



**Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy
Organizational Profile**



Prepared for



May 2005



Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy
Organizational Profile

Prepared for

Marguerite Casey Foundation

1300 Dexter Avenue North, Suite 115

Seattle, WA 98109

206.691.3134 – phone

206.286.2725 – fax

www.caseygrants.com

Prepared by

Kim Ammann Howard

BTW Consultants – *informing change*

2550 Ninth Street, Suite 113

Berkeley, CA 94710

510.665.6100 – phone

510.665.6129 – fax

www.informingchange.com

May 2005



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
About BTW Consultants	ii
The Birth & Success of an Organization	1
Purpose of This Profile	2
Looking In	3
Goals & Strategies	3
Leadership & Governance	5
Organizational Development	6
Organizational Culture.....	8
In-House Capacity	8
Finances	9
Leadership Development & Recruitment	10
Reflections & Learning.....	11
Partnering with Others	11
Looking Forward	15

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the LAANE staff, board members and collaborators whose gracious participation in our information gathering process made this report possible. We want to extend a special thanks to Vivian Rothstein who organized BTW Consultants' site visit.

In addition, we would like to acknowledge the Marguerite Casey Foundation for its generous support of this work.

ABOUT BTW CONSULTANTS

The mission of BTW Consultants is to inform change in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. We have been working with our clients, both locally and nationally, for seven years to increase organizational effectiveness and learning by providing the following services: planning, evaluation, client tracking and information system development and applied research. The work we do is guided by our three core values of integrity, intelligence and compassion.

THE BIRTH & SUCCESS OF AN ORGANIZATION

“One out of three Los Angeles workers have incomes so low that they cannot provide their families with basic necessities without government assistance.”

—The Other Los Angeles, 2000

One year after the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings, the head of the hotel labor union approached Madeline Janis-Aparicio to start something – a broad movement with a community and labor perspective. The number of working poor was on the rise, living wage jobs were not, and union membership was falling. Los Angeles appeared to have little momentum at the time to build a movement on its own. The economy was going “global” and multinational corporations were taking the place of smaller businesses, leaving “faceless bosses” in charge of industries that employ low-wage workers.

At the time Madeline was approached to “start something,” she had just left her position as executive director of the Central American Refugee Center. In that position, she led a successful campaign to legalize and regulate the activities of Latino immigrant sidewalk vendors, addressed civil rights abuses of Central American immigrants, and helped thousands of Central American immigrants obtain legal immigrant status. Madeline agreed to accept the new challenge. With a year of salary support from the union, she started the Tourism Industry Development Council which later became Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE).

Madeline recalls the start of the organization noting it was based vaguely on the idea of combining organizing, policy advocacy and research into a powerful triad. While LAANE has changed and evolved over its twelve-year history, Madeline explains, *“We have always been about the democratization of workers and connecting the issues that affect them ... homes, jobs, parks.”*

LAANE has become recognized as a national leader for its innovative work to improve the lives and communities of the working poor. Each year, LAANE adds to its list of accomplishments. Some examples of the most visible successes are:

- The passage of the Los Angeles (LA) living wage ordinance, one of the first of its kind in the country which since has become a national model,
- A Community Benefits program that resulted in a \$500 million agreement tied to the modernization of the Los Angeles airport (LAX), and
- The defeat of Wal-mart’s \$1.5 million ballot measure in the city of Inglewood that prevented superstore development without environmental impact analyses or public comment.

“LAANE is a leader in this work ... on the cutting edge ... I know I may be biased because I have worked with them, but no one has refuted that claim ... They have become quite respected and powerful ... quite a force to be reckoned with ... LAANE even gets respect from the opposition who oppose what they do.”

“LAANE is effective because of their political clout and their clout with the religious leaders in Los Angeles.”

LAANE's current campaigns and projects focus on accountable development in Inglewood and the Adams La Brea area of the city of Los Angeles, securing living wages and union protections for low-wage workers at the LAX airport, and collaboration with the Santa Monica's Allied for Responsible Tourism (SMART) to improve job wages, benefits, working conditions and protections for workers in the hospitality and tourism industries.

