

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND FAMILY ISSUES (COFI)



Illinois Solar for All

GRASSROOTS EDUCATION REPORT 2019





COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND FAMILY ISSUES (COFI)



IL SOLAR FOR ALL PARENT AMBASSADORS

WHO ARE WE?

Who is COFI?

Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), founded in 1995, is a Chicago-based grassroots force that builds the power and voice of low-income and working families at all levels of civic life. It is a center and a resource for Family Focused Organizing, leadership development, and community building focused on the well-being of children, youth, and families. Through our intensive and systematic leadership development and organizing process, parents develop skills, confidence, and the organized power to win improvements in schools, communities, and public policies. For more information, visit www.cofionline.org.



Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew –
Policy Action Council – Illinois
Padres Organizados para Ganar, Educar y Renovar –
Concilio de Acción de Políticas – Illinois

Who is POWER-PAC Illinois?

Parents Organized to Win Educate and Renew – Policy Action Council (POWER-PAC) Illinois is a cross-cultural, statewide membership organization of COFI-trained parents whose mission is to build the voice and power of low-income, immigrant and working families by uniting parents across race and community around issues of importance to children and families. For more information, visit www.cofionline.org/parent-campaigns/power-pac/

PARENT AMBASSADORS

THE PROJECT

6 Parent Ambassadors in **Chicago, IL** and **4 Parent Ambassadors** in **East St. Louis, IL** conducted street and door-to-door outreach in communities across their cities, educating residents about solar energy and the IL Solar for All program. Each team wrapped up their outreach by hosting a community forum open to interested residents to attend for more in-depth information.

BACKGROUND

The concept for our parent ambassador community outreach model arises from the knowledge that parents, through lived experience, are the foremost experts on identifying and acting upon their family and community needs. As community members themselves, parent ambassadors have the relationship capacity necessary for building bridges and shaping change within their own communities. This grassroots approach unites people and uplifts community members, as opposed to other models of outreach that involve external people entering into communities to invite change. Here, the invitation is born within.

PARENT LEADERSHIP AND BUILDING TEAMS

When developing a team of parent ambassadors to conduct community outreach, leadership development training is important to the process.

Before becoming parent ambassadors, every parent completes COFI's training.

Parent leaders believe in the power of their leadership and experience, and are passionate about advocating for their communities. We offer COFI's three-phase Family Focused Organizing model as a tried and true parent leadership development process.

Phase 1: Self, Family, & Team

Family Focused Organizing begins with the individual. Parents assess their needs, establish goals and begin to work toward achieving those goals. In the Self, Family & Team phase of the Family Focused Organizing model, parents attend an orientation session and six two-hour workshops.

The curriculum covers:

- Personal visioning
- Self-assessment and goal setting
- Building a web of support
- Overcoming obstacles and developing an action plan
- Family goal setting
- Team goal setting



TEAM BUILDING

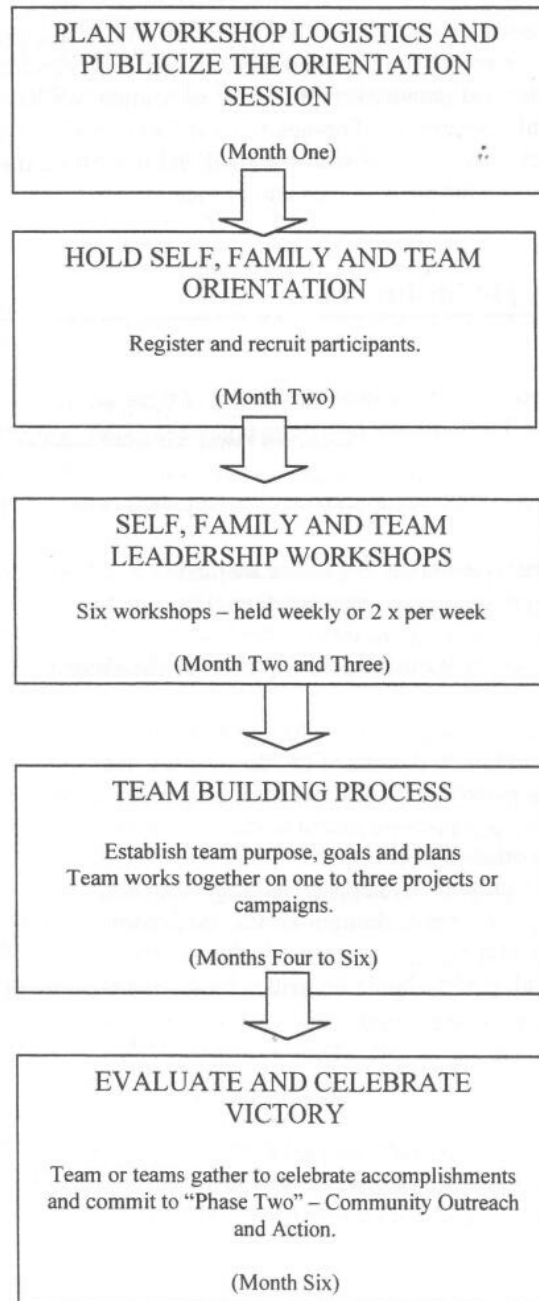
See diagram on the next page, which demonstrates COFI's tested process for developing a team; includes generalized timescales.

