



We see possibilities.

News for our partners and friends

February 2009

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2009: Time for **Hands-On Hope**



In 2008, we created a rural Latin@ voter guide called "Hands-On Democracy." We liked the name a lot because it reinforced the need to actually DO something to make democracy happen. (Plus we got to make art out of photos of the hands of our friends and allies. Neat.)

So as Main Street Project reflects back on 2008, and even more importantly looks forward in 2009, we've landed on the theme of "Hands-On Hope" to describe our focus. We know it will be a year of limited resources - no matter how good or important the work. It will take creativity and "extreme collaboration" to turn possibilities into realities - to

continue to give rural residents of all ages, cultures, economic and immigration status the opportunity to more fully participate in all aspects of community life.

So that's exactly our plan. Here's a preview of work we feel hopeful about (with a nod back to 2008).

Rural **Community Building**

HANDS-ON DEMOCRACY

Our last newsletter talked about the rural Latin@ election guides distributed in Minnesota, Iowa and Idaho as part of our 2008 civic engagement and GOTV organizing. We also worked directly with community partners in five rural legislative districts, providing hands-on training and support that helped turn out nearly 4,000 rural Latin@ voters in those same states.

One of the encouraging outcomes of the work was the level of interest expressed in having other bilingual guides on rural community issues. It's on our list of 2009 projects. And with Congressional redistricting just around the corner, our priority list includes making sure rural Latin@s understand the importance of being counted in the U.S. Census.



COMMON THREADS PROJECT

2008 civic engagement and community planning in Fargo/Moorhead paved the way for the launch of the Common Threads Project in 2009. We're supporting our partners [People Against Poverty Project](#) (PEPP) and [Cultural Diversity Resources](#) (CDR) in a community-wide initiative that includes regular community meetings, newsletters, training workshops, and more.

Our goal is to help diverse community members work together to create solutions to shared challenges. And as Common Threads expands to more communities, we'll create a network for those communities to share ideas and resources. [Read more \(PDF\).](#)



THE IMPACT OF ICE RAIDS

An injury to one is an injury to all.

In response to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in Postville, Iowa, and other rural communities, the Main Street Project Board of Directors issued a statement calling for enforcement of constitutional and human rights - regardless of immigration status. [Read statement \(PDF\).](#)

And in April, three Latin@ youths from Marshalltown, Iowa who had participated in our powerful digital storytelling workshop were asked to share their stories in a UFCW-sponsored public hearing on how their lives were disrupted by ICE raids. [Read more.](#)

Our hope is that 2009 is the year where our broken immigration system begins to receive the attention it desperately needs.

Photo (from left to right): Rocio Villagomez, former Iowa Governor and current Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Maria and Diego Alvarez at National Commission on ICE Misconduct and Violations of Fourth Amendment Rights.

Rural **Media** Justice



DTV TRANSITION

More than six million people - including many rural residents and people of color -- aren't ready for June 12. That's the (new) day that digital TV transmission is scheduled to begin - and more importantly, analog transmission ends.

Given the cost of maintaining digital and analog signals through June 12, many local broadcasters may make the switch before that date.

Along with our DTV transition partners, [Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project](#), [People Escaping Poverty Project](#) (PEPP) and the [Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund](#) (LCCREF), we've been working to create and share resources, train other organizations, encourage retailers to offer no-cost converter boxes, and connect with media resources to help make sure that people don't lose their TV access. [Read more.](#)

JUSTICE 2.0

Communication is a fundamental human right. But many people in rural communities - especially communities of color - are denied that right every day.

One of our newest initiatives, Justice 2.0, will address access, knowledge and empowerment to help disenfranchised rural residents in Minnesota and Iowa join the conversation about their future. We'll

collaborate with local partner organizations to deliver hands-on training, including Media Justice 101, how to use Web 2.0 tools (like Facebook, Twitter and blogs), and creating personal digital stories using PlaceStories (a low-bandwidth, easy-to-use digital storytelling software).

PART OF A MEDIA JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Main Street Project serves as a regional anchor for [MAG-Net](#) (Media Action Grassroots Network), whose mission is to build a community-centered movement for just media representation, rules and human rights - especially for those pushed to the margins by racism and economic inequity.

Amalia Deloney, Main Street Project Senior Fellow shares this perspective: "Through community education for the DTV transition, policy organizing around "white spaces," digital storytelling training and documentation, and our work as an anchor organization of the MAG-Net, we're working to make sure that rural communities and communities of color are included in the digital expansion. It's challenging, but we're working to close the digital divide, one community at a time."

Rural Enterprise Center

Because the mission of the Rural Enterprise Center is focused on business success of Latin@ entrepreneurs, we use a lot of numbers. Here's part of our 2008 story:

- 5 families in the Northfield, Minnesota area helped launch a **poultry cooperative**. Year one results: 4,000 free-range chickens and \$24,000 of additional gross income. Plus, the families had access to fresh and healthy foods that they wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise.
- 36 families farmed 48 **garden plots** near Northfield. Red Wing and Faribault, Minnesota are ready to launch similar gardens this summer.
- 4 **market gardeners** grew produce for sale and established a distribution network that will support up to 8 gardeners in 2009.
- 10 entrepreneurs graduated from **business training** offered in Spanish.
- 20 entrepreneurs received **technical support** to sustain their businesses or transition into more promising enterprises.



One of the exciting stories moving into 2009 is the potential for this work to transform the way food is produced and distributed in Minnesota communities and beyond.

The next phase involves our innovative **Agripreneur Training Model** and it's rapidly gaining support from academic, business and philanthropy circles. So stay tuned - or better yet, [join our effort](#).

Photo: Four generations of the Peralta Rosas family come together to tend their community garden plot in Northfield.

"We see the potential for a new, successful generation of family farmers in rural America," says Regi Haslett-Marroquin, Director of the Rural Enterprise Center. "In economically challenging and increasingly xenophobic times, the success of the rural agripreneurial approach has the power to build community bridges and transform community food systems."

Partners in Hope

Our work is possible thanks to the generous support of these philanthropic partners:

Agstar Financial Services
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation
Cedar Tree Foundation
Community Resource Bank, Northfield
First National Bank of Northfield
Funding Exchange
Gill Foundation
Headwaters Foundation for Justice
Hull Family Foundation
Leadership Conference on Civic rights Education Fund
MAG-Net (Media Action Grassroots Network)
Media Democracy Fund
Movement Strategy Center
Northfield Area United Way
Northfield Community Action Center
Northwest Area Foundation
Northfield Area Foundation
Northfield Enterprise Center
Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
SpectrumTrust: El Fondo de Nuestra Comunidad
Spectrum Trust: Multicultural Fund
Stephen M. Silberstein Foundation
Wells Fargo Bank, Northfield
Wellstone Action Fund

" "We see possibilities." That simple phrase speaks volumes about the work of Main Street Project. By focusing on community strengths and building long-term collaborations, Main Street Project is helping to strengthen local capacity for problem solving. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to again say how proud we are of the creativity and commitment that our staff and partners bring to the work, day in and day out."
-- Niel Ritchie, Board Chair

[Donate now](#). Main Street Project will put your contribution to work in support of rural communities.

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