

The Challenge to Act

How Progressive Women
Activists Reframe
American Democracy



Institute for Women's Policy Research

About this Report

The Challenge to Act describes the values-based public visions of women activists involved in progressive movements for change. Based on over 120 in-depth interviews with women from diverse backgrounds, it outlines seven values that motivate and inspire them to do their work. Taken as a whole, these values provide an alternative approach to politics and public life—one that challenges current debates about “moral values” by developing an inspirational vision for American democracy rooted in the experiences of progressive women activists. The report includes specific recommendations for policy and practice that consider how the values-based visions articulated by progressive women might reshape both politics and organizing at the national and local levels.

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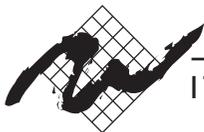
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How Progressive Women Activists
Reframe American Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

Progressive Women and the Importance of Values

As moral people, we have not only the responsibility but the challenge [to act].

People are inspired by values. Our values—our deeply held beliefs, the principles that guide our thoughts and actions—infuse our lives with meaning. When we live up to them, they give us a sense of accomplishment. They can even mitigate the powerlessness that many people feel by offering them an alternative vision for a future they can work toward.

We usually do not think of values this way in public debate. For the past decade or two, American debates over “moral values” have addressed sexual politics: abortion, gay marriage, and sex education. Progressives have often shied away from directly engaging moral values because they are concerned about religious freedom and separation of church and state. When they have adopted a moral values frame, they often have relied on strategies such as pulling out “favorite” Bible verses or arguing that Jesus cared about poverty.

This version of the values debate shows a basic misunderstanding of why Americans are concerned about morality and values. Ultimately, the cry for values-based politics, on both the left and the right, is about a search for inspiration and meaning. It is about creating and articulating worldviews that capture our imagination. It is about tapping into symbols, ideals, and even rituals that form compelling visions for what we hope to achieve in public life.

Progressives working for change sorely need such forward-looking vision. We rely heavily on statistics and policy analysis to do our talking for us; we too often assume that these tools alone can convince people to agree with our prescriptions for change. While they are, in fact, powerful tools to have, they cannot on their own provide the sense of inspiration and motivation we draw from our values. In particular, individuals often left out of policy debates—including women, people of color, and those with low incomes—need not only statistics and policy analysis, but also a transformative and innovative vision that expresses and taps into their values. This vision can motivate them to become more engaged in public life and thereby help progressives to achieve the change they seek.

This report shows how we might develop such an inspirational vision. It explores the experiences and words of progressive women activists across the country, who

reframe democracy to be more inclusive and to inspire a wide range of Americans. These women provide a forward-looking and truly progressive vision for public life.

This vision is shaped by seven, interrelated values:

- *Community*, where people from all walks of life gather to define and pursue the common good
- *Family*, which offers life-giving relationships and shared care-giving
- *Equality*, which gives us all the opportunity to pursue our own chosen goals and paths
- *Power*, which ensures that public life includes and responds to diverse voices
- *Compassion*, which is a sensitivity to the emotions and experiences of others that requires us to eliminate injustice and respect the complexity of others' life choices
- *Balance*, which allows us to negotiate the multifaceted nature of our lives without sacrificing our most cherished goals and ideals
- *Practice*, which enables us to bring our values to life through action

If those seeking progressive change would explicitly connect their public vision to their values, our society might be able to achieve the most noble—and yet unrealized—goal of democracy: to empower us all to shape politics and policy for the shared well-being of ourselves and others.

Voices for Change

The analysis in this report is based on a series of over 120 in-depth interviews with women activists involved in progressive movements for change. These women live and work all over the country. They come from every major racial and ethnic group; over half are women of color. They are Christian and Jewish, Muslim and Hindu, Buddhist and Unitarian. Some are atheist. They are rich and they are poor; they are national leaders and grassroots activists.

The women in the report are elected officials, priests and rabbis, community organizers, and former welfare recipients. They are the chief of a Native American tribe, the first Latina to win a seat on her county council, and the first Muslim woman to run for hers. They are professionals who direct multi-million dollar organizations, volunteers who lead fundraising efforts for their children's schools, and ordinary workers who negotiate contracts with huge conglomerates.

Across the country, these women are winning crucial struggles for reform at the grassroots. They secure non-traditional job training for women, reserve units in low-income housing for single mothers, and reform provisions for juvenile justice. They

build schools and houses, promote living wages, and revamp city-planning goals on behalf of those with low-incomes. They promote voting rights for the disadvantaged, design leadership programs for immigrants, and create multicultural community centers that support families. They keep landmark sites in African American history from being demolished for development, and they provide services to abused women, prostitutes, the homeless, and drug addicts.

This report provides a rare glimpse into the lives of these remarkable women. And it argues that despite their differences, they articulate a shared set of values.

Women's Moral Leadership

Traditionally, American democracy has insisted that women belong in the home, caring for their families, and we have assumed that the values they embody belong there as well. We have also imagined that these values are gentle and kind and non-controversial.

Many women, though, know better. Throughout history, women have provided public moral leadership for some of the most innovative and progressive changes in American society. White and African American women worked together as leaders of the anti-slavery movement. Progressive-era women activists argued for expanded supports for poor women and war veterans based on values of compassion and mothering (Skocpol 1992). These women and other activists extended the idea of women's traditional roles as mothers and wives to argue that they could (and should) transform government to provide for social welfare. They also worked to promote women's suffrage and political involvement (Buchanan 1997; Evans 1989; Skocpol 1992).

Like their foremothers, progressive women today call for a new kind of democracy, one that embodies consideration for humanity and cooperative models of public life. This new democracy, they argue, will more energetically seek to include all voices in public life by promoting innovative, promising strategies for building power together and by inspiring activism and engagement. It will connect people with political leaders by creating more responsive, ongoing channels for communication and by seriously addressing the power of money in political processes. It will recognize the importance of treating each other with compassion and of building connections across lines of difference through policies in housing, transportation, and community development. It will value the dignity of all human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, culture, religion, sexuality, or age. And it will more actively support families of all types by helping individuals build healthy relationships in conditions of physical and economic security.

This approach goes far beyond the narrow demands for equal rights that we have most often associated with women's organizing over the past 30 years. Most Americans certainly support equal rights, and the concept is truly important. But it is not

enough. The concept of equal rights does not adequately reflect the full range of concerns and convictions that progressive women bring to public life, and it does not fulfill everyone's needs for meaning and inspiration. In one sense, it can be seen to operate within the status quo—it pushes us to expand our existing version of democracy to include more people, but it does not necessarily redefine democracy based on what this diversity of people brings to the table.

Values and Progressive Women Activists

Progressive leaders working at the national level—most of them men—have undertaken a well-publicized search for the “values” that will help them capture the attention of the nation's electorate. But like Dorothy's ruby slippers, the power has been right before their eyes all along. A profound, values-based challenge to the status quo, one that will resonate with millions of Americans, has been percolating at the grassroots among progressive women activists.

If national leaders listen to these women, they can finally knit together the forces that have the potential to transform politics and policy and to reclaim American institutions. They can marshal the ideas, the support, the power, and the moral authority necessary to do so.

Progressive leaders recognize that we need a new, values-based approach to politics. The concern voiced in polls about “moral values” is, in many cases, a cry for meaning and inspiration. Many of us find it inspiring to imagine how the world could be different. We want, however, not only to imagine this new world but also to take steps toward realizing it. When we work to make this vision happen—when we work, as individuals and as a country, to make the world a better place—we create meaning. Moreover, it gives us a sense of meaning to act in ways that reflect our values, our deeply held principles and beliefs. We want these values to profoundly shape how we live in the world; we want to be true to our values. And we want to know that our leaders are as well. We want to know that they, too, have a coherent and compelling set of values that informs the work they do in their leadership roles.

We cannot deny the importance of values. Our values shape our worldview and our identity—our sense of who we are. Of course, not everyone shares the same values; American values are quite diverse. They can include compassion, freedom, honesty, or individual rights; even the drive for power can be a value. Our values differ, in part, because they come from many sources. Some of us find that religion informs our values; religious traditions provide symbols, beliefs, and practices that can foster transformative visions of the world and motivation for realizing them. Others of us discover that our families, friends, and communities shape our values. Our values can be formed as well by the media, our workplaces, and the locations to which we

travel. Given this diversity of sources, our values are not static; they change as we develop and grow. They are, however, always integral to who we are and how we see the world.

This diversity in our values and their sources means that we cannot identify a shared set of “women’s values” that is innate or universally embraced by all women. Indeed, women who come from many walks of life have different experiences, ways of looking at the world, and belief systems. Our research has found, however, that even in the midst of their significant differences, progressive women activists often articulate a core cluster of values. These values are an integral part of what motivates them to engage in social action and to spark social and political change. As a result, progressive women activists stand at the forefront of many of the hot button issues of the day, from immigration to health care. They are angry about the injustices that many current and proposed policies promote, and they want to eliminate these injustices and build an inclusive, mutually supportive society.

Inspired by their values, these women are pushing their communities and our country to a higher standard for democracy, inclusiveness, and well-being. In this way, they are creating meaning for themselves and society. They are finding ways to affirm that their lives have purpose and our collective future has hope. They are boldly imagining a better America and concrete ways to get there.

Progressives sorely need this kind of imagination. They need to articulate their most basic principles and envision how the world would look if shaped by these convictions. And they need to put their visions into action. More than ever, they need a new, values-based approach to politics.

Reframing Democratic Values

The rest of this report provides a framework for thinking about progressive values and public life. Each section explores a value commonly articulated by the women in our interviews, gives examples of how women talk about it, and raises discussion questions designed to stimulate conversation about the value and the ways people concretely embody it. The analysis of each value also explores its implications for specific policies and practices. These reflections are not intended to present a comprehensive or final agenda for change. Rather, they are meant to illustrate how groups can examine their underlying values and allow them to shape long- and short-term thinking, goals, and strategies.