Coming together around a common goal is necessary in any situation where people wish to make change. After enabling parents to become leaders and set goals for themselves, COFI teaches leaders Team Building. The team building process can take between **10 weeks** and **several months**, and includes the following 9 elements:

- Defining team purpose
- Creating ground rules and team rituals
- Establishing a meeting format
- Planning action
- Implementing campaign or project plans
- Holding one another accountable
- Resolving conflict
- Evaluating the work
- Winning victories and celebrating accomplishments

BUILDING A PARENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Self, Family & Team/Team Building Phase One (Six Months)



Our IL Solar for All Ambassadors are all seasoned leaders who have been through our COFI Family Focused Organizing trainings and team building process and are now actively involved in our policy issue campaigns through POWER-PAC IL. Utilizing their team building skills, the parent ambassadors united around a common goal: outreaching to Environmental Justice Communities to spread awareness about solar energy and the IL Solar for All initiative.

WHY ILLINOIS SOLAR FOR ALL?

Local parent leaders join in civic action at the citywide level, and plug into the organizing efforts of POWER-PAC IL. Through this parent-led membership organization, experienced leaders from across Illinois come together and build power to make policy and systems changes that make everyday differences in the lives of low-income families. POWER-PAC IL parent leaders participate in core policy issue campaigns, working in specific areas to bring change to their communities. The **IL Solar for All Grassroots Education** opportunity aligns well with our **Stepping Out of Poverty (STOP) Campaign**. The primary focus of the **STOP** campaign is seeking economic justice for challenged communities, while advocating for reforms to predatory financial practices that disproportionately target low-income families.

The **IL Solar for All** project aligns with our **STOP** campaign work to advocate for utilities justice for all, while creating access to healthier utility opportunities for environmental justice communities. **Financial, environmental, and physical health are intricately linked.**

STEPPING OUT OF POVERTY (STOP) CAMPAIGN HISTORY

POWER-PAC IL began this campaign in 2009 after the Great Recession hit their families particularly hard. Leaders identified together that working to end the cycle of poverty was a priority for them and their communities. Since then, parents have partnered with advocacy organizations to win major legislative and administrative changes through their Stepping Out of Poverty Campaign.

The STOP campaign has worked to win legislation in IL for Universal Children's Savings Accounts, which beginning in 2021, will be opened for each child in Illinois upon their birth and to which families can contribute over the years. When the child turns 18, they can then use the account for educational purposes. POWER-PAC IL parents think education is critical in breaking the cycle of poverty.

Also, with partners, STOP parent leaders passed legislation on reforming the use of payroll cards, eliminating fees associated with the cards that nickel-and-dime families. They successfully helped to increase the minimum wage in Chicago and eliminated asset limits for families receiving TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) so that families can actually save money for their futures. And nationally, they are working to raise consciousness and advocate for policies that end the racial and gender wealth gaps, as members of the "Closing the Women's Wealth Gap" coalition.

In January 2018, POWER-PAC IL leaders released a powerful and compelling up-close look at debt and how debt keeps low-income families stuck, in the report **"Stopping the Debt Spiral."** The parent leaders interviewed 300 other parents across the state about their financial situation, the types of debt they have and the impact of that debt. More than half the families live on less than \$15,000 per year in family income and debt is a major factor in holding them back!

Since publication of this report, the STOP campaign leaders have been digging into work around debt, sitting at the table of the Fines and Fees Access Collaborative created by the Chicago City Clerk Anna Valencia's office to restructure the landscape of predatory fines and fees collection in the city. STOP leaders are also currently deeply involved in utilities advocacy around rising gas prices, EITC reform and Fair Tax IL, and work to stop unjust fines and fees collection impacting public housing residents around the state.



MATERIALS DESIGNED FOR OUTREACH



- ☒ THE EARTH.
- ☒ YOUR COMMUNITY.
- ☒ YOU.

Call **1-888-970-ISFA (4732)** to learn about important, cost-saving opportunities available to you and your community by going solar.



Illinois Solar for All

GREATER ACCESS | CLEANER ENERGY | A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

DOORHANGER

FLYER

SOLAR ENERGY.

Solar energy is an **efficient**, **affordable**, and **clean** source of energy that protects the environment and creates jobs. With available incentives and tax credits, solar can provide significant savings for property owners, renters, and communities in the form of **energy bill credits**. Solar energy also helps to protect against future energy cost increases.



COMMUNITY SAVINGS.



JOB TRAINING.



Training is available for individuals interested in growing a career in solar energy. Training programs offer electrical apprenticeship training, customer service and administrative training, solar installation training, job readiness training, and more. **Some training opportunities may provide a stipend.** Please check with the individual training provider for more details.

