

ACORN[®]

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS FOR REFORM NOW



about ACORN®

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now—or ACORN—is the nation’s largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 150,000 member families organized into neighborhood chapters in more than 60 cities across the country. Since 1970 ACORN has been taking action and winning victories on issues of concern to our members. Our priorities include better housing for first time homebuyers and tenants, living wages for low-wage workers, more investment in our communities from banks and governments, and better public schools. We achieve these goals by building community organizations that have the power to win changes – through direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation.

ACORN Grows!

In 2003, ACORN opened operations in 20 new cities, including 5 state capitals!

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|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Little Rock (AR) ✪ | Bridgeport (CT) | Baltimore (MD) | Cleveland (OH) |
| Pine Bluff (AR) | Hartford (CT) ✪ | Prince George’s County (MD) | Columbus (OH) ✪ |
| Glendale (AZ) | Waterbury (CT) | Boston (MA) ✪ | Toledo (OH) |
| Mesa (AZ) | Wilmington (DE) | Brockton (MA) | Portland (OR) |
| Phoenix (AZ) ✪ | Washington (DC) | Springfield (MA) | Allentown-Bethlehem (PA) |
| Tucson (AZ) | Ft. Lauderdale (FL) | Detroit (MI) | Harrisburg (PA) ✪ |
| Chula Vista (CA) | Miami (FL) | Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) ✪ | Philadelphia (PA) |
| Contra Costa County (CA) | Orlando (FL) | Kansas City (MO) | Pittsburgh (PA) |
| Fresno (CA) | St. Petersburg (FL) | St. Louis (MO) | Providence (RI) ✪ |
| Los Angeles (CA) | Tampa (FL) | Jersey City (NJ) | Arlington (TX) |
| Oakland (CA) | Atlanta (GA) ✪ | Newark (NJ) | Dallas (TX) |
| Sacramento (CA) ✪ | Honolulu (HI) ✪ | Paterson (NJ) | Ft. Worth (TX) |
| San Bernadino (CA) | Chicago (IL) | Albuquerque (NM) | Houston (TX) |
| San Diego (CA) | Springfield (IL) ✪ | Buffalo (NY) | San Antonio (TX) |
| San Francisco (CA) | Indianapolis (IN) | Hempstead (NY) | Seattle (WA) |
| San Jose (CA) | Baton Rouge (LA) ✪ | New York City (NY) | |
| Santa Ana (CA) | Lake Charles (LA) | Yonkers (NY) | |
| Denver (CO) | New Orleans (LA) | Cincinnati (OH) | |

✪ State capital
New cities in bold type



Dear Friends,

For ACORN, 2003 was a year of expansion. We have expanded geographically by opening organizing operations in 20 new cities. We have expanded our base in low and moderate income communities and reached out to growing Latino and immigrant populations. And we have expanded our influence through successful local, state and national campaigns that have captured attention on the national level and won changes in the lives of hundreds of thousands of low and moderate income families. Throughout this period of growth, however, ACORN has continued to maintain our focus on building grassroots community leadership and running member-led campaigns to win real changes for low-income families.

2003 was a difficult year for many low and moderate income families, with high unemployment rates, a social safety net stripped of its resources, state and city fiscal crises threatening basic services in our communities, and sons and daughters called to serve in a war that many questioned. Nevertheless, ACORN members persevered in their fight for justice—raising wages for tens of thousands of workers, winning relief for thousands more predatory lending victims faced with losing their homes, improving education for children in their communities, and organizing to make their neighborhoods and cities better places for families to live.

Looking back over the year, I am inspired by the effort and dedication of ACORN's thousands of grassroots leaders who have worked tirelessly across the country to make our campaigns, large and small, a success. Over the year, I have traveled to dozens of ACORN cities and worked with hundreds of ACORN members on these campaigns, and have witnessed firsthand their commitment to winning a voice for low and moderate income people in this country.

As we continue our work in 2004, it is important to keep in mind the accomplishments we have made in 2003 and the battles we will continue to wage in the coming year. 2004 promises to be a year of change throughout the nation, and ACORN will be there to meet the challenge.

Maude Hurd,
ACORN National President

PREDATORY LENDING

Since 1999 ACORN has been engaging community members, policymakers, and lenders in a nationwide struggle against predatory lending. Predatory lending—which disproportionately impacts low-income communities and communities of color, and can leave victims in extreme financial hardship—is at root an issue of social and economic justice. Over the last four years, ACORN has mobilized to play a leading role in not only exposing and curbing the predatory practices of subprime lenders, but also increasing community awareness about and arming community members against predatory lending.

ACORN and Household Reach Settlement Agreement



Taking on Wells Fargo



In 2003, our anti-predatory lending work focused on the final stages of our campaign against Household International, taking on the predatory practices of Wells Fargo, pushing anti-predatory lending laws through three state legislatures, fighting rollbacks in protection for borrowers nationally, organizing against local predatory financial scams, and conducting continuing research on predatory lending issues.

Following a three-year campaign to reform the lending practices of Household Finance, one of the largest subprime lenders in the country, on November 25, 2003, ACORN and Household (now owned by HSBC Holdings) announced a proposed settlement of a national class-action lawsuit that ACORN brought against the company in 2002. The centerpiece of the settlement is a \$72 million Foreclosure Avoidance Program (FAP) which will provide relief to Household borrowers who are behind on their payments and at risk of losing their homes. This settlement comes on the heels of an earlier \$484 million settlement between Household and attorneys general and bank regulators from all 50 states precipitated by ACORN's efforts to help hundreds of victims file formal complaints against the company.

In early 2003, ACORN kicked off a campaign against Wells Fargo's predatory lending practices. In May, ACORN released a report on the company, "*Stop the Stage Coach! An Overview of Wells Fargo's Predatory Lending*," and held protests at local Wells branches in dozens of cities. ACORN members in over 25 cities kept up the pressure throughout the year with local and regional protests, as well as a "shark hunter caravan" that traveled to six major California cities in November to warn people about Wells' predatory lending. As part of this effort, ACORN has talked to hundreds of Wells Fargo borrowers and compiled detailed analyses of the loans made to nearly 100 borrowers around the country. On the regulatory front, ACORN challenged Wells' purchase of a regional bank in Washington and Oregon, getting the Federal Reserve to delay the merger while pressing Wells Fargo to respond to the abusive practices outlined in our

Passing Anti-Predatory Lending Laws

comments—only the second time the Federal Reserve has ever held up a bank purchase because of predatory lending complaints. ACORN also met with senior officials at the Office of the Comptroller of Currency (OCC) and submitted comments asking the OCC to reject or attach conditions to Wells Fargo’s application to consolidate its banking charters. To back up our allegations against the company, ACORN helped scores of borrowers around the country submit formal complaints against the company to state attorneys general and bank regulators. ACORN also met with senior staff at the Federal Trade Commission and with FTC commissioners to urge them to investigate Wells’ practices. As a result of this ongoing pressure, Wells has already made some notable changes in its lending practices—including reducing the cap on points and fees on loans from 10% to 4%, a change which will save borrowers tens of millions of dollars.

In 2003 ACORN played a key role in passing state-wide anti-predatory lending laws, and upholding city-wide anti-predatory lending ordinances.

■ **New Mexico** ACORN led a successful effort to push through a state anti-predatory lending law that was signed in April 2003. The law’s protections are comparable to the country’s strongest state anti-predatory lending laws. Allies in the campaign included AARP, United South Broadway, Project Change, and the Center for Responsible Lending.

■ **New Jersey** ACORN helped pass another of the country’s strongest anti-predatory lending state laws in March 2003 and continued to work with allies after the bill’s passage to protect it from intense industry pressure to weaken or repeal the law. Other groups which played leading roles in fighting for the New Jersey law included AARP, Citizen Action, Legal Services of New Jersey, the Institute for Social Justice, the Center for Responsible Lending, and the NAACP.