This report complements the work of other organizations that seek to develop and implement values-based, progressive visions for public life. For example, the Center for American Values in Public Life conducted a survey in August 2006 that explored

how religion and values impact political views and behavior—and concluded that American voters care far more about values such as honesty, responsibility, and integrity than about gay marriage or abortion. The Center for Community Change has sought to promote economic and social justice by developing programs that build, at the grassroots, a new politics based on the values of interdependence, community, and the common good. In addition, many organizations articulate and enact religiously-based visions of progressive values—such as Muslims for Progressive Values, the Gamaliel Foundation, Jews for Justice, and Christian Alliance for Progress. Unlike the work of these groups, our research focuses not just on progressive values but on a particular set of progressive values that often motivate women’s activism.

Our exploration of these values relies, in part, on the concept of framing that George Lakoff has most visibly promoted. Lakoff describes frames as the mental or conceptual structures that allow us to understand the world. He identifies different kinds of frames—deep frames, for example, shape and express our moral worldview and our understanding of what “makes sense.” Surface frames, by contrast, draw on slogans or phrases to shape our views of specific issues. Lakoff says that in recent years conservatives have dominated the framing of issues, embedding their values and positions in many people’s minds. To counter this, progressives must not simply negate conservative frames, as that strategy actually reinforces them. Instead, they need to develop their own positive and constructive frames that express their political principles and redefine issues to fit progressive worldviews. Put simply, progressives need a values-based approach to promoting their goals. They need to inspire Americans not just by developing policy proposals but by articulating over and over again the principles that drive them (Lakoff 2006).

This new, values-based approach to politics entails thinking in a new way. In the past several decades, American progressives have generally accepted the frameworks of the current political system and relied upon pre-set polling and surveys as the best indicator of what people think and believe. But while these research methods provide valuable information, they frequently fail to capture the nuances of what people have to say.

In addition to polls and surveys, Americans need ongoing and engaged forms of participation that allow citizens to shape the priorities and values we pursue as a country. We need inspirational visions for public engagement, which move us towards our most ambitious ideas about what we can be.

Progressive women activists can help us get there. In their public and private lives, they embody and articulate a new framework for politics that emerges from their values. Taken as a whole, these values provide precisely the motivation that progressive Americans so desperately need to generate a new, compelling approach to politics.

COMMUNITY

Chapter ONE

“Community” represents one of the values that progressive women activists most commonly articulate. For many Americans, this word evokes an image of placid streets with overhanging trees, kids riding their bikes, and adults sharing home-grown vegetables—a haven of neighborliness. At first glance, this vision seems closer to private than public life.

But there is something vitally public and profoundly political about community. Here, at the most grassroots level, citizens live out their hopes and dreams for themselves, their families, their towns, and their cities.

Women’s activism historically has begun within local communities, where women are responsible for pursuing their children’s educations and developing the networks that support their families. Even today, simply knowing their neighbors is a significant factor in whether women are politically involved, while it is not for men (Cai-azza and Hartmann 2001).

For many women, however, the activism they undertake in their local areas is motivated not only by knowing their neighbors but also by a deep sense of connection with those around them. At the heart of the value of community lies the conviction that all human beings are interrelated and, as a result, both responsible for and accountable to each other.

This sense of responsibility and accountability to all people pushes us to extend our communities to include those who have backgrounds and experiences different from ours. Progressive women activists talk about community as a place where we encounter people from all walks of life with whom we develop relationships of mutuality, caring, and support. As we form and sustain these relationships, we create a sense of common goals and the common good.

I’ve worked with a lot of different people, a lot of different institutions, both non-profit, public. How all of that works together to create a place and pride and prosperity is very important to me, and I value that. . . . I’ve been guided by the experiences of having good relations and interactions with people of all different races and classes, ethnic groups, income groups, whatever it may be.

I believe in the value of collective action and community, that we’re more than just a bunch of individuals. That there is a really important role for community and the common good, and that gets lost.

In talking about community and the common good, we must not ask individuals to ignore their self-interest. Community does not erase our individual needs and goals; rather, it provides a context in which we receive the support and care necessary to realize them (and in which we extend such support and care to others as well).

Most of us are part of multiple communities that we connect with through various dimensions of our lives, such as our work, education, religious practice, and family. When we participate in these many communities, it is important that we include and hear the voices of all those who constitute them. This means, according to progressive women activists, that we must deliberately seek out the perspectives of those who are traditionally left out of defining the common good. We must also create space for dissent:

[People need] spaces to not just dialogue, but think about their vision and strategy of how they can make differences in their communities in a systemic way. They need to know that they do not have to want what other people want.

As a political value, “community” points to policies and practices that encourage us to be responsible for and accountable to one another, and to create diverse networks of relationships.

Questions:

- What does community mean to you as a political value?
- How do you see individuals and groups in your area living out the value of community?

Women Talk about Community: Ilene and Teresa

Ilene is an African American Bah’ai who runs a community organization pursuing leadership development and conflict transformation in a diverse, low-income DC neighborhood. Her work encourages intergenerational bridge building and uses innovative technology to facilitate collective action across language barriers.

My community was a hub of newcomers from other countries and of racial diversity. A very intense transition was happening in the community, and it was causing some tension, some polarization, but also some opportunities for different groups to work together for the common good of the community.

I see us as one human family, but I see that we have barriers to making those connections. And I think that there’s a lot of value and a lot of information and knowledge and opportunity for us to learn from each other to build a better community, if not a better society, even

a better world, if we can find a way to convene ourselves and to work on areas that we have a common interest in, and for the good of all, for the common good. As simple as it sounds, it is difficult to do—for some obvious reasons and then some that are not so obvious.

One of the not-so-obvious reasons is that we don't speak the same language. And that became very clear to us, as I and the group started trying to figure out ways to work across language and cultural groups, that we had to build some capacity to do that. It isn't automatic.

Teresa is a young white activist, raised Baptist in Ohio and now working in Chicago, who promotes local issues of worker justice. She believes deeply that all people are interconnected, and thinks that it is impossible for individuals to remove themselves from the suffering of others without compromising the safety and security of the overall community.

There was a poultry plant not far from where I went to school, and...there was a woman, somehow we were connected to her through one of the church groups on campus, and she needed someone to come translate. She was going around to workers who had just arrived from Guatemala, and talking to them and giving them some necessities, because they'd come up on a bus with two suitcases and had nothing. So she was giving out pots and pans and blankets and things like that. And so I went and translated for her, and we talked to these folks and they had all these burns on their arms, and I started asking them about their jobs. They basically had burns on their arms from the cleaning chemicals in the plants. It all sort of came together in that experience for me, and I decided that [community organizing] was what I wanted to do.

I guess my world view is that biologically and spiritually and environmentally we're all connected to each other. And even though some people are able to remove themselves from that connection based on wealth and privilege, ultimately we are all connected. So if you're paying poverty wages, and you've got a community in crisis where the families can't spend time with their children, or participate in politics or civic life because all they can do is work, just to make ends meet, or simply because they're demoralized because they can't find a job that pays anything and they don't see the system working for them, then you've got all kinds of problems in a community, and it affects security and safety and health and welfare and everything.

Question:

- How can the value of community frame our priorities for political, economic, and social change? Brainstorm ideas and ways of articulating these priorities.

Community as a Guideline for Policy and Practice

Community as a Frame: Mixed-Income, Mixed-Use Housing

Policies that encourage interactions among people of different backgrounds, particularly when they occur in our everyday experiences, are a key to building community. These interactions can create a stronger commitment to the common good, engender a sense of social trust and solidarity, and empower individual engagement in civic life. When we encounter those who are different from us, we often discover not only that we can learn much from our differences but also that despite these differences, we have some things in common. Bringing together diverse groups of people, then, can encourage what social scientists call “bridging social capital”—developing norms of reciprocity that cross lines of difference and are associated with healthier communities and higher levels of civic and political engagement (Putnam 2000).

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THE CHALLENGE TO ACT

Unfortunately, in many schools and neighborhoods segregation by race and class discourages bridging social capital. Most of us can go through days or even weeks without meaningful interactions with people who are different from us. In part, this segregation results from stubborn and persistent levels of racial, ethnic, and class segregation in cities and neighborhoods. Hispanics and Asian Americans have actually experienced increased levels of segregation since the 1980s, and although there has been a decline in race-based residential segregation among African Americans, it is still higher for this group than for any other (Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz 2002).

One strategy for encouraging interactions across socioeconomic and racial differences is to promote mixed-income, mixed-use housing. This kind of development creates residential areas that are affordable to people at different economic levels, where they may interact on a daily basis. It also mitigates the geographic distinctions among various aspects of our lives—living, shopping, working—and the desertion of large areas of cities at night or during the day. It is a policy that can reduce levels of economic hardship, crime, and other social and economic problems, because subsidized apartments clustered in poor inner-city neighborhoods can actually raise rates of poverty and related social problems (Urban Institute 2007).

Usually, this model of housing is presented primarily as a support for low-income families. These programs have grown out of a need to promote or improve affordable housing, and they are usually described as benefiting those who cannot afford market rates within a city or town. Because women, and particularly single mothers, are more likely to be poor, mixed-income housing is more likely to benefit them—at least from a perspective focused on individual and economic welfare.

But what if we think about mixed-use housing as reflecting the value of community? We might make an argument like the following:

We need to bring the members of our community together to build bridges rather than walls within the places where we work, shop, and play. Although as individuals we have many different backgrounds, needs, and perspectives, there is much we have in common. Most of us want to provide a good life for ourselves and our children. There is no better way to do so than by working and living together.

This argument transforms a policy like mixed-income housing from a targeted welfare policy to one that is good for us all. It acknowledges that we all benefit from opportunities to interact in meaningful ways on a daily basis.

Questions:

- What other local, state, or national policies support the value of community?
- How might you talk about those policies using community as a frame?