PURPOSE OF THIS PROFILE

The primary purpose of this document is to provide an organizational profile to share with fellow members of the Marguerite Casey Foundation (MCF) Lustrous Cluster-US (MCF Learning Cluster) for peer learning and discussion of common organizational themes. It also will provide MCF with a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges that LAANE faces in pursuit of its organizational objectives. Finally, we hope that LAANE finds the profile useful in its own process of learning and reflection.

The profile focuses on some of the most salient and critical aspects of LAANE related to its history, evolution, successes, challenges and opportunities. We discuss the following topics:

- Goals and Strategies
- Leadership and Governance
- Organizational Development
- Organizational Culture
- In-House Capacity
- Finances
- Leadership Development and Recruitment
- Reflection and Learning
- Partnering with Others

We base the content of this profile on interviews, participant observations and a review of organizational materials. Kim Ammann Howard of BTW Consultants spent two days on-site at LAANE where she attended both a staff meeting and a community meeting. During her visit, as well as in subsequent phone calls, Howard conducted interviews with members of the LAANE staff, board members and other individuals who collaborate with LAANE.

Goals & Strategies

LAANE's vision is to be a leader of a broad-based progressive movement in Los Angeles that can serve as an example for both California and the nation. LAANE's ambition is to create a society where the following are in place:

- A real democracy that ensures workers have power over their own lives and a voice in the workplace.
- All working people have living wages, healthcare and dignity on the job.
- People live in healthy communities where there are good jobs, safe and decent housing, good schools, clean air and water and other basic necessities.
- An effective government that provides for the common good and holds corporations responsible to workers and communities.

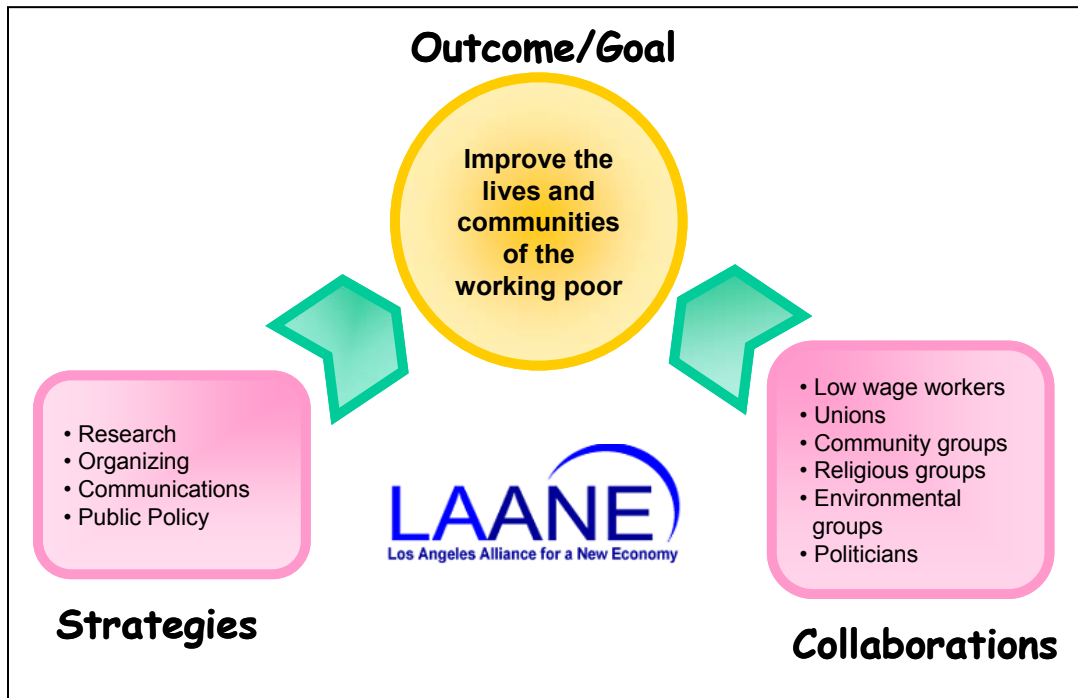
To achieve this vision, LAANE's primary goal is to build a social movement for economic justice. In support of this goal, LAANE focuses on the following:

- Empowering workers to improve standards and build power in a targeted low-wage industry or region;
- Building strong community-labor alliances around a common agenda that strengthens both the labor movement and the community; and
- Reframing the public debate about the economy, jobs and the labor movement.

