



***Community Organization and
Engagement Milestones
for the
60th Anniversary of Community Organizing***

LETTER FROM COSA DIRECTOR TRACY SOSKA

Dear Colleagues and Friends in CO

As we reflect on our 60th Anniversary of Community Organizing at our School of Social Work, we are proud of the legacy this milestone represents.



Not only were we a pioneer in macro social work with the first Community Organizing program in any of School of Social Work, but we have built a strong reputation for community engagement that has helped advance our school and our university as a leader in building and sustaining community partnerships.

We are also pleased to reflect on our many Community Organizing and COSA alumni who have made impacts locally, regionally, and nationally through their teaching, research, and practice. Our alumni have revitalized neighborhoods and communities here and across the country. They have lead important local, regional, and national community-based organizations and efforts. Finally, they have informed how we teach and learn in community organizing and macro social work practice. This 60th anniversary we have identified our first slate of Master Community Organizers from among our own, a recognition tradition that we hope to continue at future CO anniversaries.

The following narrative provides some milestones over significant decades in which the School was involved as a leader for community organization and community engagement at the University.

– Tracy M. Soska, COSA Chair (with historic context from Moe Coleman)

1950s

The post-depression and World War II era had two contradictory elements. One was the relief, the rebuilding, a rapidly expanding economy, the creation of a modern social safety net, the discovery of a vaccine for polio, the growth of suburbs and the rise of the middle class. The other was the fear of the “Cold War,” the horrors of nuclear destruction, and the specter of civil repression seen in such events as the campaign of Senator Joseph McCarthy as chair of the US House Un-American Activities Committee, a spectacle the destructive effects of which reached all the way to the faculty of the Graduate School of Social Work (now the School of Social Work) in the early 1950s. These conflicting currents gave rise to a swell of social action seen in “Ban the Bomb” protests and a growing Civil Rights Movement marked by “Brown vs The Board of Education” and the trail blazed by Rosa Parks. It was also in this decade that the School developed and launched **the very first professional curriculum in Community Organization in the country.**



Dr. Wilbur Newstetter, dean, Pitt School of Social Work

Then Social Work Dean, Wilbur I.

Newstetter, brought community social worker, Meyer Schwartz to the school to transition the then informal “intergroup work” curriculum into a formally recognized social work specialization in Community Organization. From as early as 1914, a number of scattered courses comprised the community organization curriculum for which Newstetter coined the description “intergroup work” in the 1930s. However, intergroup work was an informal curriculum focus in social work education compared to the formal specializations in casework and groupwork that dominated the profession at the time. This first formal Community Organization major launched in the fall term of 1958.

This new social work specialization in Community Organization in the MSW program at the University of Pittsburgh would set a model for other schools of social work, and Newstetter's and Schwartz's writings in this area would contribute to the emerging scholarship of this field of community practice in social work, both within social work education and the practice profession. Graduates of this early program, including notables like Moe Coleman, would become the vanguard of the early "War on Poverty" programs in Pittsburgh and beyond. This new Community Organization specialization at Pitt would attract noted faculty members such as Jack Rothman and James V. Cunningham, as well as Coleman. This Community Organization (CO) focus has become a powerful legacy of the University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work now entering its 60th year, and during this time, the CO specialization has spurred community engagement within the School as well as the broader University and has had many highlights to recognize and celebrate.

1960s

The 1960s were the both the best of times and the worst of times. The Civil Right Movement, the passage of such landmark legislation as the Economic Opportunity Act, the Community Action Program, the Job Corps, the Food Stamp Act, Medicare, Medicaid, and the creation of Head Start marked a tidal wave of attention to social and domestic needs. However, the tragic assassinations and the riots that followed in their wake, also gave rise to white and conservative backlash. The CO specialization and its graduates (including Moe Coleman from the 1st cohort) led the early War on Poverty and its Community Action Programs, locally and in other parts of the country. During this decade, the School of Social Work, like many schools nationally, saw their faculty infused with veterans. In this period, schools of social work reaffirmed the legacy of Jane Addams, Manuel Conrad Elmer (who taught courses in community organization at Pitt in the 1920s and launched the current school in the 1930s), and other community social workers and academics by establishing formal CO specializations, as well as formal programs of Social Administration for which social work was also well known. Social Work CO faculty and students were involved with many recognized settlement houses and community organizations like ACTION-Housing and Neighborhood

