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## *Communicating What Works*<sup>8</sup>

Why does it seem that voices of negativism, prison building and inequality echo so much louder than those advocating positive change, investment in human capital and uncorrupted democracy?

Because the voices of negativism are better funded, organized and media-trained than those who know what works based on scientific evaluations.

How to balance the media playing field?

The Foundation is seeking to mobilize major funders to expand advocacy by nonprofit organizations. The goal is to create a communicating what works movement that is both “top down” and “bubble up.” Presently, too few funders are following the lead of, for example, the Open Society Institute into media advocacy.

From the top, publications by national nonprofits on what works need to be more frequently and widely communicated. Toward this end, the Foundation is expanding public awareness of its periodic updates of the final report of the Kerner Riot Commission, the final report of the National Violence Commission and *The Other America* (Michael Harrington’s pathbreaking book on poverty). An annual state of what works report by the Foundation is designed to further invigorate public debate.

National nonprofits need to release publications through more sophisticated strategic media campaigns, generating the kind of print and electronic coverage illustrated by the list at the end of this publication.

National nonprofit institutions with an awareness of solutions that work, based on science and not rhetoric, need to create and finance much more high powered communications and marketing offices for leveraging change at national, state, local and especially grassroots constituent levels.

In terms of bubble up, the thousands of American grassroots community-based inner-city nonprofit organizations need to become a more coordinated force, based on their being trained in communications and media, as is done in the Foundation’s television school for nonprofit organizations. (Local nonprofit organizations interested in the training should contact the Foundation’s director of communications.)

Grassroots nonprofit organizations need to be financially assisted to bring on their own communications directors (few have them) and to generate strategic communications plans. They must learn to communicate what works in the local media. They need to push for more local electronic media news and talk shows that embrace more of what works, less of what doesn’t work, and less of a “if it bleeds it leads” philosophy. The Foundation is pursuing such strategies in selected cities.

Equally if not more important are alternatives to conventional television, radio, and print news. Such alternatives include Internet venues, Tom Paine-like street level and electronic pamphleteering and organizing (as suggested by Bill Moyers), strategically organized town meetings, and public service announcements crafted by local nonprofit organizations.

One excellent model is the youth media enterprise pioneered by the Dorchester Youth Collaborative in

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Boston. Here, the messages of inner city youth, trained as actors, have been developed into videos available at Blockbuster and into a Hollywood-financed motion picture, *Squeeze*, starring the youth themselves. Youth who previously had been demonized by society are becoming positive message senders. The Foundation is funding a replication in Seattle of the Dorchester Youth Collaborative’s youth media enterprise.

Establishment-focused messages, for example in the national campaign against drugs, have been shown ineffective in evaluations. It is past time for youth development organizations to take the lead, and receive the bulk of government funds for crafting messages to their peers.

