religious circles working on economic justice and labor. Yes, Dorothy Day – but it had dwindled into nothing in the 1980s. We didn’t look at labor until the 1990s.”

“We would get community jobs directly through protest. We didn’t want to be union – we didn’t like the union, they didn’t like us. But you march for jobs and they let you into the worksite and then tell you, pick up lumber. And it’s a job for one day. You didn’t learn nothing. We don’t want a job for a day. We want the good jobs. We would send people to city council meetings but we found, in every organization, there is someone there to stop you. So we need to build power and clout with state level officials.”

“When you get a group of people who want to organize, the union leadership is scared of them.” (This was from someone who had brought a group of workers to a union and tried to get the union to organize them.)

“Working with a community organization makes the union accountable.”

“We entered into this process because getting folks jobs is homeless prevention. It’s part of our overall package. We are developing political relations. We have been able to dispel the myth that the building trades can’t be worked with.”

These comments combine problem-solving with confrontation and complaining, airing dirty laundry with the telling of home truths. But all of these people were involved in some way with these partnerships, so their comments, although provocative, suggest conflicts that have been resolved or are at least acknowledged publicly and being worked on.

There was also, evident at least to someone present at the conference, a sense that people from CBOs felt freer to express themselves as individuals, as compared to the union

people who always were on a tighter leash as it were, speaking to some degree for the union. This may appear to run counter to the perception of the union spokesperson quoted above who said that CBO partners had to answer to a lot of other people. However, answering to someone is not the same as feeling free to speak out. A union person at this conference would have been there representing the union in some sense (for example, there were a number of presidents of building trades councils) and would not feel free to speak as an individual. He or she would be participating as a representative of the union. This would limit his or her ability to speak spontaneously.

Examples of the types of partnerships represented

To give a sense of the range of partnerships that were represented by the people at the conference, here are some examples of the projects reported either at the conference itself or in interviews during preparation for the conference. There is not space in this paper to do a full comparison of the financial structure of each partnership, the type of agreement under which they operate (for example, Project Labor Agreements or PLAs; apprenticeship utilization agreements), or the approaches to enforcement that each partnership has created or would like to create. This information is accessible, in outline form, through background materials that came out of the conference and can be developed in the future. What this brief list can do is display the range of examples of ways in which local unions and local CBOs have come together to address the problem of access for women and minorities to good union construction jobs, that they agreed they could deal with better through a partnership. It also reveals that these partnerships run into sometimes apparently insurmountable obstacles, yet the relationships that have been built survive to seek another way.

1. Kankakee, Illinois

The expectation of construction of a women's prison in Pembroke, one of the poorest areas in Illinois (no post office; sharecropping still exists; largely black community), led to outsiders buying up land and setting up construction companies that the local Building Trades Council says are bogus. Both the trades and the community feared that, with an 18% minority hire requirement, the work would be done by journeymen travelers from all over the country. Local ministers, the NAACP, the Building Bridges Project of the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues, the U.S. Dept of Labor and the president of the Building Trades Council for Kankakee County got together to provide free pre-apprenticeship math classes at Pembroke churches to "retrofit your twenty-five year old [person] to study" and enable locals to "build the prison, not be in it" at Greater St. Paul Baptist Church in Pembroke. Teachers and instructional materials were paid for by the regional consortium, Three Rivers Construction Alliance, and arranged by the Building Bridges Project. Roads were already built and equipment was on site, but prison construction was cancelled in 2003 due to the budget crisis.

2. Cincinnati, Ohio

The AFL-CIO had projects involving dislocated workers, incumbent workers, and apprenticeship programs. The apprenticeship program involved the Hamilton County vocational-technical school, the largest vocational-technical school in the U.S., and between 20 and 30 feeder schools. Students could get credit towards an apprenticeship program as well as an AA. However, funding for this program was grant-based (including WIA funding) and uncertain. In addition, working with the school bureaucracies was proving difficult regarding follow-up and finalizing contracts with unions. At the time he was interviewed, the AFL-CIO staff person did not know if he would have a job the next month.