Community in Practice: Bringing Diverse Women Together to Articulate Their Priorities

Groups that build meaningful connections across race and class often point to their success at empowering individuals from different backgrounds. By bringing together a diversity of people, they effectively build a sense of common experiences, interests, and goals that can help individuals to understand aspects of their own lives and marshal resources for change. For women, participating in diverse groups in which others articulate their stories and priorities can prove especially fruitful, because they often see their lack of power as personal rather than as linked to gender-based norms and discrimination. Interacting with others can enable them to see that such norms and discrimination—not just individual limitations or choices—limit their resources and opportunities.

Recognizing this, community groups across the country have developed innovative programs to bring women together. Some provide settings for women to talk about the issues they have as activists in male-dominated settings. Others create participatory research projects that ask disadvantaged and privileged women to collaborate on investigating the impacts of local policies. In most cases, these groups rely on the basic organizing strategies of knocking on doors, engaging people one-on-one, and doing sustained follow up. They also provide ways for individuals to articulate their own needs and concerns. These strategies are time-consuming, but

when effective, they can result in multi-dimensional, cross-cultural organizing that truly reflects the value of community.

In general, the most effective of these efforts are locally based, particularly when they target women. They are rarely linked to the most visible and nationally based women's organizations. Even at the local level, affiliates of these national groups do not usually employ community organizing techniques, in part because of the resources required. But the strategies of these locally-based programs could help them strengthen their grassroots support and increase their membership's diversity.

How might women's groups pursue this work if they are interested? As a start, they can more visibly prioritize finding and devoting resources to locally-based organizing that more intensely and intentionally employs such grassroots strategies. For example, they might follow the lead of community organizations and hire professionals to train and mobilize women in their communities. They might also forge new alliances with organizations and individual women activists who already participate in community-based organizing.

The value of community as a source of inspiration for social change is clear within the following kind of argument:

Successfully supporting women's activism requires thinking intentionally about who is in the room and who is not, and it means listening to why. It means doing outreach to women from religious, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups that are currently excluded or not well represented in an organization, and it means building meaningful and responsive ways to listen to their concerns. It means letting the people you hope to include in your work decide your group's priorities and strategies, from the bottom up.

Questions:

- How do your life and your organization's work already reflect the value of community?
- Are there new practices that you might adopt to reflect this value? How can you/your organization implement these practices?

Family has been the traditional domain of women, where they tend to hearth and home. Women historically have had the lion's share of responsibilities for feeding, clothing, and caring for their husbands, children, and extended families. They have also been responsible for making their home a place where their children learn the values and skills that will get them through life and build a healthy society (Okin 1992; Pateman 1988). For example, women traditionally have striven to see that in the home children learn how to live with integrity, negotiate power, handle money responsibly, and perform their daily routines reliably and well. In all these ways and more, family truly is the bedrock of society.

Women activists value family and what it ideally represents: relationships of connection, care, and support. Of course, families do not always live up to these ideals, and some women (and men) experience grave harm in their families. As a result, many women activists think of family as created rather than given. Family is not a static ideal but an ongoing process; it is the vital, mutually life-giving relationships that we form and sustain over the course of our lives. Our family consists of those within our communities who constitute our closest circle of caring and support. In some instances this includes our families of origin; in other cases, it does not.

Family functions in dynamic relationship to community. On the one hand, our commitment to particular communities is an extension of the care that we give and receive in the families we create. On the other hand, we seek support from our communities for the diversity of families in our midst.

I had to decide whether to have any more children. And there were so many other children, so many other families. And they were so beautiful. There was a community that I didn't have to create. My vision was so good at home, but it didn't have to be limited. So I realized that the vision was bigger than one family.

“Family” is both a source of and a metaphor for the importance of caring, connection, and support that women often bring into public life. These very qualities, however, have historically been considered inappropriate to the public sphere. Thus, a set of values closely tied to women's experiences has been rejected as politically problematic—and women, as politically unfit (Pateman 1988).

Progressive women argue that family matters to public life precisely because it promotes shared responsibility for individual and collective well-being.

I see other children suffering, and I think of my children and I feel outraged. I feel passion to make the world a better place in part because I want to teach that to my children. And just the deep love that you feel when you have children... it takes you away from yourself.

Through their activism, the women we interviewed show how much they value family and what it represents. For example, they promote programs that support the welfare of those who are disadvantaged—programs they see as embodying not just compassion but a sense of our shared well-being. They express concern about welfare “reforms” that make it harder for parents to build the skills and resources they need to ensure long-term security for themselves and their children. They question programs that require work instead of education to qualify for welfare benefits. They also provide supports for alternative choices that, in the end, are about creating family: gay and lesbian marriage and single motherhood, for example. In our families, we often love and support people who are very different from us; women bring this ideal into public life.

Many American policy debates about family have focused on matters related to “family” narrowly defined. In doing so, however, they have offered little support for the functions that families of origin historically have been responsible for—including women’s traditional roles as mothers, wives, and caretakers. For example, our policies have failed to provide adequate and affordable child care. They have not maintained a basic social safety net for low-income parents and children. Even domestic violence has only recently been widely recognized as a problem and addressed with policy; traditionally, it had been considered a “private” matter and treated as such by the law, policy, and many religious leaders and institutions.

Progressive women activists argue that our policies and practices need to more adequately address these difficulties and injustices. However, in extending the definition of family, they also redefine and expand policy debates about “family values.” By valuing the families we create over time, they suggest that this principle does not reinforce traditional gender roles or a rigid conception of “family,” but instead promotes collective responsibility for the physical, social, economic, and political well-being of all persons.

Questions:

- What does family mean to you as a political value?
- How do you see individuals and groups in your area living out the value of family? How do they violate it?

Women Talk about Family: Rose, Patricia, and Cheri

Rose grew up in the Upper West Side of New York City, the daughter of a Puerto Rican father and a Jewish mother. She got her start in community organizing at an early age and continued after coming to the Washington, DC, area for college. Her activism, now in a small city in Maryland, encourages multicultural organizing to address community problems.

In those years, the neighborhood was very low-income, and it was predominantly Black and Puerto Rican, with a smattering of Haitians and Dominicans coming in, mostly for work and that kind of thing. But then, a lot of gentrification started occurring in our neighborhood in the sixties. My mother was a very liberal Jewish woman involved in Democratic politics. And then the other parts of my family were connected to grassroots Puerto Ricans who were lower income. And our family was in the middle of all of it. As a young girl, really, just from being with so many different kinds of people all the time, I began to feel things that I couldn't articulate, but I felt them. I could only express it by saying something was right and something was wrong.

Now, I didn't even know it was called gentrification or displacement in those years. It was just my family, my friends, their families. And in the Puerto Rican community, when a cousin comes, they stay in your railroad flat, and they bring in all their family, and then you all live crowded until you help everybody get jobs and homes, and then the next relatives come.

Patricia grew up in Southern California and became a successful businesswoman before hitting a period of psychological crisis. Her difficulties, which she survived thanks to the support of her family, inspired a sense of compassion for the more complex problems faced by those without the advantages she had as an upper-middle class white woman with a stable and supportive family. She now plays an active role as a volunteer and board member of an organization that provides services to the homeless, particularly those with substance abuse issues.

I was having a very difficult time at the age of 24, 25. I was very successful, but I had a nervous breakdown. I just couldn't function. And having such a severe low in life, and being able to move back in with my parents—it made me realize that people in that situation who don't have family to fall back on end up on the street.

After I recovered I moved to Los Angeles, and I was constantly confronted with homeless people.... And I could understand it. I didn't feel like I was so separate anymore from their circumstances, except that I had resources and a family.... that gave me the empathy, by having a rock bottom experience.

Cheri founded and runs an organization that provides a wide range of counseling and transitional services to people in the District of Columbia. A white Christian, she started the organization with her husband, an Episcopal priest, who died unexpectedly at a young age; after his death, she took on a position of leadership.

Our work was targeted at a poverty-stricken, isolated, despairing clientele. But then what we found was that people started to trust us because they saw our success, and our clientele expanded to be middle- and upper-class, people who are successful in business, in politics, in the community. Because they also have needs, and so whether it was poverty of spirit or poverty of material needs, everybody started to come to us, and still does.

We have a very personalized approach because we embrace people as family. They become not only good friends, but family. It's a whole different kind of approach. And, we treat them as if that was our brother or our sister that is struggling—what would we want for our brother or sister? Well, we would want the best.

Questions:

- How might the value of family frame our priorities for political, economic, and social change? Brainstorm ideas and ways of articulating these priorities.

Family as a Guideline for Policy and Practice

Family as a Frame: Early Childhood Education

Policies that hold up the value of family, as progressive women understand it, support the formation of caring and compassionate families without entrapping women in traditionally-defined gender roles. With this goal in mind, progressive women endorse quality early childhood education programs. Such programs have two main objectives: to allow parents to work, and to give children a better start in their social and intellectual development. In both ways, these programs can support families' economic and social well-being.

Early care and childhood education (ECE) programs are an important work support for most working parents in the United States (Gault, Hamm, and Jones-DeWeever 2005). As of 2003, both parents were employed outside the home in 60 percent of two-parent families. Seventy percent of single mothers belonged to the paid labor force (U.S. Department of Labor 2004). This means that nearly 75 percent of children under five years of age with employed parents are in a regular

nonparental child care arrangement, including relative care, center-based care, and family child care (Sonenstein et al. 2002).

For low-income families, subsidized ECE programs provide access to a form of care that is nurturing and stimulating for their children but does not compromise their families' financial security. These programs, however, are not universally available. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, families living below the poverty level spend an average of one-third of their total income on child care (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Despite high out-of-pocket cost, 23 states have decreased the availability of child care subsidies since 2001 (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2003) and just 18.3 percent of eligible children receive child care subsidies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, unpublished tabulations).

Universal ECE would support families at all ends of the socioeconomic spectrum—with low and high incomes, with one or two parents, from urban or rural areas. Recognizing the benefits of early childhood education, most Western industrialized countries offer free or subsidized access to it. Childcare in many European nations is publicly funded, but supported by parental fees, which are then offset by tax credits, child allowances, and similar policy supports (OECD Family Database 2007). For working parents, this public funding can relieve a major source of stress: finding quality care and balancing the demands of work and family. Thus, ECE programs can help create healthier family environments, which is good for both parents and children.