ACORN LEADERS

Nancy and Abbey Cook Boston, Massachusetts



Nancy Cook and her daughter Abbey first became ACORN members after an organizer in Boston came to their home and left information about Household Financial, the company with which they financed their home. After reading the flier the Cooks called ACORN and made an appointment to have an ACORN Housing loan

counselor review their loan paperwork. Abbey recalls: “That’s when we saw the horror story of Household and then we realized how much trouble we were in, too. We hadn’t realized that we could have lost our house.”

Before they contacted ACORN, Nancy and Abbey’s Household loan had reached a crisis point—after multiple refinances their interest rate was at 15% and required payments they could simply not afford. While Nancy and Abbey worked with ACORN Housing to eventually get a better loan with a close to 6% interest rate, they also became increasingly active in ACORN’s campaign against Household. They led rallies, organized actions, spoke to the press, reached out to other predatory lending victims, and coordinated campaign events and activities.

Nancy and Abbey also lobbied the State House and traveled to Washington DC to fight for anti-predatory lending legislation through ACORN’s annual Legislative and Political Conference. Of her family’s experience and efforts to fight predatory lending, Abbey reflects: “We didn’t want anyone else to be affected [by predatory lending] like we were.”



■ **Arkansas** ACORN worked to make improvements in a weak state anti-predatory lending bill backed by the state Attorney General's office so that it provides some protections for borrowers.

■ In September, **California's** 1st District Court of Appeals upheld the Oakland anti-predatory lending law that was passed in 2001 through a campaign spearheaded by ACORN. The ordinance was challenged in court by the American Financial Services Association, the trade association of finance companies, which argued that the local ordinance was preempted by state law.

■ **Los Angeles** ACORN began efforts to keep the Los Angeles Department of Housing on track to write strong consumer friendly regulations to implement the citywide anti-predatory law ACORN won passage of in December 2002.

■ **Nationally**, in early 2003 ACORN focused on organizing in key districts and states across the country to successfully help prevent movement on a measure proposed in February 2003 by Rep. Bob Ney (R-OH). The measure would have preempted every state and local law in the country that protects borrowers against predatory lending.

In addition, ACORN is in the midst of campaigns to pass additional legislation in a number of cities and states, including Massachusetts, Arizona, Rhode Island, Maryland, and San Jose.

ACORN LEADER

Denise Brantley Minneapolis, MN



Denise Brantley first came to ACORN when she was faced with losing her home to a "foreclosure rescue scam" operation. Denise had been ill, out of work, and confronting mounting bills and possible foreclosure when Hendrie Grant approached her with a quick way to escape foreclosure – he would buy her home and rent it to her with an option for her to buy it back later. However, once the deal was complete Grant set Denise's "rent" even higher than her previous mortgage payment, and Denise quickly fell behind.

In danger of losing her home for good, Denise was referred to ACORN by a friend. "ACORN told me that I'd been scammed out of \$65,000 and they put me in contact with an attorney to see if I could cancel the contract." The attorney helped Denise file for bankruptcy and keep her home for a while, but in April 2003 she was evicted.

In response, Denise began working with ACORN to take more direct action. She researched the problem and found hundreds of people in the twin cities area who had also lost their homes to Grant.

"We started doing actions against Grant in July, because there was another victim losing their home." Throughout 2003, Denise and other ACORN members held a series of actions at the homes of people facing foreclosure as well as at Grant's own home.

With her home scheduled to be sold on October 27, 2003, on October 15, Denise and twenty other ACORN members staged a sit-in and press conference at the house. After a few hours the police arrived and arrested Denise.

Once she got out of jail, however, she recalls that "I started getting a lot of calls" from other victims that wanted to fight back. She filed a restraining order to stop the sale of her home, and in January 2004 settled with Grant. "That was the first time I heard him admit that he actually targeted certain people," she reflects.

Working closely with the Attorney General, ACORN was also able to move the state to revoke Grant's license and he is no longer allowed to do business in the state of Minnesota.

Fighting Local Predatory Real Estate and Financial Scams



ACORN chapters also organized to change the practices of local predatory financial service providers.

■ In **Minnesota**, ACORN members kept up the pressure on a number of foreclosure rescue scam operations—companies that promise to save people from foreclosure by buying their house and renting it back to them. Because these rents are set higher than people can afford, many families—even after being pushed into giving up their ownership—are still forced out of their homes anyway. In May, ACORN prevented the eviction of an 82-year-old widow victimized by Rand Financial, and in October ACORN members held a sit-in to reclaim the house of ACORN member Denise Brantley that she had lost to foreclosure scam operator Hendrie Grant. In November, Minnesota ACORN members held a joint press conference with state Attorney General Mike Hatch to announce a court order requiring Hendrie Grant to cease all transactions, including evictions, acquiring new properties, and selling existing properties.

■ In **Paterson, NJ**, ACORN got HUD and several other regulatory agencies to investigate a property flipping scam operation, Roselyn 2000. ACORN stopped foreclosures for many families and is working out a program which will allow homeowners to refinance their homes, bringing the loan amounts down to the actual value of the homes, while providing funds to bring the homes up to code.

■ **New York** ACORN uncovered a predatory investing scam targeting low and moderate income people, A & A Global Resources (AAGR). ACORN organized victims of the scam, and in December state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer held a press conference in ACORN's Brooklyn office to announce that he had obtained a court order freezing the assets of AAGR as part of an investigation into the company and its owners.

■ **Indianapolis** ACORN won a commitment from a mortgage lender to provide no-cost refinancing to homeowners who are facing foreclosure after being taken advantage of by real estate developers that sold shoddily built homes at inflated prices and provided mortgage loans with deceptive rates.

■ In **Philadelphia**, ACORN released a report, "*License to Steal: How Philadelphia's largest Check-Cashing Chain is Using its State-Issued License to Siphon Millions of Dollars from Low-Income Households*" which focused attention on the practices of the check-cashing company Currency One. As a result, Pennsylvania Secretary of Banking Bill Schenck worked with ACORN and Community Legal Services to begin negotiations with the company to win improvements in its practices.

RESEARCH

In 2003, ACORN continued to release important reports on predatory lending, including:

■ *Predatory Lending in South Central Pennsylvania: A Review of Rising Foreclosure Filings and the Relationship to Predatory Lending*, December. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/fileadmin/PredatoryLending/FINALREPORT.pdf>

■ *The Great Divide 2003: Home Purchase Mortgage Lending Nationally and in 115 Metropolitan Areas*, October. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=1872>

■ *Stop the Stage Coach! An Overview of Wells Fargo's Predatory Lending*, May. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=60>

■ *License to Steal: How Philadelphia's Largest Check-Cashing Chain is Using its State-Issued License to Siphon Millions of Dollars from Low-Income Households*, March. <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=79>

■ *Stolen Dreams: Predatory Lending in San Jose*, April. Available at: http://www.acorn.org/fileadmin/Predatory_Lending/0308_sj_report.pdf

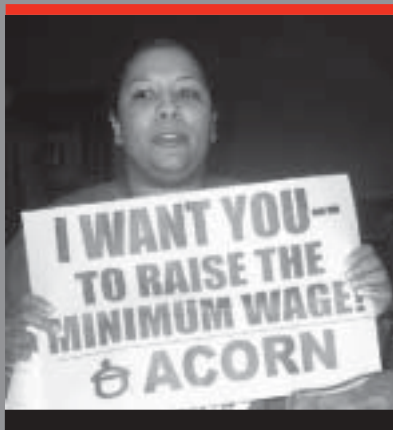
■ *Lost Equity: Predatory Lending in Rhode Island*, April. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=68>

■ *Predatory Lending in Arizona*, February. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=88>

LIVING WAGES

Over the last decade, the national living wage movement has delivered raises for some of America's lowest wage workers—passing laws in over 115 cities and counties from coast to coast. In general, these living wage ordinances require private businesses that benefit from public money to pay their workers a “living wage” which is usually substantially higher than the minimum wage. Since the beginning, ACORN has been a leader in the living wage movement—organizing, marching and lobbying with our allies to win 15 local living wage laws in ACORN cities, including Chicago, Oakland, Denver, St. Louis, New York City and, most recently, a stunning citywide minimum wage increase in San Francisco that will boost pay for over 50,000 workers. At the same time, ACORN's Living Wage Resource Center works to build the movement by providing technical assistance and organizing strategy to living wage organizers nationwide.

