



## Putting Ethics into Action

October 25, 2013

*Putting Ethics into Action* brought together staff and members of more than twenty advocacy, activist and policy organizations in New Mexico for a full day of conversations, panels and experiential workshops about institutionalizing representation, democratic decision-making, transparency and other hallmarks of ethical practice.

The gathering was the culmination of months of planning by a team composed of representatives from Common Cause New Mexico, Center for Civic Policy, ProgressNow New Mexico, New Mexico Voices for Children, and the Ethics & Responsibility Network.

Inspiration for the day came from Viki Harrison, Executive Director of Common Cause New Mexico. Viki was active in the Repeal Coalition (death penalty opposition) when she took part in an action research project on Ethics and Responsibility in Organizing led by Nina Gregg (US Coordinator of the international Ethics & Responsibility Forum). As the action research project was drawing to a close, Viki suggested that a larger face-to-face conversation would encourage attention to the potential and challenges of making explicit the ethical commitments of social justice organizations. In response to Viki's suggestion a New Mexico planning team was recruited and *Putting Ethics into Action* was the result.

From the very start the planning team was committed to designing a collaborative learning event that built on the knowledge and expertise of participants. We aimed to strengthen existing relationships and build new connections for continuing to work together. The invitation asserted that "Ethics and responsibility strengthen the work, our communities and our institutions."

On Friday, October 25, 2013, Viki welcomed everyone on behalf of Common Cause New Mexico and the planning team. Two respected leaders set the tone for the day with their remarks about the meanings of ethics and the welcome opportunity to have these conversations with allies and partners.



Arturo Sandoval, veteran organizer and founder and director of the Center of Southwest Culture, challenged participants when he said "Ethics are not about following our feelings, religion, following the law, or what society accepts. Ethics are well-founded standards of right and wrong: honesty, compassion, loyalty, rights." Reminding everyone of the importance of holding ourselves accountable, he said,

“We need to live out the values in our lives first, then we can promote them in our communities.”



Stephanie Maez, Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Civic Policy, emphasized the importance of internal organizational mechanisms for accountability and also called for being more intentional about embracing ethical practices in our work.

The morning panel was composed of two experienced activists, each of whom offered examples of ethical practices and challenges from recent and highly visible campaigns.

Rachel LaZar, co-founder and Executive Director of El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, announced “I want to talk about the messiness, because we are faced with ethical dilemmas every day.” Until comprehensive immigration reform legislation is passed in the US, organizations like El Centro must make strategic and difficult decisions about policy and transparency. Keeping community members informed is a critical component of accountability and responsibility.



Mónica Córdova described the commitment of the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) to building high-trust relationships by valuing indigenous knowledge and expertise, a commitment to long-term leadership development, supporting allies, and creating safe space for members to tell their own stories. SWOP’s affirmation that “There is genius in the hood” is a key component of developing relationships that are transformational, not transactional and thriving communities.

Before and after lunch attendees took part in interactive workshops on ***Defining and encouraging civic engagement as ethical and responsible activism*** (led by Javier Benavidez and Oriana Sandoval from the Center for Civic Policy) and ***Infrastructure for ethics & responsibility in your organization*** (led by Nina Gregg of the Ethics & Responsibility Forum and Alex Curtas from ProgressNow New Mexico).

Most ethical person

- Close family member positive or negative
- Ethics present in policy-making, AND in "politics" of a group
- Not usually discussed openly in organizations - a developed (but not explicit) set of agreements
- Diversity in where we are drawing from - personal rel'shps, professional examples, historical context/motivators
- Personal ↔ Professional tension
- Diversity of models
- Judaeo-Christian "message"
- Questioned authority/dominant power structure
- Influenced by social movements
- willingness to take consequences



Ethics in civic engagement

- leave playing field a place we want to play afterward (bottle v. war)
- giving voice to the voiceless strategically
- engage respectfully/strategically
- consider messengers
- we're always capacity-building
- sharing in the credit
- stay in conversation about organizing, etc.
- ↳ it's all worthwhile (organizing, policy, elections, etc.)

What does this have to do with ethics?

- speaking to the heart - perfect the course of the goal
- Study the psychology of the decision-making - speaks clearly for people
- avoiding politics of worthiness - choose the best example, the best
- balancing political reality w/ speaking truth to power/being right - right
- what about the other side? (shut down)
- incrementalism vs. winning it all - pragmatic vs. long term
- issue based vs. electoral strategies
- principles - basic legal rights
- - Angelika (w/)/another way - the greatest good for the greatest #

After the afternoon workshops participants convened for a plenary session on Putting Ethics into Practice. Three respected leaders shared the ethical practices (tools) they have found to be effective in their work.