3. Central California Coast

The Workforce Investment Board of Monterey committed \$900,000 for a pilot two-year program run by the Carpenters. The union had helped school board and officers get out the vote on a bond issue to build the schools; the idea was that the schools would be built under a PLA. The union would get kids from the pre-apprenticeship program and build the schools, the kids would then become UBC members. "Get the bids, hire the kids," summarized the strategy. ABC (the non-union contractors association) came to school board meetings and fought every step of the way. But the pilot program was still not up and running as of March 2003. New officials elected at the school board had held up the plan; there was a risk that the state would take back 20% of the funding.

4. New Jersey

In July 2002, PLAs were authorized by the governor to be used on any public works project that qualified in terms of size. In 2003 there was an \$8 billion dollar project in place for public schools throughout the state. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ), which is primarily a research and advocacy organization, was led into the construction area as part of working on economic revitalization. In 2003, NJISJ was in the second year of a pre-apprenticeship program involving 15 building trades unions. An arrangement with a local car dealer provided loans of up to \$3,000 towards the purchase of cars, to be paid back with two years of when the apprentice got a union job.

In Paterson, A.C.O.R.N lobbied for and got a PLA for all projects of \$1 million or more. This PLA had an apprenticeship utilization agreement: twenty percent of all hours worked, across each trade, was required to use apprentice workers enrolled in state registered apprenticeship programs. The City of Paterson set up the Paterson Community Apprenticeship Initiative pre-apprenticeship (PCAI) funded by money per worker hour worked. Apprentices had to be referred to registered programs either through the PCAI or be Paterson residents. Contractors were required to document utilization of apprentices or face \$500 per day fines.

5. Bloomington, Illinois

Bloomington Trades and Labor acted as a fiscal agent for a pre-apprenticeship program. They got Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds for this program. Participants (mostly

youth) were given a stipend and spent approximately three months in the program. Half of the day they did remedial math and reading, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 10-hour training, scaffolding, Red Cross and CPR. The other half they worked on community projects. The building trades craft workers acted as on-site instructors. In the classroom they were also given explanations of how to apply to apprenticeship programs. One such program was being run in Bloomington; another was in Pontiac through the Laborers (LIUNA) 996, one in Galesburg with LIUNA 538 and one in Kankakee with the Kankakee Federation of Labor and LIUNA 751.

6. California

The Carpenters have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CBOs in which the CBO pays a journeyman union scale (\$42.00 per hour) for instructing students. The union pays the benefits. The union will accept graduates of the pre-apprenticeship program into their apprenticeship program (give them priority on their list) if a certain percentage of the class (20%) is women or minorities, so that acceptances into the apprenticeship program is from a pool, not accepting specific numbers of women or minority applicants. (This limitation is a result of Prop. 209 which eliminated affirmative action programs in California.) The CBO can go get grants because grant funding depends on placements, and putting a graduate into an apprenticeship program counts as placement.

7. Pacific Northwest Native American Reservations

The Carpenters started pre-apprenticeship programs on Native American Reservations. At the Hoopa Tribal Center, a pre-apprenticeship program graduated 26 people per year. It is a 10-month residential program. There had been a lot of construction work being done on tribal lands, casinos and motels, but no Indians were on the jobs. The tribes didn't know how to get into the unions. If someone's brother came to the tribe as a contractor, he got the job. The Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance is a local hire ordinance; now 8 tribes have TEROs (there are 120 tribes in California). The ordinance covers work "within a reasonable commute from the center of the reservation" which means an hour and a half commute. It includes CalTrans work.. Indian tribes on the east coast have already had experience with this approach.

8. Oakland, California: Port Authority Social Justice Fund

Twelve people from "the community" sit on the Social Justice Fund committee of the vast Port of Oakland, which was developed under a PLA. The committee provides political support to the PLA and monitors implementation of a fund paid into by contractors at a pennies-per-hour -worked rate. Money from this fund goes to pre-apprenticeship programs to prepare people for jobs in construction. If a contractor violates the Social Justice Agreement, they can be called in front of the Social Justice Committee and fined. Getting the fund set up took a year, to go through the legal process. The related Cypress-Mandela pre-apprenticeship program is viewed as an exemplary program.