Opposition to implementing universal ECE programs often comes from a fear of expanding the role of government and from a belief that individual families should bear sole responsibility for providing care to young children. Both arguments are colored by assumptions steeped in gender: that women (mothers) should provide this care rather than work outside the home, and that women's traditional roles in the private sphere are not appropriate areas for government programming.

A frame shaped by the value of family as progressive women activists understand it provides an alternative perspective that can resonate with many parents, both women and men:

Healthy families are the bedrock of a healthy democracy, where children and adults are nurtured, inspired, and loved. In our families, we should learn the values of caring and compassion. Early childhood education can support the development of healthy, compassionate, and well-functioning families of all types, by allowing children to grow within a shared commitment to their welfare and relieving working adults from their worries about the well-being of their children.

Questions:

- What other local, state, or national policies might support the values that family represents?
- How might you talk about those policies using family as a frame?

Family in Practice: Organizing Strategies That Work for Women

Like most American institutions, nonprofits and activist organizations are largely run by a traditional, male-centered model of movement building. This model does not embrace the values many people associate with family—caring, connection, support for (and from) others. Instead, it often teaches a confrontational and hierarchical style of organizing, demands that activists commit large portions of their days and lives to the work, and fails to consider the ways their strategic choices might differently affect the participation and leadership of men and women. Of course, individual men and women can embrace any form of organizing. In general, though, the structure and demands of activism limit women's participation more than men's, and most organizations do not take gender into account in questions of structure, programming, or advocacy goals, despite persistent inequalities in American political, social, and economic life—including within many activist groups themselves (Burns, Schlozmann and Verba 2001).

Some groups, particularly at the grassroots level, have developed alternative, women-centered models of organizing. They reflect the value of family by forming more collaborative, supportive structures. Sometimes these groups focus on issues that shape many women's lives but are less often addressed by community organizations, such as child care or domestic violence. In many cases, their work reflects the values that women bring as well as their experiences, based partly on their roles within their families.

To create a more supportive environment for women, organizations can consider strategies designed to acknowledge and respond to the differences between women's and men's experiences. A crucial step is to ensure that women's voices shape groups' development and priorities from the beginning, and that they are not penalized for articulating their ideas as women. From there, organizations can continually take stock of the intentional and unintentional effects of their policies, strategies, and priorities on the participation of women and men. They can ask for input on ways to improve and adjust their practices accordingly.

Many groups encourage these discussions using a variety of techniques. Often, they provide women the space to name and explore their psychological barriers to politics and leadership, including why some are uncomfortable taking on public roles. They also push women to apply their analyses of power and self-interest to

their activism and leadership as women. They do this through role plays and readings, facilitated discussions, one-on-one conversations, and even presentations to a larger group. Another strategy that can set a tone of welcome and safety involves celebrating women's lives and experiences as expressed through traditions, symbols, and role models in religion, politics, and history.

This process can prove difficult because it requires women and men to examine how they have conformed to the expectations and limits imposed on them by religious, political, and social norms and institutions. But it also can transform both individuals and organizations by generating a sense of support and possibility. Groups can think of it this way:

By embracing the values that family represents—caring, connection, support for others—we can give individuals and groups a sense of safety, solidarity, and even love. This, in turn, will empower participation and public voice among those usually left out.

Questions:

- How do your life and your organization's work reflect the value of family?
- Are there new practices that you might adopt to reflect this value?
How can you/your organization implement these practices?

For progressive women activists, the principle of equality balances the responsibilities of community and family. It helps us to recognize that we must not only support others but also take care of our own well-being. At a most basic level, equality underscores this need for self-care and respect by honoring human dignity and individual autonomy. It affirms our own worth and freedom (and requires us to recognize others' as well). Equality, then, gives every person the space to exercise choice and moral authority within their own lives—and validates the integrity of the decisions they make.

Fairness, equality are probably two of the highest values for me. As a feminist, what draws me to the work is this idea that things should be fair and equal for people regardless of their gender, their class background, or their race.

While the language of equality echoes feminist calls for equal rights, equality goes well beyond this. It does not mean simply being accepted in a man's world, on men's terms; rather, it involves revamping the world to fully include the values and experiences that women often articulate—and listening to what women have to say about them. Equality means not just granting women equal pay in the workplace but also valuing the work they do as caregivers, and recognizing this work as important not just to individual families but to society as a whole. It means supporting, through policy and practice, both women and men in their multiple roles.

Women still do not have equality with men in either private or public life. In private life, many women find that patriarchal norms and values continue to shape their interactions with men. For example, women who work the same number of hours outside the home as their male partners often continue to bear most of the responsibility for housework and child care.

Women still do 80 percent of the work in their families, and when we talk with our friends we recognize that we're kind of all in the same situation.

In public life, the inequality women experience stems partly from the traditional view of women as lacking the necessary qualities to make good choices. Political philosophers who shaped the values of our democratic system—such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, and Niccolò Machiavelli—argued that women do not have sufficient rationality, sensibility, courage, competitive drive,

and self-interest to participate in the political enterprise (Okin 1992; Pateman 1988). For these reasons, they deemed women unfit to exercise political, religious, and moral authority. Despite important changes in women's roles, these assumptions still shape public life. We see this in the slow rate at which women assume leadership positions as well as in the resistance they face when they do so—resistance that is often based on assumptions about their “natural” inability to lead effectively and decisively.

For women to have equality in public and private life, our political, economic, and social systems need to change in many ways. As a start, we can value the work women do and pay them as much as men. We can work to ensure that more women rise to leadership positions in businesses, political offices, and religious institutions. We can also refrain from judging women and men for their choices about work and family. For example, we should not penalize those who leave the workforce to care for children or elderly parents by reducing benefits such as Social Security. Instead, we should provide women (as well as men) with real choices in their roles in politics, the economy, religion, and private life. We also should acknowledge that women can make good choices and exercise individual moral authority—for example, by giving them the resources to determine the course of their reproductive lives and to oversee their reproductive health.

In addition to these changes in policy, equality also requires promoting women's self-esteem and their ability to walk away from degrading or demeaning situations. It does not help to create policies that open up new opportunities for women if they lack the confidence or support necessary to pursue them. In our current society, strengthening women's self-esteem involves not only validating their intelligence and ability to lead but also resisting cultural practices that demean and objectify women's bodies. The principle of equality, then, honors the integrity of women's bodies as well as their minds.

Women's experiences with equality (or the lack thereof) have taught them its deep importance. Often, people misunderstand equality and assume that it means everyone is (and should be treated) the same. Indeed, this is how the language of equality has functioned in most contemporary political rhetoric. The women we interviewed, however, interpret equality quite differently. For them, it does not mean sameness; rather, equality recognizes human differences while challenging our tendency to make these differences the basis for privilege and subordination. Progressive women activists insist, then, that equality requires us to recognize the impact of gender, race, class, and other forms of injustice in public and private life. They maintain as well that it requires us to adopt policies and practices that help women and other disadvantaged groups claim power and opportunity.

Questions:

- What does equality mean to you as a political value?
- How do you see individuals and groups in your area living out the value of equality? How do they violate it, particularly for women?

Women Talk about Equality: Alice, Jane, and Mirin

Alice is a formerly homeless woman who now works on issues of homelessness and prostitution. A young African American, Alice has aspirations to run for higher office. She sees self-esteem as a particular problem for the women she serves, and she says she is working for a world where all women have respect, equality, and the resources they need to thrive.

I've been homeless before. As young as age 5 I lived in a shelter, and as old as age 15. My mother and I would live together and then we'd lose that place, then I'd live with a friend, or we'd live with her boyfriend, and he may kick us out. So it was a difficult childhood, you could say. And I was raised by a single mother from Jamaica, and I've just always seen injustice to a certain extent, even as a young person.

Because of my own homeless situation as a child, I went through a school system that pretty much discriminated against me, and I really would hope that the work that we do here... that there wouldn't be any homeless children who are pushed out of schools, or who, like myself, don't have a place to go after school. I would like to change some of the negative stereotypes around homelessness and prostitution and people coming out of prison... I'd like to see society step up and take ownership for some of these people who are being left behind, who are falling through the cracks.

Some women have told me really crazy stories about why they're at where they are, with drug addiction, with domestic violence, and it all ties back to a man, a lot of it, women giving up their selves, their rights, their personality for a man, and that sometimes makes them weak. And I notice that some of the women who really overcome either have a very supportive man who's been true to them, or have decided, "I don't need any more of these abusive men who I'm falling prey to." So that leads back to self-esteem and dependency issues, that's one thing I've noticed.

Jane is a white feminist leader who has been active in women's organizing for over 30 years. She has led several national campaigns around women's rights, and she insists that feminists have clear, compelling values for public life.

I think fairness is clearly the most basic value. It's interesting. I had a bad dream the other night about Mother's Day. I'd been writing columns all day about Mother's

Day, and I dreamed that some woman asked me how come I was a mother since I was also a feminist. And I just explained to her, I said, "Do you believe in social, political, and economic equality for women?" And she said, "Yes." And I said, "Then you're a feminist." So those are the values.

Mirin is an Asian American Sikh involved in local interfaith understanding, religious freedom, and youth development in the Washington, DC, area. She sees this work as inspired by her faith, which requires her to promote equality for all and to stand for social justice.

I respect everyone, and I think this is not a time for us to be secluded from each other. We can work together for humanity, for a noble cause, for a common cause. The Sikh religion is a very active religion. It is not a passive religion. It is a religion that tells you to stand for the upliftment of others. It tells you, in a very proactive way, to stand for social justice. It teaches the value of equality, the value of liberty. The Sikh religion emphasizes that women are equal to men, that anything that the men can do, women can do. It teaches you to follow God's will, but it also teaches you to be proactive in life, to do good to others, to stand up for the rights of others.