"They know the dynamic between community organizing and political leverage ... Many organizations know how to do one or the other but LAANE can do both."

As shown in Exhibit A below, LAANE utilizes a combination of research, organizing, public policy and communications to achieve its objectives. The exact strategy or combination of strategies varies depending on the focus of a specific project or campaign as well as the political context.

EXHIBIT A
Strategies for Change



There are always more opportunities for action than capacity to act and so LAANE endeavors to be strategic in selecting what issue to work on and when. These “selection” criteria have become more formalized over time and involve answering the following questions:

- Will the campaign help organize workers in targeted, low-wage industries?
- Does LAANE have a strong and effective organizing partner in this campaign?
- Does the campaign have a plan to win?
- How strong an opposition does LAANE expect?
- If the campaign is focused in one geographic area, does working in this area fit with LAANE’s overall organizing program?
- Does LAANE have the needed resources?
- Does the campaign utilize LAANE’s strengths in public policy, community organizing, communications and political advocacy?

Leadership & Governance

The staff and board members describe the executive director, Madeline, as “an intelligent visionary who motivates others and has lots of energy.” Although she appears confident and states her thoughts directly, Madeline embodies a spirit of inclusiveness, welcoming the comments and opinions of others.

In her leadership role, Madeline receives support internally from the management team which meets twice monthly and is comprised of senior staff. Externally, she is supported by the board of directors. The board includes a little over a dozen diverse individuals: delegates from citizen and community-based groups, unions, universities, and religious organizations as well as low-wage workers who are themselves employed in the industries where LAANE concentrates its efforts. One board member reflects on the composition of the LAANE board: *“It is the first board that I know of where there is authentic worker participation. They not only have something to say but what they say makes us sit up and take notice.”* Board members are recruited to serve as a result of their history of participation in LAANE projects and their demonstrated leadership ability.

Board members are expected not only to attend board meetings, but to have some day-to-day involvement in issues related to low-wage workers. For example, some board members are low-wage workers themselves, some head unions which represent workers in low-wage industries and others play active roles in campaigns to improve conditions for low-wage workers. Board members are invited to attend staff retreats or participate in ad hoc committees. Many board members meet this expectation for extra participation beyond board meeting attendance; for others it represents an ongoing challenge due to their other substantial commitments.

Both staff and board members report that board meetings have become more substantive over time and now involve other LAANE staff in addition to Madeline. Staff express appreciation to the board for its friendly (but objective) feedback as well as the board’s engagement with the work and its collective experience. Board members appreciate the preparedness and professionalism of the staff.

“I am constantly amazed about how staff are so on top of things ... Before I worried that we were giving them the green light too much but now over time I see that they [the other board members] are agreeing, and if they don’t, they speak up.”

“It is clear to me that LAANE has become more professionalized and concretely focused ... With time, their process gets better and better. The staff is very highly motivated and continuously developing.”

Organizational Development

The organization has developed substantially in size and structure over the past 12 years. The staff has grown from one employee (the executive director) to about two dozen. The paid staff are assisted at any given time by one or more interns. Current staff tenure ranges from less than one year to more than eight; senior staff tend to have been with the organization the longest.

The organizational structure of LAANE also continues to evolve. Just five years ago Madeline supervised all staff. Now the work is organized around teams with various people serving as “leads” or supervisors.

LAANE’s most recent changes in structure came out of a four-month planning process that reviewed and set priorities for LAANE’s long-range work. The planning process involved:

- Review and consensus building on LAANE’s mission and goals;
- Input from key allies on LAANE’s work and program priorities for the upcoming one to two years;
- Identification of the external opportunities and threats anticipated to affect LAANE’s work during the same time period; and
- An assessment of organizational culture by an outside consultant.

The discussions that led to a proposal for some organizational changes took place at a retreat that included board members and staff. While certain aspects of LAANE’s organizational structure remain unchanged (e.g., fundraising department), other aspects have been formalized and/or team members added or switched (e.g., organizing department).

LAANE’s current organizational structure now includes functional departments such as research, communication and publications, operations, organizing and fundraising. Program teams focus on specific industries or content areas such as hospitality and tourism, building and airlines services and community benefits. Two additional program teams serve as coordinating groups, one for the cross-program work at LAX airport and the second for new community benefits work. The final outcomes of the planning process were formally presented at a recent staff meeting described below.