Local Ordinances and State Laws



In 2003, ACORN worked to pass and support groundbreaking living wage and minimum wage policies in a number of cities and states.

■ In **San Francisco**, ACORN led a ballot initiative campaign to raise the citywide minimum wage to \$8.50 per hour with annual indexing—raising pay for 54,000 low-income workers and putting an estimated \$45 million per year back into the San Francisco economy. The measure passed in November by an impressive 60% to 40% margin, making San Francisco only the third city in the country to pass a minimum wage increase.

■ In **Sacramento**, the City Council passed a living wage ordinance in December requiring companies with large city service contracts to pay \$9.00 per hour with health benefits, or \$10.50 without, plus annual indexing. This victory is the result of a four-year campaign by ACORN, SEIU and the Sacramento Central Labor Council.

■ **Illinois** became the first Midwestern state to increase its minimum wage when the State Legislature voted in May to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$5.50 in 2004, and \$6.50 in 2005. The campaign to pass the raise was organized by the Coalition to Reward Work, headed by ACORN, SEIU Local 880, and the Illinois AFL-CIO.

■ In a related accomplishment, **Paterson** ACORN won a city ordinance which requires that contractors on city funded construction projects hire local apprentices, opening hundreds of union construction careers to local workers. ACORN successfully fought to include similar language on the Project Labor Agreement (PLA) that will cover the terms of the ten-year school construction projects statewide, opening these living-wage union jobs to urban communities.

ACORN's Living Wage Resource Center—now in its sixth year—continued to provide comprehensive technical assistance to labor, community, and religious groups organizing around a living wage nationwide. The LWRC combined telephone contacts, educational presentations and on-site training with its living wage list serve, website, and organizing manual to provide local organizers with the nitty gritty skills and materials they need to pursue ambitious living wage policies within a broader economic justice organizing context.

ACORN's Third National Living Wage Campaign Training Conference, held November 14-16 in Baltimore, MD, drew over 100 living wage organizers and activists from 44 different living wage campaigns. Participants explored ongoing and emerging issues in the living wage movement, including effective coalition building, union-community partnerships, and new directions for living wage organizing.

ACORN LEADER

Carmen Arias Phoenix, AZ



“Someone came knocking on my door,” says Carmen Arias of her first encounter with ACORN. Carmen, the mother of two and grandmother of three, decided to learn more about ACORN, and attended her neighborhood chapter meeting where she says she was “pretty loud.” Eventually, Carmen became the Chair of her local Lindo Park ACORN Chapter and then a leader in ACORN's fight for a living wage in Phoenix.

“The poverty level in Phoenix is ridiculous. We need to do something about this,” she explains when asked why the living wage is such an important issue. “We want to show the chambers of commerce all over Arizona that the living wage won't bankrupt anyone.”

Carmen's work on Phoenix's living wage campaign has focused on coalition building—bringing faith-

based, community-based, labor and other organizations together to develop a strong community voice on living wages in the city. In 2003, Carmen also participated in two training sessions organized by the ACORN Living Wage Resource Center for ACORN and other coalition members on how to talk about the living wage and its importance, and how to respond to negative comments from living wage opponents. Then, in November 2003, Carmen helped put together a living wage forum attended by over 150 people. At the forum, community members heard testimony from both an academic perspective and from minimum wage workers themselves.

Of her experience with ACORN's organizing tactics, Carmen reflects: “ACORN was a totally different area; it was a foreign land to me. I followed all of the rules for years, ACORN doesn't follow the rules, we do what we need to do to make our voices heard.”

BETTER SCHOOLS

Across the country, ACORN parents are consistently concerned about the quality of education their children are receiving. Numerous ACORN and other studies have found that children in low-income, majority African-American and Latino schools receive the fewest resources, are taught by the most first year teachers, and have the most problems in their school buildings. Over the years, ACORN members have pursued a number of strategies to improve the quality of education received by our children, from increasing parent input into school decisions and fighting privatization to winning equitable funding for lower income schools and smaller class sizes. In 2003, ACORN chapters pursued a diverse array of local and national campaigns to win better schools for our children and more support for their teachers.

Improving the Quality of Teaching



Around the country, ACORN chapters worked to develop community-specific solutions to improving the quality of teaching in our communities.

■ In **Chicago**, ACORN released a groundbreaking report in June 2003 entitled “*Where Have All the Teachers Gone: The Costs of Teacher Turnover in ACORN Neighborhood Schools in Chicago*.” The report found that Chicago’s public schools teacher shortage is related directly to the problem of teacher retention. Following the report, ACORN has been working with the Chicago Teachers Union to set up a “Grow Your Own” teacher program which will help teachers aides and other support personnel to become fully certified teachers. As part of an effort to increase teacher retention, in August ACORN members from the North Lawndale neighborhood also took 22 new teachers to do home visits with parents of students in grades they will be teaching.

■ In **Philadelphia**, ACORN worked with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers to implement the “ACORN to Oaks” teacher coaching and retention program which focused on brand new teachers and giving them the support to be effective and stay in the district.

■ In **New York City**, ACORN played a leadership role in creating the “CC9”—the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools—which successfully united parents, neighborhood residents, community-based organizations, and a university to build a movement to ensure that the children of the South Bronx’s District 9 access the resources they need to receive a quality education. In particular, the plan calls for lead teachers, the placement of specially trained principals in these schools and the building of meaningful parent-school partnerships. ACORN is now working to expand the CC9 concept to improve struggling districts in Brooklyn.

■ In **Louisiana**, ACORN worked with allies, including the teacher’s union, to defeat a school voucher proposal at the state legislature. In places where they have been approved, vouchers have done nothing to improve the quality of education for public school students.

Fighting State and Local Education Budget Cuts

State and local budget deficits throughout the country have significantly impacted and shaped the direction of much of ACORN's education work in 2003. In school districts across the country, ACORN members have taken action to prevent budget cuts from impacting the quality of education their children receive.

■ In **Oakland**, ACORN convinced the school district to accept a loan from the state for education expenses instead of cutting services to low-income children. ACORN engaged hundreds of individuals and dozens of other organizations in this fight.

■ In **San Diego**, ACORN members organized to prevent education budget cuts from affecting the lowest-performing schools.

■ In **New York State**, ACORN, along with the United Federation of Teachers and other members of the Alliance for Quality Education, played a key role in a statewide campaign to increase school funding through a tax increase on upper income taxpayers. The State Legislature passed the bill and then voted again to override the governor's subsequent veto—restoring 90 percent of the education cuts proposed in the governor's budget.

■ In **Boston**, ACORN and the Boston Teachers Union worked together to fight education budget cuts, and to continue expanding communication between schools and parents and improve teacher quality and retention.

ACORN LEADER

Michelle Young Chicago, IL



The mother of two children ages 6 and 9, Michelle Young has been involved in her children's schools for years as a parent volunteer. In the spring of 2003, however, Michelle joined ACORN and took that work to a whole new level as a leader in Chicago ACORN's education campaign.

As an ACORN member, Michelle has played an active role in Chicago ACORN's citywide campaign to create a "Grow Your Own" teacher

program to help teachers aides and other support personnel to become fully certified teachers. Explains Michelle, "We don't have any problem getting teachers; the problem is keeping teachers."