Questions:

- How can the value of equality frame our priorities for political, economic, and social change? Brainstorm ideas and ways of articulating these priorities.

Equality as a Guideline for Policy and Practice

Equality as a Frame: Gender- and Race-Based Auditing

Despite decades of progress, women are still far from equality in most positions of power. We are not proportionally represented in leadership within government and politics, religious institutions, businesses, or the nonprofit sector.

As of fall 2007, women held only 16 of the 100 seats in the U.S. Senate and 71 of the 435 in the U.S. House. At the current rate of change, it will take almost a century to achieve gender equality in Congress (Werschkul and Williams 2004). Within religious institutions, women attend services and participate in congregational activities in greater numbers than men, yet these high levels of participation do not translate equally into leadership positions. In some denominations, women's ordained leadership is still barred. Even where women serve as clergy, they rarely hold their share of top positions, and they often describe significant resistance to their authority (Cohen and Schor 2004; Konieczny and Chaves 2000; Maybury and Chickering 2001; Sullins 2000; Schneider and Schneider 1997).

In the corporate world, the number of women who hold officer and board positions has actually fallen in recent years (Catalyst 2007). Within the Fortune 500 companies, women hold just 16 percent of corporate officer positions and 15 percent of board seats. At the current rate of change, it could take women 47 years to reach parity with men as corporate officers and 73 years to reach parity with men in boardrooms of these companies (Catalyst 2007). Women also still hold fewer leadership positions than men in the nonprofit sector. Though women account for 57 percent of the top executives at nonprofit groups with budgets of one million dollars or less, they hold just 36 percent of these positions in larger organizations (Lipman 2006).

Policy does not provide many incentives for public or private institutions to encourage the leadership of women or people of color. Public and private organizations and institutions face few meaningful requirements to promote the leadership of women or people of color in order to receive government funding and/or tax breaks. True, those large enough (fifteen or more employees) to be covered by the Civil Rights Act cannot blatantly discriminate. If they have federal contracts or subcontracts and more than 50 employees (and a contract of fifty thousand dollars or more), they are required to create and implement a written Affirmative Action Program for each of their establishments (U.S. Department of Labor 2000). But enforcement of these programs is spotty. Moreover, the requirements themselves could be expanded and strengthened. What if all government-sponsored funding, contracts, and tax breaks were really contingent on promoting equality in leadership? Public policy could require businesses, nonprofits, religious institutions, and government bodies to report on the representation of women and people of color in decision-making positions. These institutions could be audited, just as they are for tax violations or other practices, to ensure reasonable progress toward inclusion. They could lose all forms of individual and direct subsidies if they failed to meet certain thresholds of inclusion.

In the United States, this kind of policy is often perceived as un-American, a violation of principles of equality in its appearance of supporting only descriptive (rather than substantive) representation. Americans worry that quotas will result in tokenism—and nasty battles over affirmative action, which often misrepresent the goals and mechanisms of these policies, have not helped. Generally, Americans are happy for gender- and race-based equality in leadership to evolve over time, assuming that discrimination will diminish as the years pass.

But we can frame this kind of policy in a different way using the principle of equality:

All people deserve to enjoy equality in public as well as private life. But for this to happen, corporations, religions, and nonprofits need to find qualified women and people of color and promote them to leadership posi-

tions. When only white men rise to the top, discrimination is playing a role. It's time to empower all Americans to pursue their own paths with dignity and to exercise their right to make real choices.

This frame puts the burden of promoting women and other disadvantaged groups on those who fail to support their leadership. It asks them to think more critically about why they do not promote more women and people of color. In addition, it argues that organizations and institutions that do not have representative leadership fall short by not honoring the dignity, talents, and skills of potential leaders.

Questions:

- What other local, state, or national policies might support the value of equality?
- How might you talk about those policies using equality as a frame?

Equality in Practice: Decommodifying Women's Bodies

Feminists rightly argue that society's treatment of women's bodies is central to their life experiences. Issues as diverse as violence against women, reproductive rights, and the depiction of women in the media all point to ways in which the integrity of women's bodies is not honored and affirmed.

Even within women's organizing, however, issues surrounding women's bodies remain controversial. In addition to obvious debates over reproductive rights, feminists disagree about women's sexuality in our culture and in the media. Some argue that sexuality is a source of power, and so wearing revealing clothing or stripping can be liberating. Others counter that because we cannot control how others look at us, these choices contribute to images of women as sexual objects and therefore are demeaning. Feminists who object to the hyper-sexualization of women in the media find themselves battling civil libertarians, feminist and not.

When we think about these issues within a frame of equality, we may find room to pursue common goals. Working around questions of freedom of choice or speech, we can promote women's self-respect, which enables women to claim their status as equal to men, particularly during the difficult stages of adolescence and high school. During this period in their lives, young women often struggle with issues of identity, self-expression, and relationships. They are at palpable risk for eating disorders and mental illnesses that reflect a lack of self-worth. Some choose to have children at a young age as a way of asserting their worth and feeling loved.

To support young women at this stage of life, we can encourage educational programs in schools and community organizations that inform the public, particularly young people, about how images that objectify women affect their perceptions of themselves and others. We can encourage youths to explore their attitudes toward violence and the commodification of the body. We can develop a curriculum that examines such topics for classes on health and sex education—and we can encourage youth organizations, congregations, and other community groups to implement it as well. When we recognize respect for women’s bodies as a central value of social justice work and a key to equality, dealing with these issues can become a core concern:

Promoting and implementing education programs about the commodification of women’s bodies encourages respect for women. It gives young women the confidence and tools to live within a society saturated with images that objectify and demean them. It encourages young men to reject these images as well, out of respect for the dignity of women as full human beings. When we promote respect for women, then, we come one step closer to a world in which women see themselves as equal to men and are treated as such in their public and private lives.

Questions:

- How does your life and organization’s work already reflect the value of equality?
- Are there new practices that you might adopt to reflect this value? How can you/your organization implement these practices?

Power is often understood as a crude, if undeniably important, factor in political life. We assume that politics is about maximizing power—the ability to make things happen. And we see those who want power as somehow adulterated. Many of us subscribe to the maxim, “power corrupts.”

But power has a positive side, too. It enables us to achieve political, economic, and social change. Progressive women activists, then, recognize that power is essential for creating and implementing new visions for public life that move beyond traditional models and frames.

Because women have been marginalized from traditional forms of political, economic, and social power, progressive women activists understand both the importance of power and how it can easily be abused. They seek to claim it and return it to their communities—including those with limited power. They understand that when we have power, we also have a responsibility to empower others, especially those with the least of this crucial resource.

Progressive women activists thus embrace but redefine power: They want power to be shared and multiplied. They want to include diverse voices in public life through innovative and responsive strategies. Progressive women activists recognize that this inclusion of diverse voices—the sharing of power—is integral to the creation of equality within interpersonal relationships, communities, and societies.

Progressive women activists understand, however, why many people do not participate in political life: It does not seem to reflect the issues or priorities of their daily lives. They recognize ways that those with little power are discouraged from claiming it through election laws, intimidation, misinformation, and even cultural norms.

Progressive women activists also recognize the costs many of us suffer when we try to claim power:

[Not taking part] allows one to live without responsibility for our lives and the lives of the ones we care about... A reflection into one's own life is not only about your hesitations or fears about the public world, but about how you became that way and what you would lose if you entered.

Claiming political power means putting oneself on the line, which requires both self-reflection and strength. For those who traditionally have experienced exclusion from many dimensions of public life, this involves taking a significant risk. Progressive women thus stress the importance of developing creative ways to encourage those with little power to take a chance and seek to claim it.

Questions:

- What does power mean to you as a political value? Do you agree with the definition above?
- How do you see individuals and groups in your area living out this model of power? How do they violate it, particularly for women?

Women Talk about Power: Mary, Layla, and Martina

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THE CHALLENGE TO ACT

Mary is an African American activist addressing hunger, self-sufficiency, and other issues affecting low-income families in Atlanta. An ordained Christian minister, Mary has developed a model for leadership development that takes into account the unique obstacles facing women of color.

I was a real estate agent, and I was doing quite well <laughter>. I actually enjoyed certain aspects of that, but it didn't satisfy what I knew I had a calling in my life to do. I wasn't really looking for a job, though. [But someone asked me to apply to be executive director of a local hunger organization.]

In the interview I asked, "What's the mission of the organization?" And they said, "To help poor people address some of the challenges of hunger and poverty." And I said, "And who is the board?" It was a majority-white board of directors, majority middle- and upper-middle-class people.

I was very candid and honest. I said, "A board of directors that has a mission of addressing poverty needs to give poor people a voice and a leadership role in the organization—because they know better than anybody what's going on in their lives. And before I would put poor people on that board, I would train them and educate them on the responsibilities and the methodology of running an organization, and being a part of a decision-making body, which would take a number of years. It wouldn't happen overnight. But I would begin that process of turning over the organization to people who were being affected by poverty."

And so I thought, well that'll nail the coffin on me getting this job. <laughs> And the very next day I got a call, and they said, "When can you start work?"

Layla is a South Asian Muslim with many roles: community activist, political candidate, and mosque leader. She promotes women's leadership within her mosque and community. She insists that Muslim women must play an active and visible role in American society, to change images of Islam and Muslim women in the United States.

We had raids that happened as part of the so-called "War on Terrorism," and we realized that a lot of these women felt so violated—I mean physically violated, to the point that they were scared to death. One said to me, "I feel there are eyes everywhere now, but I also feel like this is the same as the gulag and the secret police that we ran away from." I asked these women to come together, and we talked for a while. Then I realized it's not just talking, it's getting them out and about, to do stuff. So we started taking them to talk to other women, and it's not political, it's just purely human and a very woman-centered, family-centered thing.

But then we made arrangements to go visit the Senators and the Congressmen of where these women live. At first they didn't want to go, because they were afraid. I literally begged, I cajoled, just come, just sit there. When we walked into the halls of Congress, into the Capitol, it was just incredible, because they were trembling. Then we sat down. Senator Allen sat in his office with his aide, and she said, you have to just tell your story.