“The recent organizational changes will result in LAANE being more systematic ... It will keep us from reinventing the wheel by sharing contacts, experiences and skills across projects.”

SNAPSHOT #1 Focusing Our Work

Staff begin to gather for their regularly scheduled meeting. It is a little after noon and the team assembles in the largest room of LAANE's 12th floor offices located in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. Folding tables form the shape of the letter U. Chairs surround the outer edges of the tables, their backs facing the walls. Some staff are finishing their lunches while others are reading documents. Others still are chatting in small groups. All are waiting for the meeting to begin. Late arrivals are motioned toward empty seats. Dressed casually, the team is ethnically diverse and of varied ages, though most seem to be on the younger side. Women comprise about two-thirds of the staff.

The meeting begins when a birthday cake is presented to celebrate the recent birthdays of three staff members. After singing and distributing cake, the deputy director rises and walks to one side of the room. Pointing to large sheets of paper on the wall, she quickly reviews the steps of LAANE's long-range planning process and describes the contents of the chart: a list of current and proposed work areas of LAANE organized by industry type.

Next Madeline, the executive director, starts to review a handout that is simultaneously being distributed to those in attendance. As she describes the proposed organization of LAANE's work, she notes that for some staff their work will remain the same, while for others it will change and sometimes involve a promotion in role and responsibilities. Madeline lists the different factors that influenced the proposed decisions: LAANE's goals, priorities and capacity; the desire among some staff for more responsibility; the decision to have "fuller" program teams that include different types of expertise and people who work well together.

People don't seem surprised by what Madeline is sharing. As it turns out, although staff may not have been aware beforehand of all of the proposed changes, they were alerted to the changes that would affect them directly. When she completes her review, Madeline solicits questions and comments. A handful of staff comment about the value of the plan and the opportunities that it makes evident:

- "It reinforces where we are focused and where we could be more focused."
- "There is a strong link between the key focuses, and they interrelate well."
- "It shows how we are working and can work more strategically with LAANE's partners."
- "It provides an opportunity for us to weigh in regarding violations of the living wage [that are linked to a proposed Concession Master Plan at the LAX airport]."

There are some requests for clarification about specific responsibilities and team assignments, and when one exchange becomes tense, Madeline reminds everyone, "*LAANE is committed to using people's skills to benefit the organization and movement.*"

In the middle of the meeting, a young woman walks in and the meeting abruptly stops. A staff member introduces the new arrival and explains that she is one of the new interns. She is helped to find a seat. Later in the discussion, someone asks about how the intern's time will be spent at LAANE.

Towards the end of the full-group discussion, the deputy director asks each program team to convene and spend some time discussing and developing a workplan to address goals, organizational considerations, constituents, allies, opponents, targets and tactics. Prior to dividing into teams, a younger staff member provides an example of a completed workplan based on LAANE's work in Inglewood. When he is done, project teams disperse to different locations within the office.

As the teams meet one can hear laughing and joking as well as more serious discussion of the issues and authentic exchanges of opinion. It is clear that individuals welcome and respect one another's ideas even as they disagree. In some instances consensus emerges about which direction to take; in others, it is less clear. Some teams appear to be in the very early stages of their thinking, while others have clearly spent time planning beforehand. Teams are engaged for varying amounts of time. As team discussions end, some participants quickly leave, anxious to return to their work, while others remain seated and casually chat before rising to go.

Organizational Culture

The organizational culture at LAANE seems casual and informal on one hand and more formal and structured on the other. Staff talk about LAANE's democratic process and teamwork and at the same time describe a degree of individual independence. During the recent long-term planning processes, staff reiterated the strength of the team structure but also identified the need for more coordination and formal information-sharing among teams. As one person reflected, *"It will decrease the tendency for us to be silos by projects and for some staff to have greater connections to projects than to LAANE."*