Housing Services (now National NeighborWorks Association) that were early national leaders in housing and community revitalization. Long-standing SSW Dean, Dr. David Epperson, and interim-Dean, Moe Coleman, helped establish the strong community engagement legacy of the School heading into the next decade.

1970s

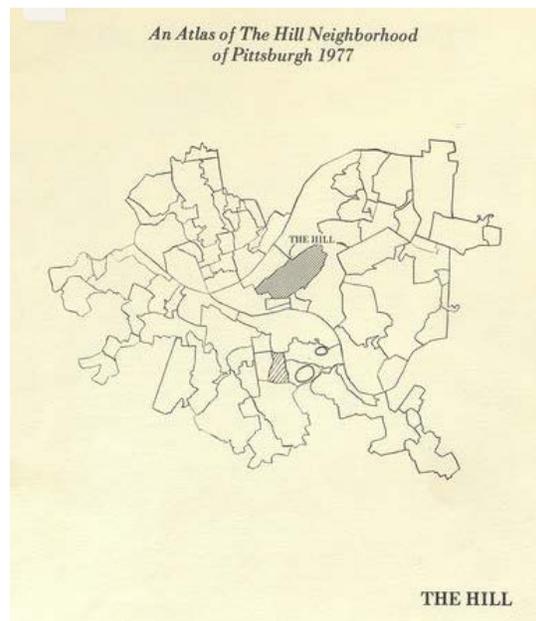
President Richard Nixon sought to both broaden the urban focus beyond the city and to advance block grant funding based on population formulas, such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), that were catalysts for great public participation and local control. A major movement was the neighborhood movement that arose in



Jim Cunningham at the Lawn Street Community Center

rebellion against urban renewal led by the work of grassroots activist and community organizers, such as Saul Alinsky, as well as the urbanism and planning work of Jane Jacobs. In neighborhood after neighborhood, community-based organizations arose to demand a voice in decisions affecting them in the wake of urban renewal and to demand

increased funding for services and revitalization in communities. Pittsburgh was again a leader in this work, and professor Jim Cunningham was instrumental not only in establishing the *Pittsburgh Neighborhood Alliance* (PNA - 1970) but in founding the *National Association of Neighborhoods* – National Neighborhood Alliance (1975) and supporting the development of



Neighborhoods USA (1976). He, along with Professor Roger Ahlbrandt, helped launch the *Pittsburgh Neighborhood Atlas Project* (1976) that published Pittsburgh's first formal reports on neighborhood demographics and neighborhood survey analysis since the famous 1907-1908 Pittsburgh Survey published by the Russell Sage Foundation. Cunningham's and Ahlbrandt's work spurred community programs and advocacy. Professor Cunningham would also chair the Pittsburgh Home Rule Study Commission that led to Pittsburgh's *Home Rule Charter*. Later, alums would provide leadership to *PNA* (Tracy Soska) and help establish and lead the *Community Technical Assistance Center (CTAC)* as a major technical assistance and capacity building intermediary organization for neighborhood organizations and their grassroots leadership. (David Feehan, Tracy Soska, Denys Candy, Leslie Reicher, and Moe Coleman were all involved in developing and leading CTAC)

1980s

Industrial decline in regions like Pittsburgh severely challenged revitalization in many now "Rust Belt" communities. The Reagan era saw another major shift to a new economic model that reduced government's role, attacked the power of unions, and seriously constrained the social welfare state and safety net in America. This decade marked the rise of *Community Development Corporations (CDCs)* across the country, and Pittsburgh and Pitt's CO