9. Gary, Indiana

Gary is now economically devastated by the closing of the major steel mills. An urban empowerment zone provided funding to set up the Gary Urban Construction and Training Program, funded by an Enterprise Zone tax, private charities and foundations. Participants do a combination of hands-on skill training and academics over a 9-week period in a pre-apprenticeship program that leads to a union apprenticeship program. It is free to all Gary residents. Instructors are journeymen craftsmen.

These sketches only describe about half the partnerships represented by people at the conference. They suggest the range of situations, types of resources, geography, challenges and agreements that take place under the label labor union-CBO partnership. Some partnerships involve nothing in writing, just a handshake or a relationship. Some involve ongoing regular meetings between CBO and union partners or a Board of Advisors. Others are under complex legal arrangements, including PLAs, put in place through a long term combination of lobbying, negotiation and legislation with some kind of public authority, whether a port, a transit system, a school district or a city, county or state government. What is common to all of them is the intent to bring the assets of unions and of communities together in a project to get people from low-income and minority communities good union jobs.

Obstacles and solutions as identified by conference participants

The participants listed and then voted on the five most serious obstacles to building successful partnerships. The top two were very concrete: lack of essential funding and the prohibitive cost of tracking and monitoring graduates of pre-apprenticeship programs. The third and fourth acknowledged the social problems that these partnerships were created to overcome but noted that there was a problem particular to each side: the lack of trust on the part of community groups that makes them reluctant to get involved with the unionized trades, and resistance within unions to opening up to minorities and women. The fifth, the difficulty of enforcing hiring requirements, is a problem that many partnerships would call themselves lucky to have.

Participants met in focus groups to discuss these obstacles as they had experienced them and then reported back to the plenary. Following this, the conference as a whole responded to the presentation of these obstacles and suggested ways of addressing them.

Funding

The problems: The length of time that it takes to bring someone up to and through an apprenticeship program was cited as closely connected to the funding problem. The application process itself is long and drawn out, sometimes taking over a year and varying with the economy. Apprentice wages start at \$11 or \$12 per hour, not enough to pay for both housing and a car, much less support a family. An apprentice will need financial help in order to have a car or be self-supporting while his or her wages are still low.

Solutions: The best solution was what was called “the building trades model” – a cents per hour stream of money that supported the pre-apprenticeship program, but written into the specs of a construction project so that contractors would include that cost in their bids. This solution was implemented in the Port of Oakland project. Money from this model could be allocated to provide transportation help, for example. When funders are not the contractors, (when funding comes from grants, for example) the conference participants said funders should be less out-come oriented and more conscious of the length of time that it takes to put someone through an apprenticeship program. Outcomes may be several years down the road. After all, apprenticeships are four and five years long, like college. Some apprenticeship coordinators use their suppliers (like Home Depot) as interim job placements for people who are waiting to get into an apprenticeship program.

Cost of tracking and monitoring

The problem: The reason tracking and monitoring is difficult is because they require resources that CBOs, which run on shoestring budgets often with only one staff person, typically do not have. When tracking has been attempted, it is clear that a staffer would have to spend at least half-time following up on graduates. There are computer and software requirements involved in tracking as well. But CBOs are only paid (especially when they get WIA funding through Workforce Investment Boards) to provide training, even though how much they get is based on how many people they place in jobs. Since tracking does not count as training, tracking is often eliminated. Of course, CBOs would like to be able to follow people through jobs over time; this is part of the case-management value that they bring to partnerships with unions. The problem of tracking people is exacerbated because many low-income people living in vulnerable communities move often and are hard to track. Also, when a graduate of a pre-apprenticeship program enters a formal apprenticeship program, the apprentice “belongs” to the union and information about his or her progress is usually hard to get.

Solutions: Union partners at the conference gave advice to CBOs about how to ask for and get information on apprentices from unions. Unfortunately, the Department of Labor tracks retention but only on a national, not a union-by-union or local level. Chicago Women in the Trades brings its graduates back to mentor and volunteer, making it possible to track them after they have graduated; Gary Urban Construction sends a career counselor out in the field. For apprentices who drop out of apprenticeship programs, participants agreed that unions need to do a better job of doing exit interviews and retention and need to be ready to share that information.