When asked to choose words that describe LAANE's culture, staff, board and community collaborators mention many different but related descriptors. Most frequently they talk about *"commitment, passion, hard work and dedication."* *"Staff expertise, intelligence and innovation"* were also mentioned as well as the way staff approach their work – *"resourceful, strategic, and collaborative."* Some staff talk about the fast pace of the organization while others describe a relaxed environment. A number of staff talked about the "women" or "family friendly" work environment. Reflecting on the differences among staff, one person said *"We [the staff] come from different worlds but respect each other."*

In-House Capacity

LAANE's in-house research and communication capacity remains a particular strength. One staff member notes, *"All the people we need are in-house and that is a benefit."* The research team develops legislative proposals and critical analyses of government and corporate policies that affect low-income workers and communities. Their work guides LAANE's organizing and advocacy projects and influences the production of campaign and educational materials. LAANE has produced numerous reports, some in collaboration with researchers from leading universities, on poverty, economic development and other issues affecting the working poor. A major study examining the impact of Los Angeles's living wage law on workers and employers is currently underway as part of a collaboration with UCLA researchers.

"Everything we do has a communication component to it ... or it should ... research, organizing, fundraising, communication with donors ... [Now] we look more comprehensively about what communication means and build it into the structure. We are more aware of communication and work to make it part of everything we do."

LAANE defines communication broadly – from media to fundraising. Before the communication director arrived in 1999, Madeline addressed most communication issues herself in addition to her many other responsibilities. Now a communication team assists staff to integrate communications in the many different aspects of their work.

Communication activities involve translation of research into accessible products, creation of newsletters, website development and communication for fundraisers and campaigns. Periodic communication trainings prepare individuals, both internally and externally, to become spokespeople.

LAANE is in the process of developing a concept paper to further enhance its communication capacity. Phase I focuses on an expansion of internal communications: a more effective photo archive, an entertainment industry advisory group for their communication expertise, video documentation of LAANE campaigns, and more products as an outgrowth of research (e.g., op eds and policy briefs). Phase II focuses on the development of an ongoing training program to enhance communication skills for a broad range of individuals who work in the movement.

Finances

For the past few years, LAANE's annual budget has remained fairly stable at approximately \$1.7 million. In 1997, the budget was half a million dollars. Approximately \$1.2 million comes from two dozen foundation grants that range from \$10,000 to \$200,000. About \$300,000 is raised through the following annual fundraisers:

- The "City of Justice" Awards dinner that honors community and political leaders with key roles in the economic justice movement and attracts 400 attendees;
- The "Women for a New LA" luncheon that involves about 100 women who are committed to improving the lives of working families to support LAANE and each other;
- A jazz event at the Jazz Bakery, which was initiated by LAANE's project Santa Monica's Allied for Responsible Tourism (SMART) and raises about \$20,000 annually, and
- House parties that provide an informal setting to discuss LAANE's work and raise money.

LAANE hired its first development director a few years ago. She focuses on the private fundraising while the executive director and director of finance concentrate on obtaining funds from philanthropic foundations. Other staff provide assistance in various aspects of the fundraising (e.g., communications) including a seven-month, half time position to plan for the annual awards dinner. Most recently, LAANE formed an honorary board to assist with fundraising. Members meet four to five times a year and include prominent academics, philanthropists and activists.

Over time the fundraising events result in more funds and attendees. Within LAANE, the development director explains how: *"Each [staff] person is the face of LAANE and everyone has a role to play in fundraising."* Cultivation of this belief occurs on an ongoing basis, and staff are encouraged to identify new supporters. When thinking about new supporters, staff mention reaching out to the entertainment industry and to people in the mainstream who typically do not become actively involved in these issues but may still be supportive of LAANE's work.

"Fundraising is more than just getting people to give money. We want to raise awareness about the work as much as raise the money."

Leadership Development & Recruitment

The development of leaders at LAANE occurs both informally and formally and at the individual and group level. Most frequently staff refer to “hands-on work experience” as well as peer learning. When a staff member arrives at LAANE he or she participates in a three-month orientation and meets weekly with a supervisor. As part of this relationship, staff members develop individual work plans that include specific goals. Annually, staff participate in a 360-degree review process.¹

Periodically LAANE sponsors staff gatherings that are designed to support leadership and skill development. These sessions provide time for in-depth discussion of strategies, skills and content areas related to organizing and research. Similarly, more experienced staff provide other internal trainings on organizing and communication. Portions of staff meetings are utilized for occasional outside speakers; during the recent long-term planning process, staff used time during their staff meetings to discuss pre-assigned readings.

