Desiring Change: Needs and Next Steps
Summary Memo
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Overview
I completed interviews with 21 organizations in order to assess which groups are undertaking intersectional or cross-issue work, how they are going about this work, and their perspectives on movement building. The organizations interviewed are working on a range of issues including immigrant rights, criminal justice, anti-violence, health, economic justice, racial justice, reproductive justice, sexual rights, and arts. Areas of focus ranged from local organizing to regional and national in scope and in some cases transnational organizing. Following is a summary of the interviews/comments.

Summary

All organizations stressed the importance of working across a broad range of issues as integral to achieving social change/justice, though many cited resources as a challenge to working across issues. Resource issues include financials resources, human resources, and critical analytical skills to understand connections across issues, for example environmental justice and sexual rights. Most organizations interviewed are working intersectionally but in a limited capacity, so they might be working on racial and economic justice in the context of LGBT issues, but sex will get left out, or environmental issues will get left out. Many organizations said they can’t do it all, and need to have some level of focus to their work, though that focus at the minimum should include an integrated analysis of how issues are linked even if they cannot address many different issues.

Definitions of effective movement building (and movement building strategies) ranged from:

- Empowering communities where we come from, how we represent ourselves, who are our role models, building community and coming together as a force.
• Groups of people working to create lasting change—working inside and outside the system (inside the system becomes social services rather than social change)
• Allegiances and alliances that support, foster, and encourage the understanding of various kinds of oppression and injustice.
• Movements grow out of people’s experiences in their lives—they are grassroots at the core and then get larger, but most importantly they start with people’s lived and actual experiences.
• Finding new ways to change the system and hold the system accountable.
• Movements are about visioning an end to a problem.
• Building community through the arts, using art as a tool for social change. Through art, looking at issues of race, gender, and challenging mainstream notions and ideals of social justice.
• Organized effort to try and get something done, working on a grassroots level, getting people informed about whatever the issues are, getting people involved
• Movements begin with the mobilization of its people
• Social, support work is an important part of movement building

Organizations saw themselves as part of a range of movements including:
• The LGBT movement
• Domestic Violence Movement
• Transgender Movement
• Lesbian, Queer Women’s Movement
• Latina Lesbians’ Movement
• Reproductive Justice Movement
• Environmental Justice Movement
• Sex Workers Movement, prostitution community
• LGBT Youth Movement
• Women’s Movement
• Social Change Movement
• Black Movement
• Anti-War Movement

Directions/Strategies that movements they are a part of should take:
• Community-based grassroots work is the most important work we can do.
• Continue to support community building, specifically for queer women of color, poor women, immigrant women, and continue to provide services to level the playing field.
• Using different strategies is important—for example: housing work, cultural work, services, arts.
• LGBT movements should be directly related to economic justice, racial justice, social justice and to broader movements for justice.
• Support other movements, work in coalition across issues.
• Services help create base for organizing and can be a good funnel for volunteers—services in and of themselves do not constitute a movement but in the context of a vision of change services can be an important part of a movement
• Need to think more about race and class issues, and need to start with conversations, making connections across issues, building relationships and supporting other issues.
• Educating our own constituencies about the interconnectedness of issues—sweatshops, undocumented migrants, forced displacements.
• Politicizing and concretizing LGBT movements.
• Larger LGBT organizations have to figure out how to support smaller organizations without holding us hostage to the way they do things.

State of Movement Building in the US
• National efforts have a great deal of visibility but they are not necessarily addressing the range of issues concerning most LGBT people and they are not connecting internationally.
• National LGBT movement has no analysis of race, class, ableism.
• Not certain what the goals are of national organizations.
• Gay marriage issue is very narrow in scheme of rights and disenfranchisement, the various state efforts seem to be fragmented and are distracting from issues that need attention like US imperialism, working poor.
• The mainstreaming of gay marriage issue makes it difficult to talk about partner abuse.
• Transgender issues often get left out.
• We’re being mainstreamed which leaves out a lot of folks who are outside the box.
• We’ve lost sight of changing the way things operate, changing the system, rather it seems now we are about reforming the system.
• We should be talking about universal health care instead of marriage, about women’s health instead of abortion rights.
• We’ve lost our broad vision and settled on single issues.
• Organizations that are primarily LGBT focused seem also to be the organizations that are not diverse in cultural backgrounds and heritages and have a fair amount of racism.
• Where the most power is in LGBT movements is with gay men and European Americans and they are mostly single issue which means they don’t acknowledge entire groups of people.

Obstacles:
• LGBT media is full of trans and bi phobia. The alternative press in and LGBT context is gone.
• Representations of racial and class diversity is not being addressed in LGBT movement organizations, especially at a national level.
• Work taking place around economic justice and/or environmental justice does not deliberately include sexual rights/LGBT issues, mainly because of resources.

Movement Building Goals
• Need people of color involved in organizations in all levels of leadership
• Arts organizations can be used as a tool—in the process of creating artistic work we promote visibility of people/women of color.
• Deal with issues of racism within the movement and have more representation from women and people of color in leadership positions—commitment to diversity has to happen at any cost, change the parameters if you aren’t meeting your goals.
• Pushing for equal rights under the law both on state and federal level.
• Overcoming societal stigma.

Funders:
• All organizations are primarily funded by smaller, progressive foundations (and to a small degree, individual donors). Foundation support includes Haymarket People’s Fund, Grassroots Gay Rights Fund, Open Meadows, Horizons Foundation, Women’s Foundation of California, LEF Foundation, California Arts Council, Gill Foundation, Resist, A Territory Resource Fund, Wyoming Health Project

Needs/Recommendations/Next Steps
• Resources to build capacity of organizations to do cross-issue work.
• Connect movement activists to a broad cross-section of organizations that share a political vision.
• Bring groups together—too many of groups/efforts are working in isolation even within specific issue areas.
• Technical Assistance and capacity building including fundraising; sending people to trainings (i.e dismantling racism) that are cost prohibitive to smaller organizations; how to start an organization; how to look for a good fiscal sponsor; board trainings, leadership development and support; bringing people together to share resources—building the capacity of organizations will help broaden the issue areas they work on.
• Bring together a select group of activists working at a cross section of issues to radically rethink the way that contemporary movement work towards social justice.
• Create a space where movement organizers, activists, and academics can come together to think, reflect plan, and have values discussions related to the present context of US imperialism.
• New ways of framing, messaging for wide public consumption.
• Strengthen links between grassroots and community-based activists and those who make policies.
• Connect movement leaders and movements in an intentional and strategic way
• Strengthen organizations that advocate on policy, organize or lead campaigns, or provide services to create systemic change in their communities.
• Develop the leadership, advocacy, and movement building skills of social justice activists and leaders.
• Assistance in movement building including developing skills in advocacy; critical political, social, and economic analysis; strategic movement building; base-building; and working in coalitions.
• Assistance in gaining the skills needed for day-to-day realization of the social justice work, including but not limited to basic organizing skills, legal and technical research skills, media and communications, program evaluation, and computer and software training

• Hold a convening broadly about movement building across issues and regions in order to build a strengthened sense of community among one another; to share experiences and learn effective strategies for public/popular education, community organizing, collaboration/coalition-building, policy advocacy and leadership development; and to identify and build future collaborations for movement-building.