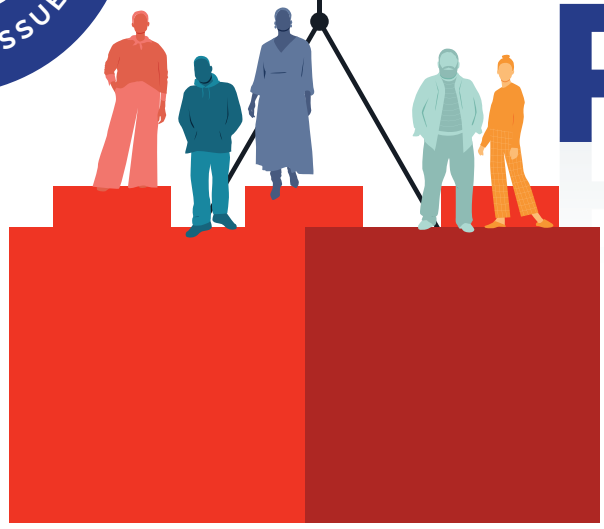


# PLAYBOOK

GOAL GO FOR GOLD IN COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION



## COMMUNITY IS THE STRATEGY

How Nonprofits are Building Power from the Ground Up



“NONPROFITS PROVED THEMSELVES TO BE EXTRAORDINARY WARRIORS. THEY KEPT SERVING. THEY PIVOTED AND INNOVATED. THEY SHOWED UP RELENTLESSLY FOR COMMUNITIES.”

Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2026 Nonprofit Trends Report

What drives a nonprofit to keep going when funding tightens, demand rises, and the landscape shifts beneath its feet? More often than not, the answer is the same: community. Across the country, organizations of all sizes are doubling down on community building, not as a feel-good add-on, but as a core operational strategy. And the data suggests it's working.

### Why Community Building Is Having Its Moment

According to the Sustained Collaboration Network, 73% of nonprofits that worked together with other organizations achieved measurable success, including expanded services, increased funding, and improved program outcomes. Research published by Candid in 2025 reinforces this: nonprofits that consistently engage their communities and act on feedback are better positioned to withstand disruption, because the community itself becomes a source of both direction and support.

### What It Looks Like at Every Level

Community building is not one-size-fits-all. It looks different depending on the scale and focus of the organization, but the underlying principle is the same — relationships precede results.

**At the grassroots level**, the most effective organizations show up before a crisis. Small nonprofits conduct listening sessions, host community tables, and embed themselves where constituents gather, such as faith communities, schools, and local businesses. Trust is high and feedback loops are fast because the line between staff and community is often subtle by design.

**At the mid-size level**, nonprofits are forming coalitions. A 2025 Stanford Social Innovation Review case study follows five hunger-relief nonprofits in Contra Costa County, California, including the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano and Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, formally aligned under a shared banner rather than merging after recognizing that food insecurity in their county was worsening despite years of parallel individual effort. They built shared data infrastructure, including a food equity “heat map” identifying pockets of unmet need. The result: reduced

Read more....



**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."**

MARGARET MEAD

You just finished our lead article, "Community Is the Strategy." I hope it landed as intended: not as inspiration, but as a call to action.

The evidence is clear. Nonprofits that root themselves in community, that show up before the crisis, build coalitions, and create genuine feedback loops, are the ones with the resilience and credibility to outlast disruption. Community building is not soft work. It is the infrastructure that makes everything else sustainable.

Our **Key Plays** feature brings that to life. In Community First, we spoke with Dr. Jovita Lee Miller of Advance Carolina, an organization that has spent a decade proving that relationship-based organizing produces real outcomes. Her message was direct: trust is not a tactic. It is a commitment measured in years, not campaigns. She also spoke to the role language access plays in that commitment. When Advance Carolina partnered with The INS Group to provide Spanish translation, community members became full participants rather than observers. Attendance grew, trust deepened, and the organization became more accountable to the communities it serves.

Language access and community building are not separate strategies. One without the other leaves people out. When both are present, organizations do not just reach more people. They build something durable.

Our **Take 5** asks you to examine your own outreach: Does your table reflect the full community you serve? Our **Stats Are In** remind us that 21.5 percent of Americans speak a language other than English at home, and grassroots campaigns outperform every other advocacy method by 13 percentage points. The community is there, waiting to be engaged. The question is whether your organization has the strategy, the relationships, and the tools to reach them where they are.

At The INS Group, we are here to help make sure you do.



A MESSAGE FROM  
OUR HEAD COACH

**RUTH PEEBLES, MPA**  
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER

Before your next outreach initiative, take five minutes to pause and ask a critical question: Who is actually in the room?

Effective community outreach is not just about showing up; it is about showing up for everyone. Take a moment to assess whether your table reflects the full mosaic of your community. Are seniors represented alongside millennials? Are people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, faith traditions, economic backgrounds, and career paths, lending their voices to the conversation?

Extending the invitation is only the beginning. True community engagement involves actively listening to and understanding the lived experience of community members. Not just who you assume are part of your community, but rather those who truly represent it. This is the heartbeat of cultural competence: widening your circle, listening deeply and ensuring no voice goes unheard.