More formal professional development opportunities seem less frequent, partially due to lack of funds, although flexible schedules allow staff to take advantage of the training opportunities that do arise. Certain staff participate in external trainings such as those offered by SPIN, a San Francisco-based group that trains progressive organizations in media, as well as those offered by one of LAANE’s funders, the Liberty Hill Foundation.

Some staff mentioned their desire for additional development and training opportunities, both internal and external to the organization. Some desire more regular and structured training that focuses on organizing, research, communication and advocacy.

LAANE typically recruits new staff through its relationships with other organizations, its community organizing efforts and word of mouth. LAANE makes a special effort to recruit ethnically diverse staff. According to LAANE leadership, it is difficult to hire community organizers in part because of the competition with unions that offer higher wages. Depending on the needs of a specific campaign, less experienced or “green” candidates may be selected. Hiring less experienced staff puts some stress on the organization since these staff require more training and support. But LAANE hopes that this investment will pay off in that those individuals will end up having a longer tenure with and commitment to LAANE.

In all of its hiring, LAANE tries to attract and retain staff through a creative benefits package that goes beyond salary: flexible and manageable work schedules, family friendly policies and high levels of autonomy and responsibility (e.g., many individuals run their own campaigns).

“We need 22 leaders or we can’t do it. There is an expectation that everyone is a leader, committed and owning the work, not waiting to take risks, taking the initiative, raising issues [as needed].”

¹ A 360-degree employee performance review process solicits feedback from multiple sources: the employee’s manager, peers, direct reports, and sometimes customers and outside publics if appropriate.

Reflection & Learning

“Evaluation is embedded in our organization and in each of our teams. We link assessment and planning. We plan a campaign [or project] with specific goals and objectives and put it all on paper – large butcher block paper so everyone can see. We continuously assess progress and when we hit an obstacle, and when we win or lose, we’re looking for explanations.”

LAANE collects and uses many types of information for learning and reflection throughout its work – for planning, implementation and evaluation – some of which have been mentioned in other sections of the report: monitoring community developments, polling, surveys, policy analyses, campaign and fundraising databases, conversations with collaborators and staff performance reviews. Staff reflect on this information in the management team meetings as well as staff and project team meetings. Annual staff and board retreats provide more extensive time for group reflection and involve several months of preparation.

As part of LAANE’s recent long-term planning process, certain information-gathering practices occurred more systematically and intensively (e.g., obtaining input from allies). One information-gathering priority that resurfaced during this process was the need to collect information in a streamlined manner so it can be shared and utilized more easily across the agency (e.g., all staff utilize the same software and a server to store and share contact information from different campaigns and fundraising efforts). This type of system would also help to ensure that *“critical information doesn’t leave when a staff person does.”*

PARTNERING WITH OTHERS

Strategic partnerships are central to LAANE’s organizing work. While the specific collaborations vary from campaign to campaign, common partners include community-based organizations, unions, religious leaders and academics and elected officials. At times, partners include groups that typically oppose one another. For example, in the campaign to pass a community benefits agreement at the LAX airport, environmental groups and labor groups became partners. One person acknowledges that partners from one campaign may find themselves in opposition to LAANE’s work in future campaigns: *“They may not agree with us but we continue to build relationships with them and even if we are not on the same side, at least we will not be surprised.”*

“Alone we can’t do anything ... Without us the union and others wouldn’t get nearly as far.”

The faith community plays an important part in LAANE’s work. The group Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) remains a valued partner which staff sometimes reference as a “sister organization.” CLUE is an interfaith association of over 400 religious leaders from around Los Angeles County who come together to respond to the crisis of the working poor. LAANE has collaborated with CLUE on a number of campaigns, with the most recent being the defeat of the Wal-mart ballot initiative in Inglewood. CLUE members were instrumental in obtaining support, especially from African American religious leaders. LAANE’s executive director and deputy director serve on the CLUE board and one of the CLUE board members serves on the LAANE board as well.