Jim and Tracy with CO Student cohort

program were a significant influence locally and nationally in this movement from neighborhood organizations to CDCs. In the Pittsburgh region during this decade, this community redevelopment movement arose in the wake of the collapse of the steel and other heavy industries in southwestern Pennsylvania's industrial river valleys, studied extensively in *The River Communities Project* undertaken by Pitt SSW faculty led by Dr. Jim Cunningham. This analysis of the impact of the industrial collapse on

communities and its peoples documented the economic, social, and community devastation during this period but also served as a catalyst for community revitalization. School faculty and graduates would play instrumental roles in developing and establishing a number of Community Development Corporations and human service collaborations in the region, **including:**

- ❖ *Aliquippa Alliance for Unity and Development* (Jim Cunningham and Cathy Cairns, later Pauline Cooper)
- ❖ *Southside Local Development Corporation* (Pauline Cooper and Carey Harris)
- ❖ *East Liberty Development, Inc.* (David Feehan)
- ❖ *Mon Valley Initiative* (Michael Eichler)
- ❖ *Human Services Center Corporation/Westinghouse Valley Human Services Center and the Mon Valley Providers Council* (Tracy Soska and David Coplan with faculty member, Dr. Barbara Shore)
- ❖ Pitt CO graduates also established a national model of *Consensus Organizing* and the *Consensus Organizing Institute* (Michael Eichler and Mary Ohmer, with faculty support from Moe Coleman), which supported the rise and growth of community development corporations.

1990s

This decade was another important one for reinvigorating grassroots and community leadership, which had waned during the significant retrenchment of social programs in the 1980s and movements to change the face of Public Welfare and Public Housing, that were hallmarks of Congressional and Clinton Administration actions during this decade. This was also a period when community revitalization raised a growing and continuing concern for “gentrification” as lower-income households and even local businesses were pushed out of their once affordable communities. The School worked on many fronts:

Empowerment Zone Project

(Jim Cunningham and Tracy Soska) – faculty and students from the School worked with neighborhoods in conducting community needs assessments and facilitating community dialogues for developing Pittsburgh neighborhood plans under the new Clinton Administration Empowerment Zone initiatives. Dozens of plans were developed during Mayor Tom Murphy’s early Pittsburgh efforts under this federal initiative.

Community Policing

(Jim Cunningham and Tracy Soska) – during Mayor Sophie Masloff’s administration, faculty of the School worked with Chief of Staff, Mary Lou Daniel to conduct community organizing and build training for Pittsburgh police officers to staff new mini-stations and beat police assignments under a new City community policing initiative.

African American Community Builders

(Jim Cunningham, Matt Hawkins, Tracy Soska, and Richard Garland) – the School trained well over 100 African American Community Builders through this initiative that was born out of “The Million Man March” in Washington, DC in 1995. Several cohorts of African American men and women in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County participated in a year-long training program to build the capacity of local grassroots community leadership. This program spurred several broader iterations of community builder training that were open to grassroots leaders from a wider range of community segments and populations. These included:

- **Regional Coalition of Community Builders** (Tracy Soska and Angie Devan) – The Regional Coalition of Community Builders (RCCB) was both a training program featuring quarterly training institutes and a biennial conference, which sought to mobilize and build capacity for grassroots leadership in Southwestern Pennsylvania. RCCB served to facilitate a network among diverse community-based, faith-based, and human service organizations from urban, suburban, and rural locales in this region.

- **United Way Leadership and Wellness Program** (Tracy Soska and Angie Devan) – the School partnered with the United Way, Leadership Pittsburgh, and the Coro Center for Civic Leadership to conduct and assess grassroots leadership training in communities with significant health disparities. This program trained cadres of community leaders that would also work to develop and implement a community-based health and wellness project.
- **Citizens Leadership Initiative** (Tracy Soska and SSW students) – working with the Coro Center for Civic Leadership and community centers and human service organizations in the City of Pittsburgh. This initiative trained and assessed citizen leadership capacity building among volunteers and constituents of those centers and organizations. Each cohort of citizen leaders would also take on a project that would build civic engagement in their community or organization. This initiative was aligned with a national campaign of the Alliance for Children and Families to build “New Voices at the Civic Table.”