**Five minutes. One question. Endless impact.**



WHO IS  
AT YOUR  
TABLE?



## COMMUNITY FIRST

### Why Relationships Are Advance Carolina's Most Powerful Policy Tool

The policy landscape shifts daily. Funding pressures are relentless. And yet Advance Carolina keeps showing up, not just during election cycles, but year-round, in living rooms, county seats, and advocacy halls across North Carolina.



That consistency isn't accidental. It's the strategy.

We sat down with **Policy Director Jovita Lee Miller, Ed.D., MPA**, pictured, to talk about county-level organizing, the power of language access, and why authentic relationship building is the only infrastructure that truly lasts.

**About Advance Carolina:** Rooted in the 25-year legacy of the North Carolina Black Alliance, Advance Carolina is a 10-year-old civic engagement organization. It serves NC communities across the Southwest, Triangle, Triad, and beyond through continuous, year-round engagement, not just when elections are on the horizon.

### Policy That Reflects the Communities It Serves

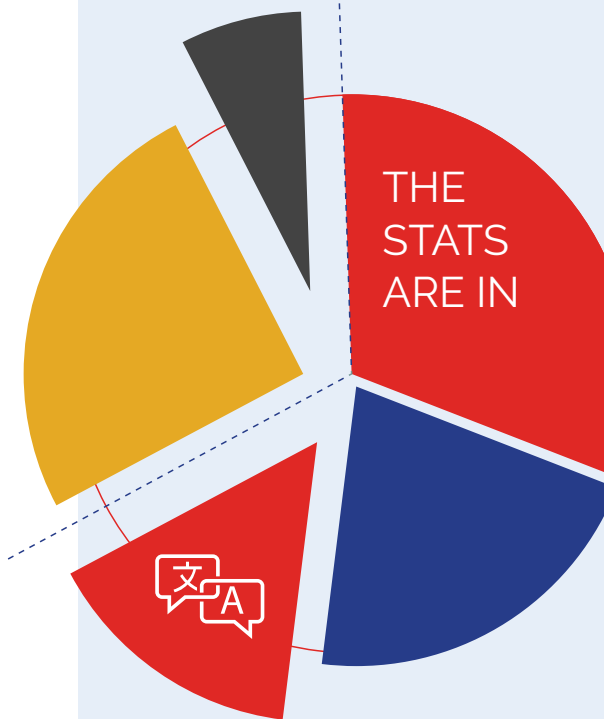
Most civic organizations show up when the stakes are highest. They disappear when they're not. Advance Carolina's regional staff work differently. They maintain ongoing relationships with community members all year, **asking what issues matter most, what people are worried about, and what would actually improve their lives.**

"During election cycles, that looks like phone banking and canvassing," Miller explains. "But off-cycle, we're still doing deep canvas conversations, trying to figure out what specific issues these community members care about most."

At the center of this work is the Black and Brown Policy Network — a body that analyzes and communicates policy solutions at the local level, where change happens fastest, and impact is most immediate.

This isn't abstract policy work. Miller describes their Advocacy Day teach-ins as a deliberate corrective to a frustrating pattern. **Organizations ask communities to mobilize without explaining why.** "We ask people to do a lot of things and mobilize them, but we don't actually take the time to explain why we need you to show up at the General Assembly," Miller says. "What is going to be the tangible impact?"

Read more...



More Americans are getting involved in their communities than ever before. In 2023, about **54.5 million** people — **1 in 5** Americans — took action on local issues alongside their neighbors. And it's working, when people organize, they win: grassroots campaigns outperform every other advocacy method by **13 percentage points**. But effective organizing means meeting people where they are, including in their own language. At least **350 languages** are spoken across the U.S., and **21.5%** of Americans speak language other than English at home.

Research shows **65%** of non-native English speakers prefer receiving content in their native language, even when proficient in English. For nonprofits, translation isn't optional, it's the bridge to the communities they serve.

## PUT THE INS GROUP ON YOUR TEAM

Our organizational development services help nonprofits plan smarter, lead stronger, and achieve more. Let us help you maximize your mission.

- Strategic fund development planning
- Organizational assessments
- Executive coaching (board and staff)
- Language translation and interpretation
- Sign language interpretation
- Customized board training
- Workshops: grant writing, fundraising workshops and other customized nonprofit management/leadership topics
- Community organizing, facilitation and stakeholder engagement
- Team building and development
- Grant research and grant writing
- Marketing communications and campaign implementation
- Project management
- Resource development assessments
- Development of customized fundraising collateral

**BUILD CAPACITY. OPTIMIZE OUTCOMES.**



**Are you looking for tools, strategies and leadership support to strengthen your organization and deepen your impact in the community you serve?**

**Contact us today for a free introductory consultation.**

Ruth A. Peebles, MPA - President  
919-266-3072 | cell 919-280-7069  
rpeebles@theinsgroup.com  
theinsgroup.com

## APRIL

National Child Abuse Prevention Month

Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

April 7  
World Health Day

April 15  
National American Sign Language Day

April 22  
Earth Day