Additional examples of LAANE's approach to partnership include:

- LAANE collaborated with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) to mount an extensive worker relief effort after mass layoffs of tourism workers following the September 11 terrorist attacks. The operation provided thousands of workers with food and access to government services, and paved the way for additional private and public relief programs.
- Working with Santa Monicans Allied for Responsible Tourism (SMART) and HERE, LAANE helped to pass the nation's first recall-rights law in Santa Monica, giving laid-off workers the right to return to their jobs as employers rehire.
- LAANE and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) led a campaign to win passage of Los Angeles County's living wage law.
- LAANE worked with the HERE 814, SEIU 1877 and CLUE to win a series of victories at LAX airport, including union contracts with W.H. Smith, Argenbright and Globe Security, as well as the prevention of the termination of several hundred security workers.

LAANE staff play different roles in their partnerships depending on the nature of the campaign or project. Sometimes LAANE assumes a more visible role while other times LAANE is a behind-the-scenes partner. Staff report that over time LAANE has become better at community organizing, building up local community groups, letting the community be more visible, and including allies more frequently in decision making. Ongoing challenges of collaboration include developing a shared agenda that respects everyone's demands, building and maintaining community/labor coalitions and identifying and executing "exit strategies" when it seems appropriate to cease involvement in a specific campaign or project.

One of LAANE's current organizing efforts involves residents and business owners in the Adams La Brea area of Los Angeles. LAANE wants to ensure that redevelopment and tax-payer subsidized economic development projects benefit the workers and community members. LAANE first became involved in these efforts in 2001 when their monitoring identified a proposed development in Adams La Brea as a "perfect example of a bad project." LAANE worked with residents to restart a new process to consider redevelopment with a community voice. This resulted in the establishment of an eight-member community panel empowered to choose the "winning" development project. A recent community meeting to discuss the proposed redevelopment plans, who should get the contract, and relocation rights for residents and businesses provides a glimpse into the process.

SNAPSHOT #2
“Until No One Is Worse Off”

The sun began to set as neighborhood residents entered the gymnasium of St. Agatha’s Catholic Church at the corner of Adams and La Brea. By the time the meeting starts seventy people including homeowners, tenants, and business owners sit on one side of the room. Circular rows of chairs face a wall with a chart that compares the key points of interest from the recently submitted development proposals. In another section of the room, volunteers prepare donated food, drinks, baked goods and tacos. Most of those in attendance are Latinos and African Americans. Some arrive more dressed up than others, suggesting they came straight from work.

Ages vary from young to old; a few children play in one part of the gym while the adults listen. Residents talk about living in the neighborhood an average of 10 years, some for thirty years or more. Not all attendees will be affected by the development but are there to show support for those who will. The attendees also include two volunteer relocation specialists who will be hired by the chosen developer, two LAANE staff, and a lawyer from the Public Counsel Law Center, an agency that provides volunteer lawyers to support community-based organizations and businesses to strengthen low-income and underserved LA neighborhoods. Many participants greet each other knowingly.

During the first part of the meeting, one relocation specialist compares the main aspects of each proposal. The group unanimously chooses the development plan proposed by the Synder Company, the plan that seems most favorable in terms of affordable housing and other public benefits. Next, to learn more about unique rights and available help, the residents break into three groups based on homeowner, renter or business owner status.

In the homeowners group, discussions take place in English and Spanish. The relocation specialist talks briefly, then pauses as a young Latino man translates her comments into Spanish. Sometime language differences result in momentary pauses as someone contemplates the most appropriate word to use. Once in a while, in response to a statement from the relocation specialist, a murmur of comments emerges from the audience. Someone can be seen elbowing the person next to him, encouraging him to ask a question or solicit advice. One woman asks “How will they decide how much my house is worth?” An older gentleman follows, “Should I do any repairs before they come?” In response to learning about a property tax benefit if they purchase another house, a young man asks whether this benefit applies if he moves out of state. By the meeting’s end, residents seem to appreciate the information and advice. Some appear relieved. However, subsequent discussions in smaller groups make it clear that concerns remain about whether homeowners will obtain the fair market value for their homes.

Later one of the LAANE staff reflects on the resistance among some homeowners to support any type of development. When it was clear that development would proceed she encouraged them : “Rather than just say ‘no’ and have no part in what happens, let’s come up with a high bar list of demands for this project ... even if they don’t agree, they will know we are not leaving or giving up easily.”