And as they were talking, and as this person was listening, their voices got more and more confident, like okay, I can do this. And the whole point was to let them see okay, these people that make these laws, they're human, they err, but we also have to hold them accountable. So the women started to get really angry. That's what I wanted, I wanted them to get angry, and not be scared. So they got angry in the middle of the talking, and we just let them go, let them get angry. But they got up after that meeting and a lot of them got involved at a political level that they would not ever have thought of before.

Martina is a Latina community organizer from Southern California. Her work has moved from service to advocacy, and she has become committed to promoting low-income women's leadership. She has been at the forefront of developing a program designed to help women tap into their strength and resources.

I have tried to engage [low-income Latina women in my community] as much as possible, as part of their leadership development and training, through hands on, doing it. Because you can talk about public speaking, you can talk about advocacy, but until you do it, that's where you really learn. That's where you really improve your comfort level. So having them take different steps, attend a meeting, just be present. That in and of itself is a huge step, because it's a foreign space, it's not a welcoming space, it's

not a space where they see themselves included or mirrored, because there's nobody else like them in there, so even that step is huge.

Question:

- How can this model of power frame our priorities for political, economic, and social change? Brainstorm ideas and ways of articulating these priorities.

Power as a Guideline for Policy and Practice

Power as a Frame: Expanding Opportunities for Democratic Participation

For most Americans, voting is the “be all and end all” of political participation. Even in local communities, most residents never attend a political meeting, much less express their political needs and interests publicly. Some attend protests or call their elected officials, but few are involved in defining and shaping political priorities, in their communities or nationally.

Women and people of color have particularly low levels of political involvement, especially in forms of participation that extend beyond voting. Blacks and Latinos are less likely than whites to contact elected officials or be affiliated with political groups. Latinos are less likely than whites to participate in protests or informal community-based activities. In contrast, African Americans are more likely than whites to participate in these less formal, less traditional kinds of involvement—in part because they embraced these strategies when they were formally excluded from other forms of participation, and in part because they see them as more effective than traditional/formal kinds of participation. Women are less likely than men to participate in all of these activities except protests, where their levels of involvement are equal to men’s (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001).

Much of our political malaise stems from a sense that our participation does not matter very much. Certainly, in many cases what citizens do has little effect on direct outcomes, in part because our political systems are more representative than participatory in nature: We elect officials to run our government for us.

While it would be impractical for all of us to participate in every governmental decision, there are ways to strengthen the responsiveness of American political institutions. For example, it would be fairly easy from a policy standpoint to limit the influence of money on political decision making, to standardize voting practices, and to reform other practices that undermine faith in our political processes.

In addition, our elected officials and bureaucratic structures could more effectively integrate input from all of us, especially those with less power. For example, positive contact with government institutions, particularly among the poor, seems to encourage more faith in the government (Lawless and Fox 2001, Lichter, Shanahan, and Gardner 2002). To inspire such confidence, we could revamp welfare, police, and other programs to allow citizen input into their design, which would both provide people with a sense that their input matters and help build more effective programming. In addition, elected officials, especially at the local level, could develop and adopt mechanisms that bring them into more meaningful contact with the less privileged. For example, they could create advisory groups of low-income citizens or “town halls” in public housing.

There exists a great deal of room for developing innovative ways to make our system more democratically responsive, particularly because most movements for change have not held this as a central goal (with some exceptions). When advocacy groups focus on increasing levels of participation, they usually rely on existing opportunities for engagement, rather than seeking to broaden the relationship individuals have with particular elected officials or government in general. The vast majority of political engagement campaigns are geared toward voter registration and turnout. Some encourage citizens to write letters or sign petitions, but few go much beyond that. Even fewer advocate for the kind of far-reaching institutional change that would increase the participatory nature of our political system.

Similarly, rhetoric around increasing participation has been framed in a language of rights and by a limited understanding of equality as equal rights. Even Al Gore’s famous mantra from 2000, “count every vote,” casts participation as a question of civil rights and equality of enfranchisement, of equal access to power as achieved through existing mechanisms. It suggests that our institutions are more or less neutral in their set up, and in theory should work despite persisting socioeconomic inequalities. Only in their implementation are they flawed.

This frame only minimally inspires those who feel left out of the system, in part because many have a persistent belief that acts like voting or calling Congress cannot really influence our political institutions (Caiazza 2006). These forms of participation also do not significantly empower those involved, since they do not involve us in setting agendas or defining the choices presented to us.

What happens, though, if we look at power in a more radical way—as something that a wider range of people could share? Using this frame, participation would look remarkably different. It would be as easy as possible, inviting to the least enfranchised, and well-equipped not only to change outcomes but to set priorities and define basic terms—including such key concepts as our basic rights,

the responsibilities of individuals and corporations, and the role of government. We should all have a stake in participation.

In most communities, and certainly in the nation as a whole, this would mean massive change. Restructuring power through policy requires considering such challenging questions as the following:

- Are there ways to restructure lines of communication between elected officials and residents so that elected officials are more responsive, ongoing, and visible to disadvantaged communities? How might this look locally? Regionally? Nationally? How might advocates and organizations facilitate this new model of government?
- Can we revamp our bureaucracies to allow those accessing services (e.g., in welfare or transportation programs) to shape how they are delivered, so that contact with government officials can consistently empower rather than diminish them?

We might frame these efforts in the following way:

We need to create a new model of political power that embraces us all, no matter what station in life we come from. This kind of power recognizes that we may look at our politics, rights, and responsibilities in very different ways; however, by actively listening to each other, we benefit from new, responsive ideas and institutions. We can be transformed by and transform one another.

Questions:

- What kinds of local, state, or national policies might support this model of power?
- How might you talk about those policies using shared power as a frame?

Power in Practice: Training Programs for Political Leadership

Progressive organizations also can promote new perspectives on power through programming that supports traditional and new forms of participation. Some community groups, for example, have developed training strategies that empower disadvantaged groups to engage in political activism and participation. They run leadership development programs that address specific obstacles to public activism for women and people of color. They build movements and coalitions that

bring together diverse communities of those with power and those with limited access to it: religious leaders and the working poor, Senators and immigrants.

Most often, grassroots organizations develop and implement these programs. Although a few national and regional programs support them as well (e.g., the Gamaliel Foundation, the Midwest Academy), most national progressive groups, including most feminist groups, do not provide intensive mentoring or training for grassroots activism, particularly in ways that attract others beyond those who self-select. Because disadvantaged people generally do not have the time, inclination, or resources to attend such programs, organizations that want to broaden their appeal at the grassroots and increase their membership need to do outreach to promising leaders from underprivileged groups and support their participation.

In pursuing this work, it is important that organizations allow people not only to participate in their programs but also to shape the content, priorities, and strategies of their work in meaningful ways. Creating participatory structures within organizations can itself build a sense of efficacy among participants. When this is done with sincerity, it provides a laboratory for developing new forms of participation. It reflects a new and transformative model of power:

By developing new models of claiming and sharing power, we will empower and involve as many of us as possible in setting priorities, determining crucial needs, and envisioning the people, movements, and country that we can be.

Questions:

- How does your life and organization's work already reflect this model of power?
- Are there new practices that you might adopt to reflect this value? How can you/your organization implement these practices?

For most people, compassion is about expressing a deep sympathy for the suffering that others experience. We have compassion for the parents whose child is hit by a car, the woman with breast cancer, and the homeless person on the street. When we show compassion towards another person, we acknowledge their situation and extend our support.

Progressive women activists recognize that this offer of support must involve more than a sympathetic gesture or a few words of condolence. Compassion—truly coming to shoulder someone’s pain—entails struggling alongside them to bear and change the injustices they face. Compassion, then, is not a mere display of sentimentality. It is a value that inspires and motivates many people to social action.

Progressive women realize that when engaging in social action motivated by compassion, it is important to listen carefully to what others have to say. We cannot truly understand another person’s situation and decisions if we do not hear their own accounts of their lives and experiences. Compassion, then, means not judging people by moral absolutes, but instead recognizing that our history and circumstances profoundly inform our choices. It means acting with the knowledge that these choices often look different from the outside than from the inside.

A lot of times people misjudge, and don't understand, and are quick to judge people. And you don't know what people have gone through. You don't know why they do things.

Compassion is not traditionally thought of as a political value, in part because it has been relegated to private life as a “woman’s” value. In fact, the political philosophers who developed the basic values of Western democracy feared the consequences of compassion in public life, arguing that it would encourage people to act against their self-interest (Pateman 1988; Phillips 1991). They believed that compassion represented irrationality and connection in a setting that should prioritize individualism.

Progressive women activists challenge this claim that compassion has no place in public life by embodying this value in many ways. They work to expand the options of those who have few. They create opportunities for us to hear why people make choices that seem to violate “traditional” morality—for example, to have an abortion or to choose single motherhood. In addition, they encourage individuals, communities, and governments to support and make policy only after listening to

the different perspectives that others offer. In all these ways and more, progressive women insist that compassion can transform traditional politics.

Questions:

- What does compassion mean to you as a political value? Do you agree with the definition above?
- How do you see individuals and groups in your area living out compassion? How do they violate it, particularly for women?

Women Talk about Compassion: Ann and Roslyn

Ann is a young, African American AME minister who helped found an interfaith organization devoted to children's issues in Atlanta. A primary focus of the group is to reform juvenile justice so that young Black men and women have a second chance. She has mobilized women around legislation that makes it more difficult to try minors accused of violent crime as adults.

We've chosen the unpopular issues, worked on children who are imprisoned as adults. We've gone out to congregations—I've done that myself, gone out to congregations, done workshops with them on the issue. And it's the most wonderful success—to see a group full of people of faith, who when you walk in there, and you're talking about children who rape, murder, molest, and rob with weapons—first they're kind of going, uh huh, because my daughter was robbed at gunpoint. But then by the end they're thinking wow, but these are kids, 13, 14, 15 years old, and locked up for life. A 10-year mandatory minimum. And then you've got folks thinking about, well, when I was 15, I did this, and God, how my life would have been different if I had been locked up with criminals, adult criminals, for 10 years.

