

Women's Project Organizational Management Structure

Many organizations and individuals have asked us about our organizational management. Deborah Dudley, a volunteer, interviewed staff members and wrote this report.

In keeping with our commitment to social change, racial, sexual and economic justice and the empowerment of all women, we have tried to organize our internal working structure to reflect the kind of world we wish to create and live in. The pressure to use traditional hierarchical organizational models, as well as the absence of acceptable alternatives result in our continual experimentation, evaluation and improvisation with structures and methods of working together to achieve our goals. We are committed, not just to a redressing inequity, but to a change of vision and policies through the majority participation of those who have not had a voice, have not had access to power.

Our work is directed and overseen by a 10 member Board of Directors made up of half rural and half urban (Little Rock) women. There is a commitment to a women of color majority as we feel that even with equal or proportional representation there is still the likelihood of a white vision dominating. Currently, seven members are women of color. We are also committed to the inclusion of lesbians through the Board participation of at least one visible lesbian with active ties to the lesbian community. We strive for a mix of both working and professional class women, low and middle income women as well as women of varying ages. The Board nominates and elects new members for an average term of three years from among recognized feminist and social change activists throughout the state.

The function of the Board is to set the overall direction of the Project, develop policy and hold internal political discussion through quarterly meetings. Also, it holds the organization accountable to its constituency both financially and programmatically. Members receive written reports from each of the Project staff prior to meetings, and staff is present at all meetings for questions and discussion. The Board participates in fundraising

activities, special Project events and activities, and provides moral support in Project endeavors.

The Women's Project staff is made up of women from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of skills. As with the Board, there is commitment to a majority women of color presence, lesbian presence, and economic, cultural and age diversity. We believe in an equal sharing of power through access to information and opportunity as well as an equal respect for the work of all women. We strive to counter the belief that certain kinds of women are only suited to certain kinds of work, and that certain kinds of work (managerial/organizational) is of more value than others (secretarial/support). To this end we do our own office cleaning and maintenance and we do not employ support staff, believing that typing, computer work, etc., is work that can and should be done by all of us, and those skills learned and shared by all. We believe that any women's time is as valuable as our own and pay for contracted services accordingly. For example, our childcare workers are paid at the rate of \$10.00 per hour for their services, the same as our staff members.

Because we work toward equal access to information and power and are a staff of varying skills and experience, we encourage and create opportunities for staff development through in-house training, time off for classes and workshops, and provision of funding for staff to attend one conference/workshop of their choice per year. We route all incoming information to all staff, encourage networking, and routinely share material from conferences attended by individual staff members. Written information for public distribution is always drafted and circulated for comment then finalized with input from all staff. We wish for no one or two individuals only to be identified as the Women's Project so encourage and expect all staff to do media work and outside public speaking. Participation in outside community social change work of special interest to staff is encouraged.

While the Women's Project is not operated as a
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collective, it shares features of that organizational structure in that all staff have equal participation in the decision-making and functioning of the Project as well as equal salary and benefits regardless of length of tenure with the organization. Longevity is rewarded not with increased salary but with increased vacation time and, after five years' commitment, contribution to a pension fund of choice and one month sabbatical for each year worked.

A yearly staff retreat provides the opportunity to review the overall progress of the Project's work as well as to strategize new work to be undertaken. Specific projects are agreed upon by consensus, with each staff member becoming lead organizer for at least one project chosen according to her interest, skills and desire. As lead organizer she is directly responsible for the functioning of her project, but work on all projects is shared by all staff. Weekly meetings provide an opportunity to brainstorm and problem-solve with each other and ask for specific help with project tasks. Lead organizers present quarterly written reports to the Board and attend Board meetings to discuss and answer questions related to their projects. One designated staff member is responsible for coordinating the work of the Project as a whole, assuring that work is flowing smoothly, tasks are balanced and evenly distributed, and the specific projects are working in sync. Another staff member is responsible for the fundraising and financial management of the Project in addition to her other project work.

Because the Women's Project is a community-based organization it encourages and relies on the help of many volunteers in its work. Volunteers are women and men both from the community and from Project programs such as the non-traditional jobs training and prison support groups. They work on the on-going work of the project such as bulk mailings, yard work, teaching in the non-traditional jobs program, clipping news stories for the Women's Watchcare Network, and fundraising. In addition, volunteers create their own projects such as the African American and Women's library at the Project which is funded, staffed and subsidized solely by volunteer efforts. They also organize, facilitate and do outreach for support groups such as incest survivors, women with disabilities, and Lesbians. During 1990 the Project has had 250-300 volunteers participating in its work.

When originally founded and for six years thereafter, the Women's Project was under the

umbrella of the United Methodist Church and was dependent on foundations and the church for 98 percent of its funding. We then made the decision to become a broad based community organization, and in the three years since that change we have reduced our dependence on foundations and corporations to approximately 50 percent. The remainder of our funding comes in the form of income from special events, product sales (T-shirts and sales of Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism), training sessions done by staff to various groups around the country, and from pledges, donations and memberships by many individuals. Though we have taken government funds for specific projects, we prefer to solicit as little government money as possible to avoid the accompanying restrictions which hamper our ability to create true social change. We prefer to be supported by the people and organizations appreciative of the radical nature of our work who can feel an ownership in our vision and work through their financial contributions. In addition to the people who support us through large donations (\$500, \$1000, \$5000), we are sustained by many small donations and pledges (\$5, \$10, \$15) from many people around the state of Arkansas as well as from around the country who learn of our work through training workshops or our bimonthly Newsletter. Our funding structure is such that we need not be dependent on any one large donor for our support, thus avoiding any major loss of funding. Staff and Board also actively participate in fundraising by asking for memberships and donations from the people and organizations they deal with both through the Project and as individuals in the community.

In the area of Project expenditures we tend to be fiscally conservative, attempting to spend as little as possible. Our major expenses are incurred with staff salaries, participant expenses for the Women in Work program, travel expenses and debt service on the Women's Project building.

In trying to fulfill our mission to change the world by working to eliminate racial, sexual and economic injustice and providing opportunities for the empowerment of women we are continuously experimenting, talking, evaluating, making mistakes and trying again. We do the same in our attempts to create an internal organizational structure that is reflective of the way we wish to live and work in the world.

Deborah Dudley