The second time through this process, the community has benefited from being involved in the decision-making process. “I think that is a good feeling for them. It makes it worthwhile. People have gone through good learning. Elected officials have to ask them [for their input] ... For a lot of people it is the first time that they have been listened to by an elected official. They [the elected officials] know their name, shake their hand ...”

The staff member reflects on LAANE’s relationship with the community and how throughout the process “we have made the commitment to be there until no one is there ... From the start, the fundamental demand is that no one [as a result of the development] is worse off.”

As LAANE successes mount, the number of requests for assistance from economic justice groups within California and more broadly across the United States is on the rise. In response, LAANE sometimes makes difficult decisions about its involvement.

To promote accountable development on a statewide level, three years ago LAANE joined three other California-based groups with similar missions (East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy in Oakland, Center on Policy Initiatives in San Diego, and Working Partnerships USA in San Jose) to form a new organization, the California Partnership for Working Families (CPWF). The goal of CPWF is to ensure that economic development benefits the communities where it takes place (e.g., good jobs, affordable housing and neighborhood services). CPWF engages in two types of campaigns:

- Efforts to win community benefits at specific development projects in each of the metropolitan areas where the founding groups reside; and
- Campaigns to pass broad policies that change the way development takes place in entire municipalities rather than individual development projects on a case-by-case basis.

At the national level, LAANE and CPWF have developed a technical assistance program and training on the passage and implementation of living wage ordinances and other worker protection legislation, on community benefits agreements and on accountable development programs; they also provide advice on building alliances between community, labor and religious groups. One current CPWF national project focuses on supporting community benefits work in eight cities. CPWF brings together key organizers from each city for training, technical assistance and peer learning, and offers a website as an avenue for broader and ongoing communication. A number of staff, including the executive director, participate in this national work.

“LAANE has been there for us for research, organizing, communication ... they have supported us on many levels ... They help us think things through and share their experiences with us and other communities. They help us to do stuff in a sophisticated way. They are very professional, so committed and so smart.”

“LAANE did an effective job of educating us ... All of us are very busy ... but once we heard what they had to say, how could we turn our backs?”

LOOKING FORWARD

LAANE's strong relationships and strategic use of organizing, research, communication and advocacy continue to result in successes that improve the lives and the communities of the working poor. LAANE is a model for other communities and in a position to share its knowledge throughout the nation. As LAANE continues to mature and receive national attention, it may continue to experience the tension of choosing the work – both in terms of geography and content. The context in which LAANE works (e.g., lack of political support, increasing power of multinational corporations, rising costs of living, devaluing of the U.S. dollar, etc.) will remain a challenge. As one LAANE collaborator states: *“Supporting the working poor is not glamorous or sexy, especially in these times. You are up against national influences that oppose what you do.”*

When staff reflect on their vision of LAANE in 2010, they talk about a credible mainstream research organization and think tank that is quoted and respected in the national media. They imagine multiple sites across the country, possible regional and national offices. Some envision a slightly larger staff, about 30 to 40 people, that would include additional organizers and more ethnically diverse senior leadership. Most directors talk about expanded capacity such as more sophisticated monitoring of the issues, a training institute for young organizers, an improved intern program, estate planning as a form of giving and higher utilization of the LAANE website for information and training outside of the organization.

Staff also think about the impact that they hope to see as a result of their work and that of their partners:

- A cadre of community leaders in four to five areas of LA who are ready to spring into action when needed;
- Strong alliances between labor and community, doubling of union allies, movements of thousands of people, our allies becoming elected officials;
- More accessible government programs with outreach in multiple languages;
- Economic development policies applied broadly;
- A reframing of the debate about the economy that is oriented towards good jobs, better lives, community benefits;
- A reduction in poverty in the Los Angeles region; and
- Increased capacity of other similar organizations in Los Angeles and the U.S.

“It is about understanding the important role of government and how to leverage money and authority ... to hold them to their own standards and rules. It is about keeping focus and strengthening tools. Putting peoples' feet to the fire ... It is about incremental wins ... using good information ... inside and outside strategies. We are shooting ourselves in the foot if we criticize government and then we are afraid to take them on ... We need to change the framing of the debate about the economy.”