

## SCOPE

## SCOPE: A LOCAL GROUP BECOMES A FORCE FOR CHANGE

The growth and evolution of SCOPE (Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Development) demonstrates the value of FACT's strategy of choosing groups with strong, visionary leaders and giving them consistent funding and support to help build a powerful, stable organization. A FACT grantee since 1995, SCOPE is now taking on the enormous challenge of promoting progressive changes in California's tax and fiscal policy.

SCOPE was born out of the violent racial tensions of Los Angeles in 1992. Its first incarnation was a membership organization called AGENDA (Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives), a group founded in 1993 to organize low-income communities to address the entrenched problems of crime and poverty in South Los Angeles. In 1995, when its budget was around \$300,000, AGENDA received its first general operating support grant of \$60,000 from FACT.

As the organization grew, so did FACT's funding: the annual grant eventually ranged from \$100,000 to \$175,000. "FACT was one of our earliest funders," said Anthony Thigpenn, the group's founder and president. "We had lots of ideas and strategies, but we hadn't done a lot yet. FACT had the foresight and commitment to invest in an emerging organization. It helped us to get started and do the work, and it gave us credibility. It was foundational for us, both in the early years and ongoing. We would not be what we are today without FACT's investment and support."

Today, SCOPE has evolved into a \$4 million organization that is skillfully using cutting-edge research and technology to further its mission of eliminating structural barriers to social and economic opportunities for poor and disadvantaged communities. It was a pioneer in the realm of integrated voter engagement, and has built on its door-to-door local organizing methods to create a state-wide network that employs sophisticated outreach and voter engagement technology with the goal of winning systematic tax and fiscal reform.

### Building Alliances

Thigpenn describes the evolution of SCOPE as a series of concentric circles, beginning with the localized organizing work to improve conditions in South Los Angeles, expanding to include all of Los Angeles, and then outward to the whole state. "Our local economy is tied to regional, national, and global economy," he said. "Addressing those connections required more sophisticated analysis of trends and other factors. Building alliances was crucial, otherwise groups would be set against each other, even though we were fighting for the same things." Research, analysis and coalition-building were at the root of an early successful workforce campaign, in which SCOPE and its partners got Dreamworks to create Workplace Hollywood (1999), a \$5 million jobs program, which has trained and employed 5,000 low income people. In 2006, SCOPE convened the 25-member Apollo Alliance to shape a green jobs economy in Los Angeles. Three years later, in 2009, the Municipal Green Building Retrofit and Workforce Development Ordinance was adopted, and SCOPE will monitor the development of a green Career Ladder Training Program. Federal and state resources for the program include nearly \$6 million for job training and \$16 million for construction.

## Voter Engagement Becomes a Key Strategy

The successful outcome of the Apollo campaign was in part based on the intensive voter engagement strategy that SCOPE adopted in 2001. SCOPE realized that to have more impact, it would need to change the political climate, and get the attention of politicians by making the community's voice a factor at the ballot box. SCOPE integrated its voter work with its organizing work. "Neighbors, not an invading army, are your best messengers," Thigpenn said. "And to make an impact on increasing the level of voter participation, you have to be continuous. You can't change a 20-year pattern over one election cycle. You also have to build an ongoing coalition of groups, because the scale is beyond any one organization." SCOPE launched ALLERT (Alliance of Local Leaders for Education Registration and Turnout), a regional 501(c)(4) coalition of community groups, churches and unions, which broadened its reach and afforded it greater latitude for advocacy and fundraising.

The results were dramatic: voter turnout in the inner city neighborhoods where SCOPE is active went from 10-15 percent below the citywide average to equal or above that average by 2004, and an independent research study showed that SCOPE's efforts raised voter turnout by 6.6 percent in its targeted precincts in the November 2006 election. "We'd like to get the turnout to be 100 percent," Thigpenn said.

## Taking on the Big Picture with Sophisticated Methods

SCOPE is now using this voter engagement strategy to look beyond Los Angeles to California as a whole. Its central goal is reforming the budget and the tax system which, with the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, took away revenue that could be used for such areas as education, health care, and other social services. SCOPE convened and anchors the California Alliance, a 501(c)(3) organization, consisting of 27 groups based in 10 counties around the state, with the goal of engaging enough new and occasional voters to be a tipping point for reform in the state. "People's view of government and taxes has gotten more cynical," Thigpenn said. "Conservatives have done a good job of demonizing government. People also

think that any change in fiscal policy means that their property taxes will go up."

The nonpartisan California Alliance uses sophisticated methods and technologies to educate voters about the impact of tax and fiscal policies on their lives. "We're first asking people about why they think the way they do about tax and fiscal reform, and then figuring out what they are open to, what narrative we need to use to move them to a more progressive view," said Thigpenn. To reach people, the California Alliance bought a predictive phone dialing system that vastly increases the number of people that can be contacted. A small social justice organization could not afford such a system; the combined forces of the Alliance can. The usual type of calling practice might reach 40-50,000 people statewide. The Alliance has now done three rounds of calling with the more advanced system, reaching from 110,000 to 220,000 people each time.

Even more original is the crafting of the message. SCOPE's research showed that the tipping point in highly contested elections in California is about 500,000 voters. With the aim of engaging, educating and turning out that many new and occasional voters all over the state, the Alliance and a social research firm are using polling to identify possible voters through a social values lens.

"We began to examine people's world views and values, and the impact they have on behavior," Thigpenn says. "Unless we understand why people feel as they do, change can't happen." Working with communications consultants, the Alliance is developing and testing a narrative about the role of government that will motivate specific constituencies to feel more positively about policy reforms.

"Typically, social justice organizations approach messaging in an unsophisticated way," Thigpenn said. "They assume that if they give facts and figures, they'll prevail. It's not true, and social values will determine how people filter the message." With the development of infrastructure that enables the Alliance's member groups to conduct voter outreach and education, the Alliance aims to reach its goal of engaging 500,000 voters by 2012.