**Introduction to the Parent Organizing**

**Evaluation Framework and Implementation Manual**

The ZOOM Foundation (“ZOOM”) is pleased to share the attached Parent Organizing Evaluation Framework and Implementation Manual (“Framework”) and related materials for your use. ZOOM is a family foundation based in Connecticut that focuses its philanthropic investments on innovative change efforts that have high potential for sustainable impact, particularly in the areas of education and the environment.

Initially, this Framework was developed for ZOOM’s use with its Prize for Parent Organizing initiative, but it is adaptable and, hopefully, of use to organizers and foundations working to affect change through organizing.

1. **Background: Prize for Parent Organizing**

The ZOOM Foundation is guided by the core belief that every child should have access to a great public school education. In Connecticut, that is not currently the case. The divide between high-income families and low-income families is reflected in a gap in the quality of education their children receive. Children from low-income families and children of color are more likely to attend underperforming schools than children from high-income families and White children.

How would schools change if parents in every community acted collectively to advocate for their children? What if parents had the knowledge and tools to organize so they could raise their voices in local and national debates about education? ZOOM is supporting community organizing to provide platforms for parent leaders[[1]](#footnote-1) whose children are directly affected by underperforming schools.

Community organizing has improved the lives of individuals and communities throughout our country’s history, notably during struggles for civil rights. Organizers listen to the needs of a community and encourage grassroots leaders to develop and flourish. Through this process of organizing, communities and individuals come into their power and raise their voices for change.

*“Community organizing comprises building relationships, leadership and power, usually among underrepresented communities, for the purpose of bringing that power and collective voice into discussions about the issues that affect those communities by engaging with relevant decision makers.” [[2]](#footnote-2)*

To catalyze increased development of parent power and leadership through organizing, ZOOM selected five organizations in 2015 to receive funding and capacity building support. The 2015-2017 Prize for Parent Organizing initiative sought to develop effective and sustainable parent organizing in Connecticut. After two years, ZOOM awarded the Prize of $150,000 to the organization in the cohort that demonstrated the most evidence of developing parent power. More information is available upon request.

In its preparations to award the Prize in 2017, ZOOM funded Columbia University’s [Center for Public Research and Leadership](https://cprl.law.columbia.edu/) (CPRL), under the direction of Professor Jim Liebman, to work with the participating organizations in the co-design of an evaluation and assessment tool. ZOOM used the resulting Framework to award the 2017 Prize for Parent Organizing. The Framework may benefit the field at large, so ZOOM and CPRL have made the tool “open source” and available to others for their own use.

1. **The Purpose and Development of the Evaluation Framework**

Historically, efforts to measure the effectiveness of organizing have often been viewed with skepticism, as organizing is a complex process. However, a number of useful evaluation frameworks have emerged over recent years. Building on this existing research, and with feedback from the 2015-2017 Prize for Parent Organizing cohort, CPRL crafted the Evaluation Framework and Implementation Manual (Framework).

To determine the winner of the 2017 Prize, ZOOM hired external Reviewers to observe, analyze and score the organizing initiatives using the Framework and related rubric. The observation data was compiled into the Framework’s Dashboard feature to compare organizing initiatives and track themes across the cohort. Overall, stakeholders found the Framework and process effective. ZOOM made minor adjustments, contained in this version, and again used the same approach to determine the 2019 Prize winners.

1. **Key Ideas**

* **The Framework is designed to support continuous improvement**: The real power of the Framework is diagnostic. It measures absolute achievement in three areas of Organizing: Infrastructure, Skill and Impact. The indicators and related rubric enable users to identify areas of strength and opportunity for growth.

While the Framework measures a point in time, not development over time, multiple assessments may be administered and combined to create a picture of progress and change. Using a growth mindset, an organizer and team of leaders might, for example, perform a first “point-in-time” self-assessment. They might use the results to decide what areas to prioritize for improvement. Then, sometime in the future, they would perform the assessment again to look for change in strengths or growth areas. Likewise, a funder might use the framework to create a “point-in-time” assessment, which may provide an opportunity to discuss the results with the grantee partner. The practical design supports recurring, periodic assessment.

* **External Reviewers with previous organizing experience are more effective**: In 2016, ZOOM conducted a pilot to test the Framework. Consultants with a mix of experience including organizers and non-organizers were hired as Reviewers. From this experience, ZOOM learned that that the most effective Reviewers were seasoned organizers. Their previous experience in organizing led them to more quickly identify key indicators of the organizing in action. They were more effective in applying the Framework and in assessing and rating the level of development associated with each indicator. Therefore, in 2017 and 2019 (during the second Prize initiative) only experienced organizers were hired as Reviewers.
* **Connecting theory and practice through a case study:** In this version,ZOOM has embedded a real-world case study from the [Logan Square Neighborhood Association](http://www.lsna.net/About-us/index.html) into the rubric. It is hoped that this example will help organizers in their self-assessment efforts, as well as Reviewers regarding agreeing on common standards. Because this one example does not present a complete picture, ZOOM hopes others will add additional examples for a future version.

Please contact these leaders who have helped in the development and use of the tools:

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1. ZOOM uses the term “parent” to mean any caring adult in a child’s life. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jagpal, Niki, and Kevin Laskowski. Smashing Silos in Philanthropy: Multi-Issue Advocacy and Organizing for Real Results. Rep. N.p.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)