To address this problem, Michelle is organizing to help paraprofessionals—many who have already worked in local schools for years and demonstrated their commitment to these schools—to overcome the barriers they face to becoming full time teachers. "Many [paraprofessionals] can't afford to go back to school because they don't have the funds. Many are single parents or don't have transportation."

In August, Michelle participated in Chicago ACORN's efforts to strengthen bonds between teachers

and community members by helping to take 22 new teachers on home visits with parents of students in the grades they will be teaching. And on Christmas Eve, Michelle was part of a group of ACORN leaders that met with the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools to talk about funding for the Grow Your Own program.

While Michelle is passionate about improving the quality of education in her children's schools, she has also been involved in a number of other ACORN campaigns in Chicago—including fighting drug dealing in her neighborhood and organizing for increased utilities assistance for low-income customers in Illinois.

On her work with ACORN Michelle adamantly asserts that: "My biggest regret is not joining ACORN sooner."

Building Partnerships with Teachers Unions

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)



In 2003, ACORN formed critical collaborations with teachers unions to bridge the gaps between parents and teachers. Nationally, ACORN entered into a formal partnership with the National Education Association (NEA) and also has been working closely with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Local ACORN offices ran joint campaigns with local teachers unions to fight education budget cuts, stop privatization, or improve the quality of education in our neighborhoods in cities and states including Albuquerque, Boston, California, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York City.

In 2003, ACORN continued our campaign work to ensure that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is implemented in a way that benefits struggling schools and children. In May 2003, ACORN released a report on NCLB, *“Leaving Teachers Behind: How a Key Requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act (Putting a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Class) Has Been Abandoned.”* In September, ACORN members, parents, teachers and eleven members of Congress came together in their communities to hold “back to school” events to highlight the need for full funding for NCLB.

RESEARCH

ACORN has continued to produce and release critical studies documenting educational inequity in our communities and exploring strategies to increase the quality of education received by low-income and minority children. ACORN’s 2003 reports include:

■ *Where Have All the Teachers Gone?: The Costs of Teacher Turnover in ACORN Neighborhood Schools in Chicago*, June 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=315>

■ *An Educational Bill of Rights for Oakland Students*, June 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=328>

■ *Leaving Teachers Behind: How a Key Requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act (Putting a Qualified Teacher in Every Class) Has Been Abandoned*, May 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=327>

■ *Poverty, Race, Resources, Results in the Pittsburgh Public Schools: A Report from the National Center for Schools and Communities*, authored by Fordham University at the request of ACORN, May 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=347>

■ *Leave No School Behind: Educational Inequality and the Importance of Protecting San Diego High Priority Schools from Teacher Layoffs*, April 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=356>

■ *Under Bush’s Proposal in his FY2004 Budget to Underfund his No Child Left Behind Act, Money for Title I Schools Would be \$6 Billion Short*, April 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=369>

■ *Baltimore City Schools—2001-2002—A Failing System Riddled with Inequities: A Report by the National Center for Schools & Communities, Graduate Schools of Education and Social Services*, authored by Fordham University at the request of ACORN, February 2003. Available at: <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=370>

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Across the country, low and moderate income people are facing a severe affordable housing crisis. ACORN members pursue a variety of strategies to address the housing crises in their communities, including: working to increase production and rehabilitation of affordable housing through the creation of housing trust funds; establishing and demanding enforcement of affordable housing requirements for developers; promoting programs to help lower income homeowners repair their homes; and organizing tenants to demand an end to unjust treatment by landlords.



In 2003, ACORN members won a number of major affordable housing measures:

■ In **California**, ACORN organized a statewide tenants rights campaign which successfully passed a law, Assembly Bill 647, which provides renters statewide with the means to force landlords to make needed repairs without fear of being evicted.

■ In **Jersey City, NJ**, after a nearly three-year campaign, ACORN and allies helped pass a linkage ordinance in the City Council requiring all developers who receive tax abatements to contribute funds to an affordable housing trust fund.

■ In **Minneapolis, MN**, ACORN won approval from the Minneapolis City Council to create an affordable housing trust fund. In 2003, the fund budgeted \$10 million for the creation of affordable housing—a significant win during a period of serious budget cutting.

■ In **New York City** ACORN won the introduction of three ACORN-developed affordable housing bills in the City Council, which will be considered in 2004. The bills would change the affordable housing income guidelines to create thousands of units affordable to households earning less than \$40,000 per year, reform the City's policy of auctioning off public land in low-income neighborhoods without any requirements for improvement or development and increase disclosure requirements for the City's affordable housing programs to better track who is benefiting.

■ In **Los Angeles, Washington DC, Norwalk, CT, and Chicago** ACORN members kicked off campaigns to increase affordable housing through policies like inclusionary zoning.

ACORN LEADERS

Gerardo and Margarita Madrigal Los Angeles, CA



Gerardo Madrigal and his wife Margarita joined ACORN in 2001 after a “property-flipping” scam nearly forced them out of the home they had been renting since 1996. After the owner of the FHA-backed property disappeared after “flipping” or selling the property back and forth between his associates in order to artificially inflate the price, various banks who had an interest in the property began writing the tenants threatening letters, telling them they had to leave. The Madrigals understood, however, that Los Angeles landlord-tenant law protected them from “no-fault” evictions, so they and their neighbors joined ACORN and decided to fight for their right to stay.

After several more weeks of harassment, Gerardo and his neighbors decided to take action: over thirty building residents and other ACORN tenant members marched into the management company contracted by HUD to manage the building, and refused to leave until they had a meeting set up with the Regional

Director. A few weeks later, the group met with the Real Estate Owned Director of HUD for the Western United States and the Regional Director of the management company, who both agreed that all intimidation would stop and that HUD would work with ACORN members living in the building to find an alternative solution to their eviction.

During this time, Gerardo, who works in a cassette manufacturing plant in Santa Monica, became involved in supporting other ACORN members who were experiencing unjust eviction and poor treatment from their landlords. He and his family traveled to support rallies against slum building owners in downtown LA and helped organize and run citywide meetings of tenants on how to win repairs and how to change policy to improve access to affordable housing. In 2003, Gerardo and several other Los Angeles ACORN members helped lead the largest ever ACORN State Convention in Sacramento with over 500 members from across the state participating. Gerardo has also helped lead the push for more city and statewide protections for renters—resulting in 2003 in the passage of two statewide tenants rights bills.

For his own family, in late 2003 Gerardo and Margarita, as a result of a collaboration between ACORN and the Enterprise Foundation, moved into a newly refurbished building formerly owned by HUD.

UTILITIES

In recent years the cost of basic utilities has skyrocketed—leaving many low-income families struggling to keep electricity and heat in their homes. In response, ACORN members have organized to win improvements in and funding for utilities assistance programs.

Federal Funds for Energy Assistance

In early 2003, ACORN members organized a series of protests, press conferences, community forums and other events in more than 15 cities around the country to pressure the President and Congress to allocate funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP. On January 24, the President gave in to public demands and released \$200 million in emergency LIHEAP funding.

State and Local Campaigns

■ In **Rhode Island**, in November, ACORN and Governor Donald Carcieri announced the creation and funding of a special utility restoration fund to assist LIHEAP-eligible Rhode Islanders whose gas or electricity have been disconnected but who owe more than LIHEAP can provide. ACORN members had been organizing for the last three years to win a utilities assistance program in the state.

■ In **Delaware**, ACORN members delayed a 15.9% gas rate increase by the state's major utilities provider, Conectiv, and won negotiations with the company around demands for a Percentage of Income Program and no shutoffs in the wintertime.

■ In **Illinois**, ACORN supported legislation passed by the state legislature stopping shutoffs for LIHEAP-eligible customers during the winter months.