Lack of trust on the part of community groups leading to reluctance to getting involved with the trades

The problem: conference participants said that CBOs fear that unions will be too powerful as partners; the legalities of working with unions (contracts, MOUs, PLAs) are too intimidating. Unions are seen as inflexible, inaccessible, mysterious, operating by

rules no one else understands. In addition, each apprenticeship program has a different application process. Some CBOs fear that if they bring unions into the community, the presence of union construction companies will drive up costs. Union construction companies may also drive out non-union but minority-owned local construction companies. In tribal situations there are sovereignty issues that make tribes wary of getting involved in unions. These incompatibilities do not even touch on the well-known history of unions as racist and exclusionary.

Solutions: For both CBOs and unions that have begun partnerships, most of these problems are seen as lack of familiarity and lack of information. This can be addressed by mutual commitments between labor and community to get to know each other better. Working together in good faith will create a present and a future that is different from the past. “We are the community,” said one labor rep.

Resistance from within unions to opening up to minorities and women

The problem: Union spokespersons volunteered a lot on this issue. To the general public, which overall knows little about unions, the old image of the white male skilled craft worker still prevails. CBOs in this sense resemble the general public. The union people acknowledge that this public image is exacerbated by the unions’ practice of bringing in travelers when more tradespersons are needed rather than increasing the local union workforce by training locally. Also, employers use unions against each other and still use minorities as strikebreakers. Dealing with this history requires strong leadership from the unions.

Solutions: Union leaders have to be proactive about speaking out to make it clear that exclusionary practices are being dismantled. Union leaders at the conference urged: Get rid of the dinosaurs, organize minority contractors, remind union journeymen that if their own children are going to college, not into the trades, new people will have to take their place. Unions need to fight the employer’s so-called “right of refusal” – the right to turn away a worker that has been sent by the union hiring hall. Employers will turn down minority tradespersons and ask that another one be sent from the hiring hall and do not have to give a reason. The union should never let the employer refuse to hire someone and not have to explain why. Active, militant minority caucuses and women’s committees should not be viewed as a threat by union leaders: in fact, they take the pressure off local leadership and give local leadership a political reason to welcome women and minorities.

Enforcing agreements

The problem: Partners on both sides agreed that contractors will fake ignorance of agreements even when they have signed these very agreements. They ignore hiring requirements even when they are in the specifications. Enforcement is a problem that CBOs and union share and can help each other with. Sometimes one black woman apprentice gets sent to one job after another, never staying with a job long enough to learn what she needs to learn; just long enough to satisfy some quota requirement. Other

times contractors simply assume that no one is going to come to the site and count who's there.

Solution: Enforcement of agreements to hire women and minorities requires the willingness to go to the site and look and engage in some confrontational behavior. Representatives from CBOs can do this – can come on site and demand compliance. They can represent the community around a construction site. The language of the contract must be clear: it should not be vague or just require a “good faith” effort. Penalties should be enforceable and the timing of enforcement needs to be set up so that it does not lag far behind the job. Once the job is done, and the contractor is paid, there is very little enforcement can do. But when hiring requirements (for example, local hire, apprenticeship utilization or per cents) are put into the specs, a business agent who is conscientious can enforce it and the union can take the contractor to court if necessary. In addition, the penalty must be big enough so that the contractor cannot comfortably build it into his bid. Before a project starts, the union and the community need to get together to draw up the specs so that there is wide understanding of what the specs are and readiness to enforce them. Preparing local media to understand these issues is important.

Conclusions

More information to be produced

This summary only presents a portion of the information that was developed through this conference process. There are many other ways that these partnerships could be compared or analyzed: for example, by length of time in existence, by number of people graduated into apprenticeship or journeymen jobs, by funding sources, by types of agreements that hold the partnerships together, by the types of agreements that commit contractors to employ apprentices that have come through these partnerships. While we did not gather this information in systematic detail, enough detail exists to begin these comparisons. A listing of funding sources, for example, might be of interest to unions or CBOs contemplating developing one of these partnerships. An analysis of types of agreements both between CBOs and unions and between partnerships and contractors or public agencies would also be useful.