So to see the lights go on, to see the eyes well up with tears and the face turn beet red, and then to have people come up afterwards and say, I was not really open to this until you started telling me stories about these kids. Now I just need to know what to do, I need to do something.

Rosalyn runs a program for prostitutes in Los Angeles. A white Presbyterian minister, she calls on the community to understand how women decide to become prostitutes and promotes ways to support their health and well-being both during and after periods when they are on the street.

[When I started this work, I came to realize that] they were all abused. They all had been sexually assaulted. They were all school dropouts. They came from disproportionately dysfunctional families. This wantonly libidinous woman luring men into her

clutches on the street corner was really nothing more than the mother of three, who needed to put milk on the table. And this beat being incested. These women were abused and prostitution continues that cycle of violence and abuse.

People will ask me can we ever get rid of this, and I say, well, sure, we could stop doing this. We'd just have to raise our female children to be incest free, and in healthy families, and no sweat, there we go. There we go. This gets interesting flak.

One of the things that I've become very, very sensitive to over the years is what I call broken sanctuary. It's women who have been betrayed by a trusted institution, or a trusted adult. When dad was incesting you, and mom wouldn't do anything about it. When you went to the minister and said, my dad's doing this. The minister said, well, I'll pray for you, but other than that, I don't think there's much I can do about it. The survivors of that stuff remember mom and the minister with far more intense feeling and negativity than they do the perpetrator of the actual incident.

Question:

- How can the value of compassion frame our priorities for political, economic, and social change? Brainstorm ideas and ways of articulating these priorities.

Compassion as a Guideline for Policy and Practice

Compassion as a Frame: Supporting Single Mothers

Poverty among single mothers is a lightning-rod issue that has received a great deal of focus in the “moral values” debate. It is also a singular example of how approaching policy from the standpoint of compassion changes the basic tenets of political debate.

Many of the poor are women: U.S. poverty rates in 2005 were 12.7 percent for women aged sixteen and older compared with 9.2 percent for men. Single-mother families have the highest poverty rates, at 29 percent compared with 5 percent among two-parent families (Hartmann, Sorokina, and Williams 2006). Women's poverty is tied, in part, to occupational segregation, wage and employment discrimination, and limited educational opportunities for low-income Americans. It is also linked to inadequate supports for women's work raising children, including child care and paid leave. Without these resources, single mothers find it difficult to hold on to steady employment, much less pursue education or advance in their jobs. Welfare policies requiring work (rather than allowing women to pursue education) have only exacerbated the problem.

Recently, though, debates over anti-poverty policy have been distracted by a focus on the morality of single motherhood. One of the most visible policy initiatives around welfare and poverty has been marriage promotion, which is designed to “solve” the problem of poverty among women and children by encouraging women to marry the biological fathers of their children. As of 2006, \$150 million a year in federal funds were allocated for healthy marriage promotion and fatherhood.

Many conservatives and even some progressives have embraced marriage promotion as supporting traditional family structures, which they see as the root of a stable economy and society. Those who endorse this view construe women’s status as single mothers, rather than their limited access to resources and supports, as the cause of their hardship. They typically present women, particularly African Americans, as deviating from the “proper” or “traditional” moral roles that would supposedly bring them stability and financial security.

The value of compassion transforms debates over poverty and marriage. It demands that we listen to why some women choose to become single mothers, recognizing their moral agency and ability to weigh circumstances in making this choice. In doing so, we might hear about the options that low-income women often have: for example, to marry a man who has little economic security or to forgo having children at all. We might see how narrow these options really are.

In acknowledging the ways that social structures constrain and shape choices, the value of compassion calls for the government and politics to play a larger role in promoting the health of disadvantaged communities, rather than the smaller one that some have argued for in recent years. It does so to address the larger structural issues contributing to poverty: eliminating gender and race-based wage discrimination, providing universal access to early care and education for children, and guaranteeing paid sick and family leave to working parents.

Traditionally, progressives have framed these issues with the values of equality and economic rights. For instance, they have argued that rising inequality makes it harder for working families to build economic security. For many Americans, however, this frame does not work—in part, because we rarely think we are at risk of poverty, and so we do not see how such policies will benefit us or society as a whole. A frame that helps us see the world through the eyes of the have-nots can help us make a personal connection that engages and mobilizes us.

An approach rooted in compassion offers an alternative perspective:

Most of us are doing the best we can, but we still come up against hardship. In many cases, our adversity has a lot to do with our circumstances

and luck. Even when it results from our choices, we've often made those choices with the best intentions. And sometimes we must choose between less-than-ideal options. We know this about ourselves, and we can understand it about others as well. In viewing their lives and decisions with compassion, we can see the need to support those who have had bad luck or limited opportunities. To offer this support in a way that truly helps them, we need to listen to what these people say about their lives and choices, rather than simply assume we know.

Questions:

- What kinds of local, state, or national policies might support the value of compassion?
- How might you talk about those policies using compassion as a frame?

Compassion in Practice: Providing Opportunities for People to Speak for Themselves

The value of compassion can also shape the ways organizations approach social welfare in providing services and advocating for change. In essence, it demands that organizations move from working on behalf of disadvantaged individuals and communities to working together with them, based on how they articulate their needs, perceived opportunities, and experiences.

Since compassion requires listening, it asks organizations to engage in conversation with those they wish to serve, in settings that will guide their practices and programs. For example, service organizations might hold focus groups or workshops with individuals from the communities they serve, where participants can provide insights into their lives and hardships as well as feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of available programs to support them. They might also put members of those communities on advisory boards or staff and, where needed, provide training for effective leadership in these positions.

Such strategies should be integrated into programming on an ongoing basis, rather than employed on a one-time basis. When sustained over time, they can keep programming effective and empowering, rather than cold and dehumanizing. They can help ensure that programs address the issues they are designed to tackle. They also can encourage meaningful connections across lines of race and class, which help to build community.

Using the value of compassion as a frame, we can think about this work in the following way:

Ideally, the democratic enterprise should allow us to speak for ourselves, because when others speak for us, they often misrepresent our lives. When we talk about who we are and where we come from, others can better understand the circumstances and opportunities that got us where we are today. This builds a sense of connection and compassion. Ultimately, it can result in more effective policies and programming that address the issues we *face*.

Questions:

- How do your life and your organization's work already reflect the value of compassion?
- Are there new practices that you might adopt to reflect this value? How can you/your organization integrate these practices into your current work?

Balance is often associated with women, in part because debates over balancing work and family are among the most visible, ongoing conversations about women's roles. In fact, women are still struggling to find real balance in a society that has not adjusted to the new reality of their lives and the needs of their families. Balance is truly a problem for many women.

Balance is also something that many women value highly. For example, women activists often insist that work and activism not demand a 24-7 commitment from anyone, no matter what profession or class. They seek innovative policies and practices that help men and women find balance in work, family, creative, social, and community life. They ask that employers respect women's contributions and allow women (and men) to identify their goals and priorities for all aspects of their lives and adjust their work accordingly. They develop political organizing strategies that provide child care for participants and feed them dinner. They also fight so that low-income parents can have quality time with their children.

The most important value to me is family time. For a lot of people out there, it's in vain to work two or three jobs, to build something up that you never get a chance to see.

You have to meet people where they live. You can't expect them to drop their lives and just do what's convenient for [your organization].

Balance, however, goes beyond work and family. It also means balancing the public and private, the spiritual and practical, our rights with responsibilities, the economic and creative, and our self-interest with the common good. Women apply the concept of balance to all dimensions of themselves and their lives. They insist that we take them as a whole.

The values that progressive women activists hold themselves reflect the importance they place on balance. Indeed, these values keep each other in check. Equality, for example, balances family and compassion by underscoring that one must care for oneself as well as for others. Similarly, power without compassion proves dangerous, and compassion without power is ineffective.

The balanced nature of these values is crucial to recognize, because historically we have privileged certain values—namely, individual rights, self-interest, power, and competition—over others, such as compassion, family, and community. We

have also privileged the experiences and interests of a few white men over those of others. This lack of balance has undercut our ability to create real, participatory democracy.

Questions:

- What does balance mean to you as a political value?
- How do you see individuals and groups in your area promoting (or failing to promote) balance?

Women Talk about Balance: Helen and Joanne

Helen is a white Christian who has been involved in community organizing for 30 years. She has sustained this work by seeking balance in her life among work, family, and religion, which she sees as a source of sustenance for her broader struggle. She encourages the same balance among her co-workers. She also is committed to promoting supports for low-income families so that they can achieve the same sense of balanced well-being.

I think people who are grounded in lots of ways are more effective. They're more effective with their families, they're more effective for the long haul. And I certainly think that people who are able to practice their faith life in whatever way they choose to, it gives them some strength and some power and some grounding that allows them to be more effective in their work.

I see way too many union organizers who are crazy. I mean, they burn themselves out. They work crazy hours. They destroy their families in ways that really aren't healthy, and I don't believe are healthy for the work, long term.

I'm not saying you don't see some of that in the religious community, for sure you do, but I think it helps that our struggle is not a struggle just for today. The struggle is a long-term struggle, and I've got a role to play, and I've got things I need to be doing, but it's not just my struggle. I think balance, it helps us to be more effective in the long run.

Joanne is a Native American tribal leader who seeks balance in all of her life: between work and family, in the economic development of her tribe, and among the values driving her life. Although she is a practicing Christian, she sees her approach to life as connected to her tribe's traditional spiritual traditions.

[My dad was chief.] I was always so curious even though I couldn't go into important meetings. I would stand outside the door, sneak up on the table, you know. It was just always this thing that I wanted—I wanted to know what was going on in the tribe, so it was always this burning desire for me. And I guess I was just nosy.