■ In **New Orleans**, ACORN, working in coalition with labor, including our sister organization SEIU Local 100, prevented the privatization of the city's water supply with a close vote of the Sewer and Water Board rejecting three bids from private companies to manage the city's water.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Local ACORN chapters across the country have been engaging in environmental justice campaigns for years, from turning vacant lots into public parks to running innovative campaigns to fight childhood lead poisoning. In 2003, ACORN's environmental justice campaigns represented a diverse array of issues and approaches to tackling environmental issues from a racial and economic justice perspective.

Local and National Campaigns



■ **New Orleans and Baltimore** ACORN continued their innovative childhood lead poisoning prevention programs, conducting dust wipe sampling in over 450 high risk homes to identify lead hazards and organizing lead-safe trainings for hundreds of low-income families. In Baltimore, ACORN also won clean-up of over 200 units and forced two landlords into settlements with the state for lead violations, including substantial fines. In New Orleans the ACORN-led Environmental Roundtable won an agreement with the City of New Orleans to require city-funded groups to conduct lead education, began a campaign to pass a Universal Testing Ordinance for children in high-risk areas, and won \$300,000 in funding to remediate lead contamination in low-income housing.

■ **Los Angeles** ACORN and the United Teachers of Los Angeles won increased monitoring of emissions from a chrome plating plant located across the street from the 28th Street Elementary School.

■ **St. Louis** ACORN won greater public input and participation in the regional transit authority's policy process after the transit authority tried to propose service cuts without adequate public input.

■ **New Orleans** ACORN won the closure of a concrete crushing plant that bordered on the residential Hollygrove-Carrollton neighborhood. ACORN members had been organizing for four years to shut down or move the plant, owned by Barriere Construction Company, because of the health problems the concrete dust was causing for local residents.

■ **ACORN National Clean Up Day:** Around the country, thousands of ACORN members also participated in the third annual ACORN National Clean Up Day, joining with their neighbors and others to increase the health and safety of their neighborhoods.

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

In recent years, the number of ACORN members who are immigrants has grown substantially, and in response locally and nationally ACORN has begun to take an increasing role in immigrant rights campaigns.

Immigrant Workers Freedom Rides



State and Local Campaigns

In the fall of 2003, ACORN members around the U.S. played an active role in the historic Immigrant Workers Freedom Rides. Fifteen ACORN members from Seattle, San Jose, Los Angeles, St. Paul, Chicago, Orlando, and Phoenix rode the Freedom Ride buses, while ACORN members in Phoenix, Chicago, Columbus, New York, Minneapolis, Orlando, New Orleans and other cities participated in kick-off and welcoming events.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, ACORN organized a moving event to welcome riders to the city. Riders, ACORN members, and community leaders gathered and spoke on the steps of the historic Central High School—the site of the pivotal 1957 school integration showdown where nine black students known as the Little Rock 9 faced down the governor of Arkansas and the national guard in order to attend the then-all-white high school.

The Freedom Rides culminated in New York City on October 4, where over 100,000 supporters of immigrant rights rallied in Queens and heard speeches from union and civil rights leaders including ACORN President Maude Hurd.

ACORN chapters in a number of states worked as part of a widespread effort to increase access to drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants and on other state and local campaigns.

■ In **New Mexico**, ACORN worked with organizations including Enlace and Somos un Pueblo Unido as part of the Alliance for a Safer New Mexico to build support for a bill allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain drivers' licenses. The bill was signed into law by New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson on March 18, 2003.

■ In **Illinois**, ACORN was an important part of the Grassroots Collaborative campaign for drivers licenses for immigrants, known as the Safe Highways bill, which lost by one vote in the senate.

■ In **Massachusetts**, ACORN worked with allies including the MIRA Coalition, the Brazilian Immigrant Center, and the Irish Immigration Center, to build support for a bill improving access to drivers licenses for immigrants being considered in the senate.

■ **Illinois** ACORN saved over 100 jobs that were threatened as a result of “No Match” Social Security letters, including 60 jobs at World Kitchen in Monee, Illinois. ACORN members marched into the World Kitchen’s offices and demanded that they listen to workers and public officials, like Congressman Luis Gutierrez and County Commissioner Roberto Maldonado, who explained that the Social Security Administration has no authority to deal with immigration issues, and is just trying to protect workers who may not be getting their social security benefits credited to the right account.

■ **Illinois** ACORN also participated in a statewide campaign with the Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations, Centro Sin Fronteras and ICIRR to pass a measure allowing undocumented immigrant students who have been in the state for three or more years to pay in-state tuition instead of out-of-state tuition at public universities.

■ **In Passaic, New Jersey**, ACORN members protested at the Pac-Rite Corporation which had refused to pay wages due to four Spanish-speaking immigrant workers who had quit their jobs. The former employees won a meeting with the company owner, with full translation, and negotiated a commitment from the company to pay them the wages they had earned.

■ **In Los Angeles**, ACORN and other immigrant rights groups got the City Council to amend the City’s Rent Control Ordinance to prevent an eviction method targeting immigrants. Under the threat of eviction, landlords were unjustly requiring longtime tenants to supply personal information, including copies of Social Security cards and car registrations, and to follow new lists of intrusive regulations.

ACORN LEADER

Octavio Guerrero,
Seattle, WA



Seattle ACORN member Octavio Guerrero first joined ACORN in 2003 through ACORN’s campaign to address crime in the White Center community. That fall, Octavio decided to become a rider on the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride bus traveling from Seattle to New York City to call attention to the struggles facing immigrant workers in the U.S. and

the need for immigration policy reform. Originally from Mexico, Octavio comes from a family of immigrants—his father worked in the U.S. as a *bracero* or guestworker in the 1960s, and Octavio himself first came to the US as an undocumented immigrant, though he has since become a U.S. citizen. Of being undocumented, Octavio recalls that: “There’s no peace of mind. You have to look over your shoulder all the time.”

Reflecting on his family’s immigrant history and the conditions faced by immigrants in the U.S., particularly those without documentation, Octavio says that: “My father worked as hard as any citizen, but he didn’t have the same rights. That isn’t right. Today things are even more difficult for people who come to work hard and contribute. They can’t even apply

to legalize their status, but their labor is required to do dangerous and poisonous work, to harvest and serve food, to care for children and the elderly, all kinds of work that makes this country strong. People can be injured or not paid and then deported. When we are exploited, Americans suffer too. We need laws that treat everyone the same.”

Since the Freedom Rides, Octavio has continued as co-chair of his neighborhood ACORN chapter and has taken a leadership role in ACORN’s work to fight predatory tax preparation scams and increase EITC usage among low-income families in Seattle. At the kick-off event for Seattle’s free tax prep sites, he made the introductions for Congressman Adam Smith, County Executive Ron Simms and County Councilman Down Constantine.

VOTER REGISTRATION AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

ACORN views political action as an essential part of our strategy for empowering low and moderate income people. When most community organizations still believed in sitting on the sidelines on election day, ACORN was leading the way in voter education and mobilization. For over 30 years, ACORN members have used the electoral arena to press their issues and make their voices heard.

Voter Registration



Kicking off ACORN's campaign to register 1.1 million voters before the 2004 election, in 2003 ACORN worked with Project Vote, the nation's pre-eminent non-partisan voter registration and voter turnout organization, to register 89,532 new voters in 32 cities and 13 states, including Arizona, Florida, New Mexico, Ohio and Pennsylvania. To accomplish our voter registration success, ACORN chapters ran some unique voter registration campaigns and coalitions. For example:

- In **Kansas City**, ACORN partnered with the bus drivers union to register people using public transit. Bus drivers made announcements to passengers about registering to vote and ACORN staff registered interested riders.

- In **St. Paul-Minneapolis**, ACORN attended immigrant naturalization ceremonies and registered new citizens on the spot.

ACORN ran or participated in a number of critical ballot initiative campaigns.