Key role of union leadership in promoting inclusion of women and minorities

Reading through the comments on problems, one of the things that jumps out is the role of leadership on the part of the union (“Get rid of the dinosaurs”). CBOs spokespersons do not talk in the same way about their leadership, possibly because many CBOs are formed around one individual leader and do not survive transition to another leader. On the other hand, it is not unusual to hear spokespersons from CBOs talking in terms of dire outcomes and threats (“We want to not just crack open a door but kick down a door”). One of the things that was striking about this conference is that we heard union leadership speaking with voices that equaled if not surpassed the voices of the CBO spokespersons in directness. Union leadership usually frames its remarks about organizing in minority and low-income communities in terms of remediating loss of

membership, not a vision of a conflict that risks encompassing a whole society. At this conference these leaders also, without exception, noted the past exclusionary history of the building trades unions, rejected it explicitly, and declared that a different approach was necessary. They seemed to understand and act on the understanding that acknowledging the past was essential to moving forward.

Training as an organizing strategy

Another question raised but not answered by this paper is the effectiveness of these pre-apprenticeship partnerships as an organizing strategy from the point of view of the unions. These partnerships, as several participants mentioned, are expensive, hard to set up, have no real results for at least a year, and depend on the creation of large public works projects. Unions are not public agencies or charitable organizations: they have to represent their members' interests and justify how they spend their money. If all that is accomplished, when these conditions are lined up, is the bringing in of several thousand or even hundred journeymen tradespeople who are women or minorities, does this justify the spending of these resources?

Apparently, the answer to this question depends on whether or not the partnership is related to an organizing strategy. Unions need market share (which means organizing contractors) and members. When we consider these partnerships as part of an organizing strategy, we're asking what it means when an organization (a union) that represents its members economic interests does so by taking ownership and promulgating – teaching and training – skills that are at the cutting edge of the industry and cannot be equally well learned in any other way. We may be looking at a strategy that is in its most early stages, that might be widely adopted by combinations of construction trades unions, or that might be adopted by unions that represent other training-intensive types of work, like nursing, teaching, social work or paralegal work – types of work where unions have not historically claimed the right to run the training programs. H.E.R.E. has a culinary academy in Las Vegas; the machinists who work in transportation in Pennsylvania have put together a training program that involves five different unions.

Extending the training as organizing strategy beyond construction or other high-skill work unions

But then we need to ask how the linking of training and organizing would look in the cases of jobs that are considered to be low-skill jobs. The argument can be made that there are no really low-skill jobs – that there is important knowledge created and required for every job. But that argument is unlikely to carry great weight. There probably is, then, a limit to how far the strategy of organizing by means of channeling access to training can be carried.

Then, looking at it from the perspective of the CBOs, how viable long-term is the strategy of partnering with construction trades unions as a means to bringing high-skill good jobs into minority communities? While construction is less susceptible to economic downturns than some other industries, because most big projects are publicly funded, it is

not immune (as in the case of the prison at Pembroke). And, there is a limit to how much of a local economy can be based on construction.

This means that other strategies for raising the quality of education, income level and job opportunities in minority communities must be in operation as well.

New forms of organizing – one among many

We are clearly in a transition period of some sort, whether it is better described as “social movement unionism” or “community unionism.” Not being able to see ahead, the limited purpose of this report on the Berkeley-Illinois conference has been to focus what brings these two types of organizations together as partners, despite what is often a troubled history, geographic and cultural differences, tremendous differences in resources and economic power. By understanding what brings them together, we can learn what may keep them together.

Both types of organizations know they face a desperate future. Whether on the union side they are saying, “We must plant a new tree,” or on the CBO side saying, “We are a forgiving people,” they are demonstrating a readiness to reject the past, stay at the table, and keep working together. The variety of partnerships brought together at this conference indicated a powerful political will; the forms through which that will are to be expressed are not yet set in stone.

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Appendix

People who were interviewed prior to or who were participants at the March 21, 2003 Conference, *Community Partnerships and Building Trades Unions*. People who attended conference are marked with #. People who were interviewed prior to the conference or completed the pre-conference questionnaire are marked with *. Dates indicate when one interview occurred. Additional interviews may have taken place.

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