You look at some of the basic elements of what I call the circle. The circle is... you as the individual, your family. And then your clan, and how that clan fits into the community unit. And then your spirituality, and how your spirituality integrates with the family and with the community, how it supports those structures, how it supports our tradition, to preserve and to be able to carry it on. And then, of course, economics has to be a part of that. Our economic security and our safety and well-being, and our political structures, they have to be balanced, right along with everything else. And our health has to be balanced.

And so there are many different pieces on that wheel but, you know, there needs to be a balance in all of these things, in order for our community to be maintained and be... what I consider to be a happy and healthy community, where people have the ability to grow and create, to be able to create within their own destinies.

Question:

- How can the value of balance frame our priorities for political, economic, and social change? Brainstorm ideas and ways of articulating these priorities.

Balance as a Guideline for Policy and Practice

Balance as a Frame: Paid Sick Leave

Paid sick leave can help workers recover from sickness or care for sick family members. Too many workers have no paid leave, and for them staying home from work means losing pay or perhaps even a job. This is a particular concern for working mothers, who have primary responsibility for caring for the health of their children. For example, half of working mothers, compared with 30 percent of men, miss work when their child is sick with a minor illness. Half of these women do not get paid for their time off. More than 22 million working women, including almost half of all women in the private sector, have no paid sick days (Lovell 2007). The problem is even worse in the industries that employ the most women. In retail trade, 55 percent of women lack paid sick days, while in accommodations/food service, 78 percent do.

In recent years there has been a growing push to extend paid sick leave to a wider range of workers, often by requiring employers to provide it. In 2007, San Francisco became the first city in the country to mandate that employers provide sick leave, and federal legislation that would do the same is pending in Congress. During the 2008 presidential campaign, most Democratic candidates endorsed the federal proposal to make seven days of paid sick/family care days a year

standard for all workers. A broad range of organizations support these efforts, including unions, immigrant groups, and women's groups, all of whom represent communities that will disproportionately benefit from access to sick leave because they are less likely to enjoy it now.

Those who oppose paid sick leave often express concern about the financial burden they believe it will impose on businesses (National Federation of Independent Businesses 2007). But the costs that businesses incur when workers do not have paid sick leave actually exceeds the costs when they do; without paid sick leave, many workers go to work ill, reducing their own productivity as well as the productivity of other workers who contract their illnesses (Lovell 2004). In addition to benefiting businesses, paid sick leave also benefits employees by allowing them to more effectively manage both their jobs and family obligations. When we frame sick leave policies with a lens of balance, then, the frame supports the idea that workers are full human beings with responsibilities that extend beyond their workplaces. It affirms that these individuals need support to balance the various aspects of their lives:

Paid sick leave can help families, and especially working mothers, balance their many roles and responsibilities. Most working mothers and fathers recognize how hard it is to do everything they need—much less want—to do. Working parents who lack sick leave may face the choice of leaving a sick child at home for the day or losing crucial wages that could pay for rent, food, or even health care. Paid sick leave can help them achieve more security and balance in their lives.

Questions:

- What other local, state, or national policies might help bring balance to the lives of women and men?
- How might you talk about those policies using balance as a frame?

Balance in Practice: Embracing Inspiration

Many activists, and the organizations they work for, fail to achieve balance between the drudgery of daily work and the sense of inspiration that first brought them to activism. This lack of balance is evident within organizations, where staff members often work many hours with inadequate resources. It is also evident in the outreach of many progressive groups, which often fall into the trap of trying to convince individuals to act solely through rational approaches based on facts, policy papers, and public education, rather than inspiring them with a clear articulation of values and a compelling vision for the future.

Facts are important to policymaking and to some organizations appropriately specializing in generating information and analysis, but most people are motivated by something more charismatic in nature. They are motivated by a vision for the world that stems from values and ideals more than from statistics and talking points. Without this vision, they often lack the drive necessary to complete the hard, sometimes tedious daily work that makes change possible.

One reason it is difficult for organizations to create and sustain compelling visions is that people do not all draw on the same sources of inspiration. Moreover, their sources sometimes conflict. For example, some of us find that our motivation comes partly from religion, while others consider ourselves secular. In addition, those who look to religion often encounter others who are also religious but hold very different beliefs.

Just as people differ on whether they find religion inspiring, they also differ in their use of the arts as a source of inspiration. Some of us are creative types who need music and dance to engage our inspiration; others find this kind of public storytelling alienating. For some, it is easier simply to rely on the structure of a traditional meeting or lecture.

Since engaging people's inspiration is so difficult, many organizations simply give up. This approach may create less conflict, but it also proves less effective because it does not connect with our most intimate beliefs and passions. In fact, the failure of some organizations to balance hard work with practices that inspire people accounts, at least in part, for the resurgence of interest in religion in political circles. Many of us find that religion embodies, expresses, and instills values—for example, compassion, justice, and peace—that give us a sense of meaning and a transformative vision. We want to feel inspired by such values and the worldviews in which they are embedded, and we want to know that our leaders are, too. Put differently, we want to know that they have achieved a healthy balance between carrying out the sometimes mundane tasks of daily work and sustaining the vision that makes it possible to do this work.

Organizations devoted to social change can benefit immensely from restoring a sense of balance by tapping into people's sense of meaning, encouraging them to articulate their deepest inspirations, and asking them to share their values—especially if this is done on an ongoing basis. For example, internal work groups might begin meetings by checking into each individual's lives and concerns. In more public settings, leaders might ask people to describe why they do what they do, or to talk about role models and why they admire them. They may also take leadership in talking about their own sources of inspiration and visions for the future.

Finding balance between generating inspiration and taking care of the mundane tasks of everyday work represents a key for organizational success:

To achieve balance in work for social change, we must adopt strategies that engage not just our minds but our hearts and souls. As we fight for justice we need inspiration, and engaging our passions can be infectious. Embracing our inspirations can help us achieve balance among our spiritual, work, activist, and family lives.

Questions:

- How do your life and your organization's work already honor the need for balance?
- Are there new practices that you might adopt to help people achieve a greater sense of balance? How can you/your organization implement these practices?

PRACTICE

Conclusion and Recommendations

This discussion of the values that many progressive women activists hold is incomplete without adding one more: the value of practice. In their long history of running family life, supporting the careers of their husbands, and doing the day-to-day work of churches, schools, and communities, women have “practiced” or lived out their values in many ways. Progressive women activists live out their values as well by promoting change in policy and practice.

I don't have a choice but to do something about what's around me.

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THE CHALLENGE TO ACT

When put into action, the values that women activists describe can transform American democracy to make it more inclusive, responsive, and innovative. They can return America to its most noble roots and build on women's long legacy of leading progressive social change.

For this to happen, however, individuals and organizations need to understand how values can generate a stirring vision for public life that translates into action. This report provides a framework that facilitates such understanding by encouraging individuals and groups to explore their values through critical reflection on several difficult questions:

- What values do we bring to the table? Do our goals, strategies, and public activism reflect them?
- Do our values and work adequately question current systems of exclusion in the political, economic, and social lives of our communities? How might they more fully do so? Do they provide effective alternatives to traditional strategies for social change?

These questions are only a first step. A second series of equally difficult questions must follow:

- How do our values shape our top priorities for changing policies and practices in our communities? At the national level? How can we effectively talk about the policies and practices we want to promote using values-based language?

- How can individuals and groups work together to promote these policies? Where might we build new and innovative alliances around them, particularly among diverse groups of women and men who are not currently well connected to activist social change organizations?
- What resources do we need to do this work? What supports might new alliances and partnerships allow us to provide one another? What are some innovative ways to collaborate with other groups to share resources and push for change?

Based on our research on women's values and activism, some answers to these questions have emerged for various activist communities:

Feminist groups that want to strengthen their grassroots appeal and increase the diversity of their membership:

- Can more intensively adopt the strategies of community organizing, including knocking on doors, doing intensive training in community-based political activism, and intentionally bringing together people from advantaged and disadvantaged communities.
- Can work towards hiring the equivalent of community organizers to strengthen this work locally, do outreach, and provide the resources needed to do community organizing work.
- Can help women in other organizing movements promote women's perspectives within these movements. While specific targets will vary by community, this often includes local unions and progressive religious/interfaith organizations.
- Can create ways for people at the local level to more actively shape national agendas and strategies for change.
- Can develop spokespeople for their movements who come from disadvantaged communities.
- Can consider adopting a values-based approach to their work that will shape both their policy priorities and the ways they frame them.
- Can look for ways to collaborate with religious social justice activists who share similar values and goals.

Religious and secular social justice groups that want to become more fully involved in this work:

- Can reach out to feminist organizations and support women activists who bring feminist perspectives to their work, particularly by creating ways for women to explore how their needs and concerns might shape the work of their organizations, and then responsively adapting their goals and strategies.
- Can recognize the barriers to women's involvement and leadership, particularly—but not only—within religiously-based organizations, and adopt strategies that help overcome them.
- Can promote women's empowerment and equality within other organizations, including religious and political institutions.
- Can work with other organizations to explore a values-based approach to social justice—for women and other disadvantaged groups—that is both inspirational and inclusive.

The questions and recommendations presented in this report touch on some of the most difficult problems of social change. These problems are easier to deal with when we have a vision that guides our answers, sustains our passion, and inspires activism.

An approach to change grounded in the values that progressive women activists articulate can provide this vision and engender more sustained, forward-thinking, and transformative movement building and political activism.

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The Challenge to Act articulates a transformative vision for American democracy rooted in a set of values described by progressive women activists from very different walks of life. Based on interviews with women activists across the United States, the report identifies seven values in particular that move these women to social and political action. It gives examples of multiple ways activists embody the values in their work, as they successfully pursue such challenges as building schools and houses, creating multicultural community centers, and securing non-traditional job training for women. The report then explores how these values can revitalize progressive politics by providing a framework for rethinking specific policies and practices. It concludes by suggesting concrete steps individuals and organizations can take to generate inspiring, values-based public visions that translate into action.

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