

# **ENABLE PASSION**

## **Echoing Green seed grant proposal**

### **1. What is your new idea to create lasting social change? When and how did you come up with it?**

Our mission is to promote corporate social responsibility and demonstrate the viability of democratic business while building toward community self-sufficiency. We seek to empower communities by building institutions and cultural enterprises rooted in collective power—alternatives to traditional schooling, food and medical resources. As these projects grow, we promote progressive culture via autonomous media outlets, and consult for organizations trying to democratize. Enable Passion grew out of both frustration and inspiration. We have consistently been involved in organizations promoting change yet lacking a financial strategy. While we try to engage our social justice work/play in an un-capitalistic fashion, the need for funding is clear. We are inspired by new directions in social movements, especially the Zapatista “Other Campaign” and the Argentinean Autonomistas. The face of power is changing—in favor of consensus, autonomy and collectivism—and nonprofits need to adapt.

### **2. As specifically as possible, demonstrate the need for your organization. Use statistics and references.**

Our work in education will challenge dropout and prison recidivism among youth of color. The dropout rate for New York City minorities in high school is 65% (Harvard CRP). Further, the NY Correctional Association noted that in 2004, 46% of youth released from jails were readmitted to detention the same year. We also believe in providing a living wage. New York’s minimum wage is currently set at \$5.15, the federal minimum. The ratio of CEO pay to average worker pay stood at 431-to-1 last year (Executive Excess 2005, faireconomy.org). In NYC, one-in-five residents live below the federal poverty line (Community Service Society, 2004). More than 5.6 million New Yorkers (1 out of 3) did not have health coverage for 2002-2003 (Families USA, 2004). Last, for a telling measure of political inefficacy with widespread implications, the largest group of non-voters is youth between 18 and 24, with 78% abstaining (AdCouncil, 2005).

### **3. Why have you chosen your specific approach to addressing the need described above? What is your theory or premise about how to create real and lasting social change that underlies the vision for your organization?**

Enable Passion is committed to building from between the chasms that keep specific experiences of discrimination separated. For lasting change it is imperative one sees the interconnectedness of sexism, racism and classism. We should not fuse the struggles of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, and there should be organizations devoted wholly to women’s empowerment; but, is there not a power

struggle men of color experience outside the home that fuels the need to exert abusive control within their homes? Enable Passion wants to challenge the relationship between racism and sexism, between classism and racism, etc. At the core, much of the oppression experienced by working class communities of color has been internalized there. Rather than targeting external state-sponsored organizations, we will build internal solutions based in the strength and ingenuity of marginalized groups. Dialogue and cooperation will ultimately provide the impetus for profound systemic change.

**4. Innovation is important to Echoing Green. Explain how your idea is truly innovative or unique. If appropriate, identify other organizations that are addressing this specific area of need and how your approach is different and why it is potentially more effective.**

Enable Passion is largely inspired by struggles for autonomy and workers' rights, which have particularly used dialogue and horizontalism (equal distribution of decision making power) as tactics. Enhancing each individual's ability to develop a vision of liberation and the skills to implement that vision are central to our organizing work. Socially responsible businesses like No Sweat have done important work developing consumer consciousness and awareness about inequality in the workplace. We will bring this consciousness into cultural enterprises designed to challenge the media empire. Interrupcion is founded on similar principles of non-competition and collective action. While doing incredible work in public schools in Argentina, they have only begun to sell fair trade products in the US and lack access to consumer markets. We will develop product that is recognizable, readily accessible and visibly challenging the status quo while serving as an internal source of sustainability.

**5. Describe your long term desired outcomes. Describe the activities and/or services that your organization will engage in to deliver these outcomes.**

As in summer 2005, the Freedom School project will serve as the first step in community empowerment, both for youth and adults. This was accomplished with light funding and the impact is immediate, offering skills in power analysis, action planning and grassroots organizing combined with hands-on arts workshops. Town halls will begin to facilitate the dialogue process and begin to network resources, spaces and concerned people. Once we establish funding, we will move the informal Freedom School through high school accreditation. We plan to offer credit to youth who are unable to thrive in the traditional authoritarian school by September 2007. During the interim period we will prepare to open a clinic combining holistic medicine with more traditional services. A food co-op offering affordable organic food to residents will be also be established. Democratic factories producing, for example, our magazine or clothing line, and housing will continue to empower workers and residents.

**6. How will you measure the impact of your work in the communities that you serve?**

The creation of new systems for the qualitative measurement of leadership development is essential to our work in education. In the context of non-authoritarian learning spaces, we have rejected the traditional definition of leadership in favor of self-agency, and through a combination of surveys and observation have shown that our experiential Freedom School model is particularly effective for challenging internalized oppression. Quantitatively, we will decrease the neighborhood's dropout and incarceration rates, and increase the number of people receiving adequate healthcare and food. Equally important, and less measurable, we expect to see a dramatic rise in people collaborating for the development of their communities, and galvanize a divided community on issues affecting us all. Our easiest measurement will be the success or failure of our commercial ventures, based on readership of a magazine, profits in clothing and record sales, and the size of a television and radio audience.