The University Community Career Development Partnership or UCCDP (Santos Torres, Tracy Soska, Anne McCafferty, and Crystal McCormick Ware) – beginning with Welfare Reform in the mid-1990s, the School established a training program with the City of Pittsburgh under its Workforce Investment Board to work with single-female heads of households to help transition from welfare to work with the Pitt and UPMC. UCCDP was housed in the School and provided classroom training, supportive services, and Pitt/UPMC—based internships for these women to gain work experience and to work-audition for employment at Pitt and/or UPMC. This program ran through the School until 2010. Dozens of women were hired from their work audition, and many had children attend Pitt through educational benefits they earned as Pitt employees. This program was a forerunner of a current Pitt “local hire” program now in place as part of its “economic engagement” initiative from the Chancellor’s Office.

Institute of Politics (Moe Coleman) -

A major outgrowth of the Advisory Council on Regional Development in the late 1980s were the recommendations that led later to the founding of the Institute of Politics (IOP), an independent, community-supported, nonprofit organization operating under the University's auspices. The Institute delivers timely information on



Institute of Politics founder Moe Coleman

complex public policy issues affecting our region to elected officials, community leaders, and the public they serve by providing a non-partisan forum where diverse viewpoints are discussed, digested, enriched, and applied to the goal of promoting, improved quality of life, government efficiency, and economic vitality in Western Pennsylvania.

HOPE VI (Hide Yamatani) - The effort to change public housing to mixed-income communities arose during the 2nd term of the Clinton Administration and continued into the 2000s and the Bush Administration. Dr. Hide Yamatani undertook a series of studies of the local efforts for “changing the face of Public Housing” largely through his community-engaged study of the HOPE VI initiative that transformed Pittsburgh largest public housing community, Aliquippa Terrace into the mixed-income community of Oak Hill into the early 2000s.

2000S

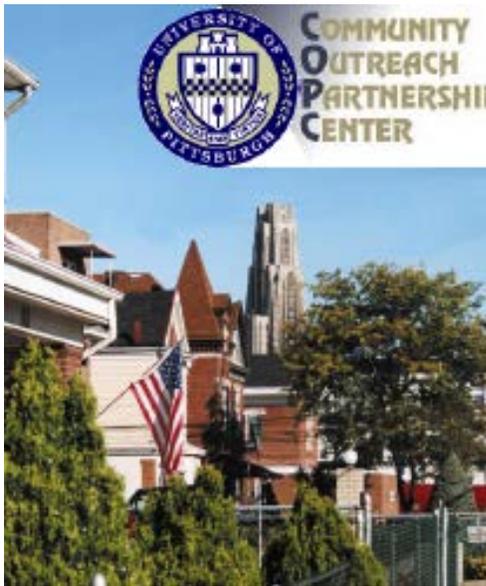
Even during the challenging second Bush Administration, the School maintained a focus on opportunities to advance community organizing through the rise of the community engagement movement that was sweeping through higher education and awakening a new sense of engaged scholarship and work that had long been a social work hallmark.

COSA Concentration (now Specialization in the MSW Program) – the School

combines its two macro practice curricular specializations - Community Organizing and Social Administration – that had been in place since the late 1950s, under the COSA Concentration. In 2017, the School renamed its macro practice specialization to Community Organization and Social Action (COSA).