Interested individuals can find a job training provider at IllinoisSFA.com and contact the provider directly to sign up.



CLEAN ENERGY.



Using solar power instead of conventional forms of energy reduces the amount of carbon dioxide and other pollutants that are emitted into the atmosphere. Reducing carbon dioxide emissions means **less pollution** and **cleaner air and water**.



Illinois Solar for All

Call **1-888-970-ISFA (4732)** to learn about important, cost-saving opportunities available to you and your community for going solar.

RESULTS FROM OUTREACH

TOTAL # DOORS KNOCKED

2,606

TOTAL # STREET OUTREACH

1,369

TOTAL # INTERACTIONS

2,213



COMMUNITY FORUM

The solar ambassador teams hosted community forums in both Chicago, IL and East St. Louis, IL. These events offered opportunity for community members to learn more about IL Solar for All, connect with **approved vendors** directly, and hear from community organizations. **Chicago Jobs Council (CJC)** gave a presentation about FEJA and CEJA legislation, as well as providing information about job training opportunities through IL Solar for All. The **Citizens Utility Board (CUB)** gave a presentation on utilities resources and advocacy.



CHICAGO EVENT



ESTL EVENT

East St. Louis Event 20 attendees

Chicago Event 35 attendees

A total of 55 community members between East St. Louis and Chicago gathered to learn more about IL Solar for All opportunities. Event attendees were engaged with the presented materials and were eager to talk with approved vendors to learn more. We invited all IL Solar for All approved vendors to attend our forums to engage with community members. 3 vendors accepted the invitation and presented directly at the event.



CHICAGO AUDIENCE



CJC PRESENTATION



ESTL AUDIENCE

PARENT REFLECTIONS

After completing IL Solar for All outreach, each parent ambassador participated in a final conversation to share their leadership growth and the impact of being involved in the project. All parent leaders agreed on the importance of this project, and spoke about the positive experience of building a team, discovering new places, and welcoming communities to solar energy. There was general agreement that most individuals encountered during outreach had not heard about environmental justice communities before, and were newcomers to the idea of solar energy, or its availability to them. Due to this, all ambassadors agreed that continued outreach is necessary. Ambassador reflections are captured here:

PERSONAL IMPACT

"Participating in this project gave me the opportunity to learn how to reflect and look back and see how much I have accomplished. There were both challenges and growth around understanding my role and leadership."

"Traveling a long distance from my community, one I am comfortable in, to enter a community I do not know, shaped my leadership growth. I also showed leadership by being on time, showing up when asked, and being open to last minute changes."

"Around leadership, I learned when to step up and when to step back. I also spoke at a public event for the first time."

COMMUNITY IMPACT

"This is such an important issue for us to continue working on because of climate change, and the disparate impact it has on our communities. If funding is there, we *need* to continue."

"Grassroots education is *necessary* for reaching our communities. They *need* this information."

LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1

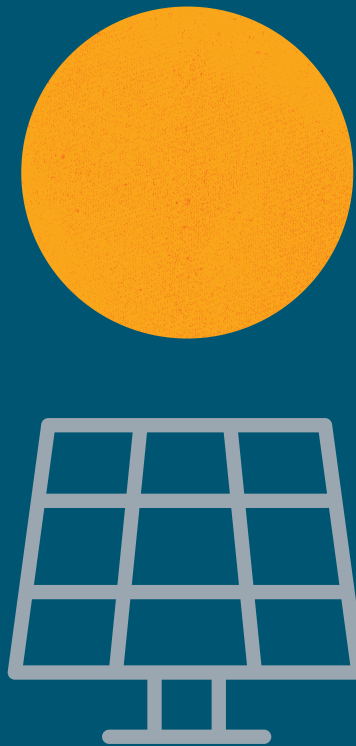
Upon wrapping up our outreach work, one primary reflection is our concern for the protection of communities in working with vendors. It was clear to us that IL Solar for All approved vendors are not all experienced in interacting with low-income communities, and may not have communities' best interest in mind when going forward with these projects. We believe that the consumer safety of community members should be a priority for the IL Solar for All program moving forward. Increased transparency is owed to interested individuals: although marketed as free installation with no upfront costs, information around what down-the-road costs look like to families for maintenance, repair, and use needs to be clearly communicated.

2

Community individuals are interested in the concept of community solar projects, but we found that no vendors within Chicago are currently set up or approved for this solar option. We want to be able to provide community members with clear options that are actually accessible to them.

3

We believe that continued community outreach and grassroots education is necessary to expand access to the IL Solar for All program. This information is valuable to improve the lives of environmental justice communities. We know that continued community outreach is the only way to bring communities to these opportunities.



From all of us at COFI and POWER-PAC Illinois, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to Elevate Energy and Illinois Solar for All for providing us with this impactful opportunity. We strongly believe in the mission of this work, and know that through continued efforts, environmental justice is an attainable reality for all.