**7. Why you? Why now? How are you uniquely qualified to take on this challenge? What personal or environmental factors are driving you to make this commitment at this time?**

We seek to challenge the traditional theory of social change (changing laws) and the standard definition of organizing (building political power) in favor of building alternative institutions and internal funding sources. We firmly believe that self-determination will come from the development of critical consciousness in marginalized communities. We are not at the beginning of this movement, but rather seizing on this period of massive organizing against corporate globalization as the ideal time to integrate these new strategies with the indigenous organizing traditions organizing oppressed groups in the US. Inspired by the Zapatista concept of "mandar obedeciendo" (to lead by obeying), rather than providing answers, we seek to facilitate the asking of questions. The tendency of activists and NGOs to appear in communities and impose alien solutions is extremely problematic. Our approach is designed to address root causes while doing necessary support work to remedy the symptoms.

**8. Describe your experience with the proposed constituency or community. Describe your experience in providing the proposed services and/or working within the program area.**

Doreen has significant experience helping battered women rebuild their lives, and has recently begun teaching young girls. Rahula began teaching leadership development for at-risk youth immediately out of high school in Chicago. In the five years since, organizing in New York City for tenants' rights and against police brutality has come with a support network of organizers across New York. As a seasoned canvasser, Rahula is well-versed at meeting and building trust with residents, with the goal of understanding their concerns and passions, and helping connect them to local struggles. Based on early community input and conversations with parents in the

Lower East Side, we opened the Freedom School to provide what was most lacking, access to role models and arts training. Meanwhile, we built relationships with many community leaders, vendors, and families. Further, between us we speak Mandarin, Spanish and French, offering unique access to the diverse communities present in the LES.

### **9. Identify your current financial resources.**

Due to academics, we are currently in a proposal phase. We will incorporate and begin the nonprofit application in January. At this point we will begin grantwriting to fund the Freedom School, set to open in June 2006 as our first initiative. We expect to utilize resources from last year's summer school, including a small base of private donors and New York University, and significantly diversify. As we are founded on the principles of cooperation and mutual aid, we have sought in-kind donations of goods, services and spaces, in exchange for resources we were able to offer. Last summer we used a space which would have cost \$4000 to rent, in exchange for cleaning and painting the building. We were also able to draw from the resources of grocers in the Lower East Side to the point of spending almost nothing on food (originally the largest budget point) for the entire month. To date, this is our first request for funding for the Enable Passion project—we are rich in human resources.

### **10. Describe the major challenges and obstacles that you anticipate for this organization and how you will overcome them.**

So far, our asking-not-telling approach has lent to us being welcomed with open arms. While it is not difficult to provide services to people in need, it is very difficult to sell alternatives. If ultimately our funding is to be based in progressive artistic and media outlets, we are up against the empires of Rupert Murdoch, Bertelsmann Music Group, and Nike, and they do not take kindly to competition. Even more significant is the deeply engrained consumer mentality and branding of Americans. Teenagers still want the Nikes even after you explain that they are sewn together by children half their age. Our major challenge will be to establish ourselves as a pan-industrial alternative brand. In order to do this, we will establish a coalition of left organizations and alternative media outlets, drawing on our immense network of activist support, through which we can build industrial solidarity and cross-promote ideas and products.

*If you are applying as a Partnership, you will also need to answer the following questions:*

**Why have you decided to apply as a partnership?**

By default, we feel, a single founder of an organization committed to non-hierarchical structures and values would discredit itself. Our individual experiences combine into a strong dynamic: a biracial (Chinese and Caucasian) female who inherited the immigrant struggle but grew up in a privileged suburb; and a white male who grew up in Detroit (an inside look at America's urban third world). In the work we are passionately pursuing, these experiences forge a complex and critical partnership.

**Have you ever worked together?**

While we have briefly organized together in the past, our work has largely been with different issues and populations: Doreen with women's rights and domestic abuse, and Rahula with youth empowerment and alternative education. This partnership marks the evolution of our strategies into a new holistic approach to change.

**What distinct contributions will each of you make to the project?**

Rahula's experience teaching in formal and grassroots settings, and having opened a freedom school based in dialogue and collective decision making will prove foundational for our organizational model. Doreen's administrative experience, having managed a women's shelter in Brooklyn, and internal knowledge of nonprofit funding and government subsidies are essential to our sustained impact. Managing a hierarchical organization has also exposed the problematic nature of unequal decision making power.

**What challenges do you anticipate working in a partnership?**

Despite our demonstrated initiative to move from idea to impact, we expect to find our organizational styles to differ significantly based on organizing experience. Consciously overcoming these differences, and our ability to synthesize our theories and strategies, will prove to be one of the most significant elements our organization has to offer the social justice community.