- In **Maricopa County**, including Phoenix, ACORN worked with SEIU to mobilize voters to approve Proposition 414 which saved the county hospital from closure. ACORN ran get out the vote programs in 26 Latino precincts, knocked on 5,000 doors, and the initiative passed by a vote of 58% to 42%.

- In **Albuquerque**, ACORN worked with environmental and Native American allies to defeat a road bond that excluded a fast-growing ACORN neighborhood from improvements funded by the bond. The measure was successfully defeated by 1,700 votes out of 54,000 cast.

- In **Kansas City**, ACORN ran a major voter turnout campaign in 14 precincts in order to win approval of Question 1, preserving Saturday night and Sunday bus service. The bill passed 66% to 34%, and includes improvements such as a new bus line to the airport and more bus lines in the inner city, and will save 150 jobs within the Kansas City Area Transit Authority, the city's bus company.

- In **Cincinnati**, ACORN ran the field component of a campaign that passed a \$485 million school bond issue to renovate 31 schools and build 35 new schools over ten

Civic Participation



years. ACORN doorknocked over 29,000 households, building support for the measure which passed by 53% to 47%.

ACORN also played a significant role, including covering precincts and turning out voters, in larger campaigns in New York City and California.

■ In **New York**, voters rejected the mayor's Question 3, which would have instituted nonpartisan elections in the city.

■ In **California**, voters voted down Proposition 54, which would have prevented state or local government bodies from collecting or analyzing race information.

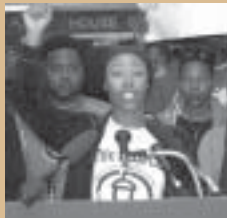
Despite dedicated organizing efforts in Seattle and in Cotati, CA, two ballot initiative campaigns run by ACORN were narrowly defeated.

■ In **Seattle**, ACORN collected 29,000 of the 39,000 valid signatures necessary to put a proposal on the ballot to convert the Seattle City Council to a district as opposed to at-large system. The proposal lost by a vote of 46% to 54%.

■ In the Northern California town of **Cotati**, ACORN ran the field component of a campaign to prevent big box development in the vicinity. In a grassroots campaign against a major national developer, the campaign lost by only 34 votes.

ACORN LEADER

Tamecka Pierce
Orlando, FL



As the Chair of Orlando ACORN's Pine Hills Chapter, Tamecka Pierce has had the chance to work on several of ACORN's campaigns. Working on Florida ACORN's statewide campaign to put a minimum wage ballot initiative on the 2004 ballot, however, has become one of the largest parts of her work. Tamecka explains that: "The constitution guarantees that ballot initiatives are a way that we can communicate our needs to the government."

The ballot initiative proposes a minimum wage of \$6.15 per hour (a dollar more than the federal living wage) with indexing to

inflation. That means not only a big raise for minimum wage workers, almost 20%, but also that as the cost of living keeps going up, so will the minimum wage. With a goal of getting 810,000 petition signers by July 2004, Tamecka has worked to register voters and engage signers all over Orlando. She has gotten petitions signed by going door-to-door and even staffing a table at a local High School.

When the Florida State Senate passed legislation that would raise the threshold of votes needed to pass citizen driven constitutional amendments, Tamecka went to the state capital to stop the House from also passing the proposal. "I went to Tallahassee to lobby the legislature and make sure that we would be able to vote on the minimum wage issue this election cycle. The next day we had about a hundred members come from all over the state to protest in Tallahassee."

As a mother of three and the daughter of a Haitian immigrant, there are a lot of ACORN campaigns that have been important to her over the past year. An outspoken activist against police brutality, she and Orlando ACORN fought tooth and nail with the Orlando Sheriff's Department until the department agreed to regularly meet with ACORN and to make the process for filing formal complaints easier.

During last fall's Immigrant Workers Freedom Rides Tamecka spoke at rallies in Florida on behalf of immigrants' rights. But she and the rest of Florida ACORN have invested much of their time and effort into the minimum wage ballot initiative. Tamecka's motivation for her voter registration and minimum wage work is clear: "We need better wages so that we can provide for our families."

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

To support ACORN's rapid expansion, in 2003 ACORN dedicated significant resources to building organizational capacity, with a focus on leadership development and staff recruitment and training.

Leadership Development



Staff Recruitment and Training

ACORN works to develop grassroots community leadership through both hands-on leadership training programs and more formal local, regional, and national leadership trainings. In 2003, thousands of ACORN members around the country participated in leadership trainings—including facilitating and leading local leadership trainings for newer ACORN members. In March, 100 ACORN members from across the country attended ACORN's annual Legislative and Political Conference in Washington, DC, where they participated in issue and skills training workshops, met with their members of Congress, took action against the Bush tax cuts and predatory lending, and heard from allies including Senators Ted Kennedy and Paul Sarbanes, Representatives Barney Frank and George Miller, Reverend Al Sharpton, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, SEIU President Andy Stern, and La Raza Vice President Cecilia Munoz. In June, 50 ACORN members attended ACORN's weeklong National Leadership School in Oakland, California, where they learned about topics including ACORN's history and principles, what makes a good leader, building community and political power, organizing strong actions, and planning campaigns and strategies.

ACORN also expanded leadership training opportunities for Spanish-speaking leaders, providing translation and Spanish-language programs at the ACORN National Leadership School and Legislative and Political Conference, and organizing Spanish language leadership trainings in Providence, New York City, Paterson, Miami, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, Tucson, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno and Contra Costa County.

By the end of 2003, ACORN had over 330 staff members, ranging from field organizers to voter registration project directors to political organizers. 61% of staff were people of color and over 50% were women. To meet ACORN's organizational expansion, in 2003 ACORN ran 26 weekend to week-long Organizer Academies to recruit and train new organizing staff in cities from San Jose to Seattle and from Orlando to Hartford. Organizer Academies allow people interested in community organizing careers to get a taste of what a community organizer does, from knocking on doors to identifying and developing new leadership, to working with members to take action. ACORN also maintained its commitment to recruiting staff from within our membership base. Over 100 mid-level and senior ACORN organizers participated in three national training sessions for organizing staff, each 4-6 days in duration. These trainings maintained a special focus on staff and office management issues that organizers deal with as they take on more responsibility within their local operations.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



Community-Labor Partnerships

ACORN has long believed in the importance of organized workers and organized communities working together to build power for our constituency. In 2003 we entered into a deliberative process with the AFL-CIO designed to identify communities where we could create formal partnerships between local Central Labor Councils and local ACORN chapters. Existing partnerships continued their work, including those in San Jose, where ACORN and the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council formalized their relationship and engaged in joint campaigns targeting new development in the city; Los Angeles, where ACORN and the L.A. County Fed collaborated on voter participation strategies; and Baltimore, where ACORN and local unions, working through CLUB (Community and Labor United for Baltimore), organized to stave off an attempted state takeover of the Baltimore City Public School System and increase local union-community solidarity.

In addition, ACORN deepened its relationships with many International unions and their locals, running joint campaigns on living wages, fair taxation, community benefits and more with locals from SEIU, AFSCME, HERE, CWA, UNITE, UFCW, the Carpenters, and many others. In St. Petersburg FL, to cite one example, SEIU partnered with ACORN to open a new ACORN office in that city, and the two organizations organized a major joint campaign around healthcare access.

Organized Teachers— Organized Communities

2003 saw an increased level of collaboration between ACORN and teachers unions. ACORN and the National Education Association signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding committing the two organizations to a range of joint projects, including the development of a broad-based campaign aimed at winning a massive investment of new funding for the nation's public schools. In addition, ACORN and local affiliates of both the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers have developed joint campaigns focusing on stopping education cutbacks and improving the quality of education in schools in our communities.

Collaboration with Other Community Organizing Networks

ACORN has also begun developing partnerships with other community organizing networks. Our joint project with the Gamaliel Foundation network in San Diego advanced in 2003, and we took the first steps towards developing joint campaigns in several additional cities. In addition, we began discussions with the PICO network about similar joint activity, focusing initially on California.