Sarah Nolan from Comunidades en Acción y de Fé (CAFé) returned the focus to the choices made every day when she said "Our commitment is to truth, not a quest for power."



Laurie Weahkee, Executive Director of the Native American Voters Alliance (NAVA) reminded everyone that for Native peoples, responsibility for all living things is not a new concept. She described the importance of having guiding principles that set out the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

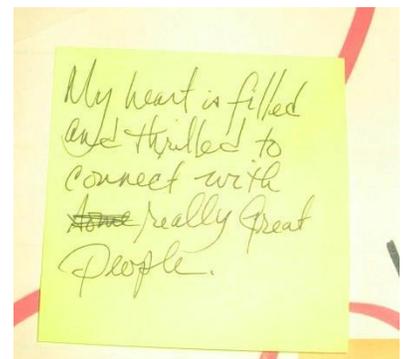
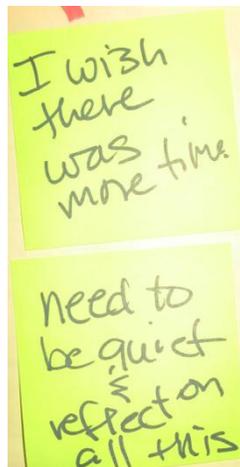
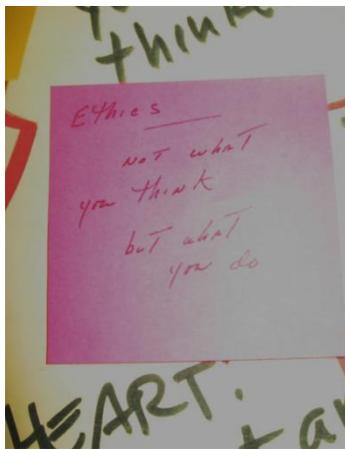


Matt Henderson, Executive Director of Organizers in the Land of Enchantment (OLÉ) shared a story about a group action to make the point that there is a lot of conflict in the work of social justice and that conflict can be a positive force, clarifying options and opening up dialogue.

To conclude the formal program, two participants offered reflective remarks. Marsha Garcia from ProgressNow New Mexico encouraged participants to continue to be attentive to ethics in their organizational practices and to make a commitment to share what was discussed.

Oriana Sandoval summarized the themes from the day, emphasizing the importance of living our values in our organizations before we promote them in our community or judge others; the importance and challenge of transparency; the necessity of inclusion; tensions between short and long-term objectives and incremental versus whole system changes; and the work necessary to codify principles and ethical practices.

Everyone expressed appreciation for the day's program and the opportunity to have candid conversations with allies and partners about the successes, challenges and lessons of their work. There was a lot of interest in creating safe spaces to continue talking about putting ethics into action.



## Next Steps



The momentum launched by Putting Ethics into Action continues:

- Contact information for participants has been circulated to enable networking and building new relationships. The C3 Table (a monthly meeting of leaders of not-for-profit organizations) will host an ongoing group focused on putting ethics into action.
- This report has been distributed to participants. In response to participant requests for assistance developing organizational codes of ethics, we have also distributed examples of statements of values and codes of ethics from other organizations along with suggestions for ways to proceed.
- We are exploring the development of written case studies on ethics in action as resource materials for internal education, in recognition of the value of written resource material about putting ethics into action. We will develop a case study template and encourage participants to use or adapt the template to document their own experiences. If this idea takes hold we will identify a web platform to host these materials.
- We are looking into organizing similar gatherings, focused on Putting Ethics into Action, in other regions of the US.

For more information, contact Nina Gregg, US Coordinator, Ethics and Responsibility Forum [nregg@att.net](mailto:nregg@att.net) (865) 977 7399

### Sponsoring organizations for New Mexico Putting Ethics into Action:

*Center for Civic Policy*

*Common Cause New Mexico*

*Ethics & Responsibility Network, supported by the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind*

*New Mexico Voices for Children*

*ProgressNow New Mexico*

*University of New Mexico*

Participating Organizations:

*Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice*

*America Votes*

*Center for Civic Policy*

*Center of Southwest Culture*

*Common Cause New Mexico*

*Communication Workers of America (CWA)*

*Comunidades en Acción y de Fé (Café)*

*El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos*

*Encuentro*

*Ethics & Responsibility Network*

*Interfaith Worker Justice*

*Native American Voters Alliance (NAVA)*

*New Mexico Voices for Children*

*Organizers in the Land of Enchantment (OLE)*

*ProgressNow New Mexico*

*Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC)*

*Committee of Interns and Residents/Service Employees International Union (CIR/SEIU)*

*SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP)*