COSA Students on Urban Hike in Mt. Washington



Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC

– Tracy Soska, with Sabina Detrick, GSPIA and John Wilds, Community Relations Office). This forerunner of Pitt’s Community Engagement Centers Initiative, Pitt’s COPC was part of a national program initiative of the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to mobilize university resources to address community-identified needs through partnership between institutions of higher education and communities. Pitt received two HUD grants from 2000 – 2010. The School provided project leadership along with GSPIA and the Office of Community and

Government Relations on this grant initiative that worked in the Oakland, West Oakland, Oak Hill, and Hazelwood neighborhoods surrounding the University. More than a dozen academic partners in schools and units across the University were engaged in working with community partners under this COPC, and a new generation of community development professionals gained experience in these community partnerships. Lessons learned from this project were catalysts for the new Pitt Community Engagement Centers initiative and influenced such efforts as PittServes. The COPC helped establish community engagement as a strategic priority and center for excellence at our University and in the community.

2010 – Present

EU-US Symposium on Social and Community Development: A Transatlantic Dialogue on the State of Community Work (Tracy Soska). In 2011 the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work coordinate the University Center for International Studies' European Union Center of Excellence spring symposium, which brought together community organizing scholars and practitioners from across the U.S. and the European Union to discuss the "state of community work" and how we are preparing our future community organizers and workers. This symposium partnered with the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA) in bringing national and international experts to Pittsburgh and the University for this important dialogue.



EU-US Symposium on Social and Community Development at Pitt School of Social Work



Dr. John Wallace, Professor and co-founder of the Homewood Children's Village

Homewood Children's Village (John Wallace and COSA alumna Aliya Durham) – In returning to his hometown of Pittsburgh, Dr. Wallace sought to establish a replication of the successful Harlem Children's Zone in his childhood community of Homewood, one of the most distressed neighborhoods in the City with some of the most under-performing public schools in the Commonwealth. This collaborative effort among community, faith, and human services organizations in Homewood produced a partnership with the Pittsburgh Public

Schools to transform Homewood into a community “where every child can succeed.” Transforming the neighborhood public schools – where now all three Homewood schools are “full-service community schools” - and developing a cradle to college pipeline of supportive services in the community has been a key to this community engagement initiative. The Human Children’s Village has now established the Pitt-Assisted Community Schools initiative to broaden education and community collaboration to work with children and families to address the deeper issues of poverty that impact school performance and adult success.

Browne Leadership Fellows (Keith Caldwell) - The School believes that engaging people, communities, and organizations will result in tangible changes. Supported by two SSW graduates, James Browne and his wife Noel, the Browne Leadership Fellows Program annually recruits a cohort of students from all disciplines who see the world through the lens of helping and who look to impact society in meaningful and lasting ways. The Browne Leadership Fellows Program is an interdisciplinary fellowship aimed at preparing students to be engaged civic leaders working for economic and social justice. It provides a spring seminar to prepare fellows for a summer, small group internship in one of a variety of community-based organizations where they will apply their knowledge in building stronger communities through these organizations. The School also coordinates the **Service to Others Living-Learning Community** (Tracy Soska and Keith Caldwell), now 10-year collaboration with Residence Life on campus to support undergraduates with strong orientations to community service and engagement. LLC student have monthly service projects and seminars.



Students Helping to build the KABOOM Playground at the Human Services Center courtyard in Turtle Creek

AgeWell Pittsburgh (Danny Rosen) – worked with a community collaboration to help seniors age well in place in the Squirrel Hill community of Pittsburgh. This is a best

practice model for inter-organizational coordination designed to ensure a one-stop shop of supports for the elderly population in the Jewish community.

Community Engagement

Centers (CEC) – the School has long been a leading University unit for community engagement, and it has now aligned its teaching, research, and service work to support the University’s new Community Engagement Centers initiative, which is connecting academic and other University resources



Chancellor Gallegher speaks at grand opening for Homewood Community Engagement Center

to distressed neighborhoods through a series of long-term community engagement centers . These CECs are physically located in key neighborhoods – currently, Homewood and the Hill District are targets for these CECs.

Other CO/COSA faculty are today conducting community-based and engaged research and building new community partnerships to address issues and needs related to: social determinants of health, child and youth development, women and girls, criminal and juvenile justice, community violence, community behavioral health, integrated health, and many other areas.