Organizers Forum

As a vehicle for promoting cross-fertilization and discussion among a range of constituency-based organizations, the ACORN-initiated Organizers Forum continued its important work. With a membership of senior organizers from labor unions and many of the major community organizing networks, the Organizers Forum has become one of the few places where community and union organizers can discuss common challenges and strategies. In 2003 the Organizers Forum sponsored a meeting in New Orleans focusing on political strategies with Cecile Richards of America Votes and Berkeley professor George Lakoff, and a series of meetings in Delhi and Kolkata, India, with labor and community organizations, focusing on responses to globalization.

ACORN Housing Corporation

Founded in 1986, the ACORN Housing Corporation is one of the largest nonprofit housing counseling programs in the United States.

In 2003, ACORN Housing Corporation produced more new homeowners than any other housing counseling organization in the U.S.—providing loan and credit counseling to 17,397 households and closing 6,088 new homebuyer mortgages and 891 home refinance loans. With operations in 32 cities in 20 states and the District of Columbia, the mission of ACORN Housing is to aggressively address the problems low-income and minority families face in their attempt to purchase homes. ACORN Housing uses a variety of strategies to improve housing opportunities for lower income people, including negotiating community reinvestment agreements with mortgage lenders, providing comprehensive loan counseling services, conducting community-based outreach and education programs, and developing affordable housing units through construction and renovation.

Community Reinvestment Agreements / Bank Partners:

Developing national and local bank partnerships is a key component of ACORN Housing's homeownership program. In 2003, ACORN Housing closed \$783 million in mortgages with Bank of America, representing 5,644 home mortgage loans. Other major bank partners included Chase, Fleet, US Bank, Citizens Bank, PNC Bank, M&T Bank, Ameriquest, Washington Mutual, and a number of smaller lenders in cities around the country. ACORN Housing also established its first home equity loan product with Citizens Bank that includes lower interest rates on smaller loans for expenses such as home repair. ACORN Housing also implemented the Foreclosure Avoidance Program created through Household Finance's settlement with ACORN, which has already provided relief to 327 Household borrowers facing financial difficulties.

Clients Served: ACORN Housing has continued to expand its client base, opening new operations in San Diego (CA), Tampa (FL), and San Antonio (TX). 2003 is also the first year in which ACORN Housing served more Hispanic than African American clients. Of more than 17,000 clients counseled throughout the year, 40% were Hispanic, 39% were African American, 15% were white, and 6% were Asian. ACORN Housing also further increased its work with non-traditional homebuyers, par-



ticularly immigrants with limited credit history by using alternative documentation, such as bill payment, to establish credit and creating ways to use undocumented income from jobs like private home cleaning to establish income.

Assisting Predatory Lending Victims: ACORN Housing continued its efforts both to help homeowners avoid becoming victims of predatory lending, as well to assist those who have already fallen prey to abusive lenders. ACORN Housing worked with individual predatory lending victims throughout the country to negotiate major reductions in interest rates and monthly payments and refunds of excessive fees and credit insurance, and when possible help borrowers to refinance into loans with better terms.

Creating Innovative Homeownership Programs: In a number of locations, ACORN Housing developed local innovative programs to increase homeownership opportunities. For example:

■ In **Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, and Miami**, ACORN Housing worked with Section 8 recipients to participate in programs that allow very low-income people to use their Section 8 vouchers towards mortgage payments.

■ In **Philadelphia**, ACORN Housing worked with first-time homebuyers to increase their household income and assets by claiming tax credits like the EITC, applying for food stamps, and completing energy assistance applications. Along with budgeting assistance, these steps helped increase clients' income in order to qualify for better loans, avoid foreclosure, or refinance out of predatory loans.

■ In **Philadelphia**, ACORN Housing also worked to create new subprime loan products that provide people with credit problems access to credit at reasonable rates. Considering Philadelphia's older housing stock, this is particularly important to increase low-income homeowners' access to funds for home repair.

■ In **Los Angeles**, ACORN Housing worked with Fannie Mae, the City of Los Angeles, San Fernando Val-

ley Legal Resource Center, Chase Bank and Bank of America to create the Los Angeles Senior Homeownership Preservation Program, which, starting in 2004, will assist seniors with housing needs such as accessing good loans for home repair or home refinancing.

Affordable Housing Construction: In 2003, ACORN Housing continued to grow its programs to build or rehabilitate affordable housing units in Phoenix, New York City, and Chicago.

■ In **Phoenix**, ACORN Housing completed the construction of 22 homes in the Desert Rose Homes housing subdivision. When completed, Desert Rose Homes will have 42 three and four bedroom homes, half of them affordable to households making less than 50% of the area median income. The project uses approximately \$1 million in grant funds from HUD, the City of Phoenix, and the Affordable Housing Program of the Federal Home Loan Bank, and mortgages will be financed through World Savings and Bank of America with discounted interest rates and fees. ACORN Housing also launched plans for a second subdivision, the ACORN-Beverly Project, and will break ground on the project in 2004.

■ In **Chicago**, ACORN Housing purchased the first set of homes as part of its Englewood Women's Homeownership Initiative. Targeting low-income, single mothers, the project will renovate 15 homes in Englewood and West Englewood and provide families with \$20,000 each in downpayment and other assistance. The program will take into account the unique needs of low-income, single mothers, providing them with homeownership counseling and training programs. Funding for the project comes from HUD, the Affordable Housing Program of the Federal Home Loan Bank, World Savings, and the Eleanor Women's Foundation.

■ In **New York City**, ACORN Housing began construction on 25 of a planned 36 two and three family homes in the Brownsville and Bushwick sections of Brooklyn that will be rehabilitated and sold to low-income homebuyers making no more than 80% of the city's median income. Funding for the project comes from HUD, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, JP Morgan Chase, Washington Mutual and the Federal Home Loan Bank.

■ Also, in **Brooklyn's East New York** neighborhood, ACORN Housing's affiliated organization the Mutual Housing Association of New York, was awarded eight buildings by the city for a gut rehabilitation project for low and very low-income residents, and acquired five

parcels of vacant land for the planned construction of 60 two and three bedroom apartments for low and very low-income families. Throughout New York City, ACORN Housing also continues to maintain over 650 affordable housing units.

Project Vote

Project Vote is the largest, non-partisan voter registration and education organization working in the United States today. Since 1982, Project Vote has registered and turned out to vote over three million low-income and minority citizens nationwide, won a dozen lawsuits to protect their right to vote, trained hundreds of low-income, minority organizers, and provided registrants with non-partisan follow-up voter education.

Project Vote's mission is uniquely focused on building voter registration, education and mobilization networks. Project Vote mobilizes new and infrequent voters around issues that are important to their families and communities, thus giving previous non-voters a reason to vote. The increasing presence at the polls of low-income and minority voters continues to make a difference year after year.

In 2003, Project Vote began the preparations for its largest non-partisan voter registration and voter mobilization campaign ever. Approximately 89,000 new voters were registered, which was just the start of the 1.1 million projected registrations Project Vote planned on doing for the 2004 election cycle.

American Home Childcare Providers Association

In 2003, ACORN's new affiliated organization of home child care workers—the American Home Childcare Providers Association (AHCPA)—became a powerful force in organizing the primarily low- and moderate-income workers who care for children in their homes. AHCPA now has members in Los Angeles and Sacramento, CA, Baltimore, MD, Boston, MA, San Antonio, TX, Philadelphia, PA, and Brooklyn, NY. In Boston, AHCPA members won over \$100,000 in back pay for hundreds of childcare providers. In California, the AHCPA affiliate, California Childcare Providers For Action, has grown to become the largest association of home child care providers in the state and in 2003 organized a highly visible "Say Yes to Children" campaign to successfully fight major state budget cuts in subsidized childcare.



Local 880

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 880 is the union for homecare workers and home childcare providers in Illinois. Local 880 Workers have been organizing for a voice on the job since 1983, first mobilizing through ACORN, where they overcame the challenge of organizing without the benefit of a common worksite. In 2003, Local 880's membership grew by over 10,000 new members, including 9,000 new public sector state homecare workers and 1,200 new private sector homecare workers. Today, Local 880 members are 28,000 strong, and continue to fight for living wages, healthcare benefits, dignity and respect through legislative and grassroots campaigns. In 2003, Local 880 members won a number of major victories, including:

- State homecare workers, also called Personal Assistants, won the first Union Contract for over 20,000 homecare workers. Local 880 members then negotiated and approved a new contract, which included guaranteed raises totaling \$2.35 per hour over four years, the right to unemployment insurance and a Grievance Procedure with Arbitration.

- Private sector homecare workers, also called "Homemakers," won an increase in the state reimbursement rate for homemakers, including a 5% raise with back pay.

- Private sector homecare workers also took on Community Care, one of the toughest anti-union agencies in the state, and won a neutrality agreement, a \$60,000 back pay settlement, union recognition or contracts in six cities.

- After 17 years of negotiations and organizing, private sector homecare workers won a historic national recognition agreement with Addus Health Care, leading to a neutrality agreement and victories in union elections in three cities.

- Home child care providers continued to organize for union contracts, living wages and health insurance, and won a number of improvements along the way, including successfully challenging a discriminatory town

ordinance in Bellwood that imposed unfair zoning restrictions and village fees, increasing state eligibility levels for childcare subsidies to make 14,000 more children eligible for affordable childcare, and engaging three state Representatives and Senators who became "Home Childcare Providers for a Day" in Austin, Aurora, and Harvey, Illinois.

Local 100

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 100 is one of the largest unions in the South. Founded in 1980 in New Orleans, Local 100 represents public and private sector service industry workers in Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas. Local 100 has been one of the groundbreaking unions in the country in trying to confront low union density, meager wages, and the so-called "right-to-work" conditions in the South. In 2003, Local 100 continued to break new organizing ground and improve the quality of life for low wage workers in the South.

- In Dallas and Houston, Texas, Local 100 members provided grassroots support to successfully help elect progressive candidates to the County Schools School Board and the Houston Independent School District School Board.

- In Houston, Local 100 Head Start workers signed a new three year contract, which made them the highest paid Head Start employees in the South.

- Local 100 also kicked off the new Working Family Association by organizing taco stand workers in the Houston area, and successfully prevented the Harris County Health Department from closing down 800 out of 1,600 total taco stands in the area.

- In Louisiana, Local 100 continued to work with ACORN and other allies to fight the privatization of water in New Orleans. In Baton Rouge, Local 100 continued bargaining efforts with city and parish workers in East Baton Rouge, while at the same time fighting increasing pressure around privatization in the union's



school units. In Schreveport and other cities Local 100's nursing home workers continued to push their contracts forward in the midst of ownership changes and other issues. In 2003, Local 100 expanded significantly in Lafayette among school and education based workers to complement the union's membership among community, home, and other workers.

■ In Arkansas, Local 100 expanded its membership among both Head Start workers and employees at the University of Arkansas Medical Center, where unionized workers now include food service workers, nurses, radiologists and clerks throughout the hospital. Head Start workers also worked with State Representative Joyce Elliot to create a job fair program for Local 100 members.

ACORN Radio

Over 20 years ago, ACORN members decided that low and moderate income families needed a real voice on the nation's airwaves. To achieve this, ACORN members worked to put two independent radio stations on the air: KABF in Little Rock and KNON in Dallas.

In Little Rock, KABF (www.kabf.org) broadcasts at 100,000 watts, reaching most of Arkansas. KABF broadcasts a wide variety of music to appeal to a diverse audience. In 2003, KABF greatly expanded its Spanish language programming, and now has the only programming in Spanish in the Little Rock area. In the fall of 2003, KABF was instrumental in letting the immigrant community know about the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride that passed through Little Rock and remains a critical source of information for the growing Spanish speaking community in the area. ACORN members produce a weekly program called "The People Speak" which airs for one hour each Monday and often has local politicians as guests, allowing the public to communicate directly with their elected officials about their concerns. The Little Rock Central Labor Council also has a weekly program.

KNON (www.knon.org) in Dallas is the "Voice of the People" in the eighth largest media market in the country. Over 100,000 people a week listen the varied music programming on the station which ranges from gospel to R&B to Tejano to country. In 2003, KNON upgraded its morning talk show programming "Morning Line" which plays every morning from 7 am to 9 am. KNON's programs are hosted by volunteers from the community

ranging from African American newspaper editors to local legal services lawyers to a Dallas City Council member. Every Wednesday morning, ACORN members take to the air to talk about local and national community issues, followed by a show sponsored by Local 100 of the Service Employees International Union.

In mid-December KABF and KNON launched a new nationally focused talk show, Empowerment Radio, which concentrates on issues affecting working families—from immigration to tax preparation to predatory lending.

ACORN International

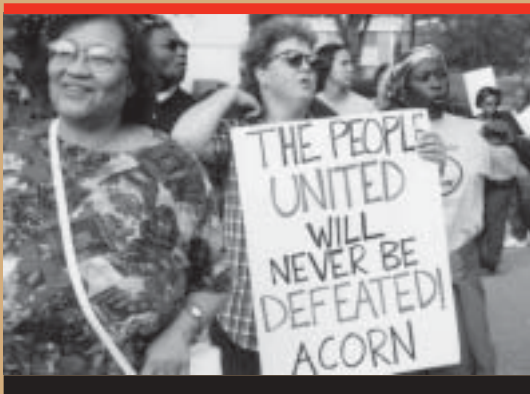
Recognizing the growing interrelationships between low- and moderate-income people and communities across political borders, in 2003 ACORN took a number of steps to expand our work internationally.

Peru: In 2003, ACORN developed partnership programs with two organizations in Lima, Peru: Comedores Populares, a grassroots organization that runs community kitchens in 1,200 locations that feed 150,000 people daily, and the water workers union, which is waging a fight to stop privatization of water. Our partnerships have included staff exchanges and training with Comedores Populares, and other strategic support.

ACORN Dominican Council: With the goals of organizing campaigns and building leadership around issues affecting the Dominican community in the U.S., as well as building bridges between Dominican American ACORN members and their communities in the Dominican Republic, the ACORN Dominican Council continued to expand its work in U.S. cities. In New York, the ACORN Dominican Council met with the Consul General of New York as part of an effort to win recognition of a Dominican identification card, similar to the Mexican Matricula, that could serve as legal identification for certain government agencies and banks. New York ACORN Dominican members also traveled to Rhode Island for a cross-training with Latino leaders there, which was attended by the first Dominican City Councilman in Providence, Miguel Luna.

Looking to 2004

2004 promises to be an important year for ACORN. Looking forward to 2004, we have already set our sights on a number of major campaigns and issues.



- **ACORN's 34thth Anniversary National Convention to be held in Los Angeles, June 26-28**
- **Major voter registration and GOTV campaigns in battleground states with Project Vote as we head towards November**
- **Expanding our predatory lending campaign to improve the practices of even more subprime lenders**
- **Fighting the selling of high-cost "Refund Anticipation Loans" in our communities**
- **Helping more low-income families receive the Earned Income Tax Credit**
- **Running campaigns to pass more state and city living wage and minimum wage increases, including the statewide minimum wage ballot initiative campaign Florida ACORN is spearheading**
- **Organizing to win more funding on the federal, state and local levels for schools in our communities**
- **Increasing access to healthcare for the uninsured and non-English speakers.**
- **Hundreds of local campaigns in ACORN neighborhoods and cities**
- **Opening new ACORN offices in 20 additional cities!**

ACORN

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