

Foundations Giving Voice to the Voiceless

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Sound policy can only be effective if it represents the experiences and voices of the people it is trying to benefit. The theme for the Grantmakers In Health (GIH) annual meeting this year, *The Power of Voice*, is appropriate in a world where philanthropic organizations are seeking to effect policy and programmatic impact for shifting demographics and marginalized groups. With last year ushering in the historic second term of the United States' first African American president and with white smoke bellowing over the Vatican signaling a new Pope from the "new world," changing voices are everywhere. As a mother, woman, immigrant, person of color, and former legal services attorney and state advocate, I appreciate my current role as a funder at The Atlantic Philanthropies, helping leverage resources that best elevate the marginalized voices of those who have not traditionally had a seat at the policymaking and grantmaking tables. These experiences allow me to recognize when voices of the marginalized are not being appropriately considered or their efforts not appropriately and efficiently leveraged.

This year's implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marks an opportunity to invite more voices into the health care discussion and begin the long road to eliminating health disparities. In this essay, I will discuss the role of The Atlantic Philanthropies' KidsWell initiative in elevating the crescendo of diverse voices in the quest for full coverage for children and families.

For over 30 years, The Atlantic Philanthropies, a limited-life foundation, has been dedicated to bringing about lasting changes and raising the voices of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Across the globe, from South Africa to Vietnam and Ireland, at the heart of our work is the belief that all people have the right to opportunity, equity, and dignity. Across our grantmaking areas, grantees have targeted distinct deficits in health provisions to address the needs of vulnerable populations and to build sustainable human and physical capital to reduce and eliminate those deficits. It is within this framework that Atlantic's KidsWell initiative was developed to provide health coverage to all children and families and create systemic changes to support this coverage.

VOICE TO POWER: THE ROLE OF FOUNDATIONS

There are different paradigms that foundations use to give voice to power. Foundations can choose to insert themselves

into national, regional, and local conversations and become prominent and distinct voices in the dialogue through research, papers, and public statements. Foundations can also choose to provide resources for organizations to speak on behalf of the communities they represent. Additionally, foundations can choose to serve as a convener by bringing together diverse organizations or communities to help them best elevate their voices. Finally, foundations can employ any combination of different models that work most appropriately at any given time.

Cooperation, communication, and compassion have been the guiding principles used by Atlantic's KidsWell initiative in leveraging the power of the voice. We focused our investments to ensure that grantees are pooling resources by cooperating with each other so that emerging voices have an opportunity to be heard. We attempted to build strong collaborations, relationships, and capacity that we hope will enable these voices to live beyond our investment. In addition, one of Atlantic's goals was to foster compassion about health insurance, which is crucially important to the marginalized and underserved. This not only helped with building our initiative's infrastructure, but also helped to focus our communications strategies.

Deploying a strategy of policy analysis, communications, and grassroots advocacy to create change, we tried to incorporate a diverse roster of voices, including not only the voices of mothers, immigrants, and young adults, but also those of local and state level advocates and elected officials. Collectively, our grantees deployed effective and creative methods to bring new and powerful voices forward in the name of the uninsured. We also found that fostering compassion about an issue important to the marginalized and underserved helped with cooperation and focused our communication.

Atlantic's role in this initiative has been similar to that of an orchestra conductor pulling together different sounds and lifting up all of the distinct voices to create one symphonic sound. Bringing all these collaborative voices together helps maximize resources and creates a diverse yet harmonic symphony that collectively helps achieve one agenda.

ENGAGING THE VOICES OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES USING COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND COMPASSION

KidsWell engaged multiple organizations with a reach into nontraditional communities to ensure that as many voices

are heard in the health care debate as possible. The following are just a few highlights of Atlantic's dynamic and creative grantee strategies.

- **Immigrants** – With Latino and immigrant communities having the highest proportion of the uninsured, Atlantic enlisted New America Media (NAM) and the National Council of LaRaza (NCLR) to help these communities understand their coverage options and get the word out. NAM partnered with KidsWell state advocates to hold multiple [ethnic media roundtable ACA press briefings](#). This strategy helped target the ethnic media press that is often overlooked but reaches millions of immigrants. In addition to their traditional advocacy strategies, NCLR launched a question and answer campaign on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), and its [Web site](#) to answer individual questions on immigrants and the ACA.
- **Mothers and Caretakers** – With its significant reach into the “mom constituency” and its clever use of new media as a grassroots organizing tool, MomsRising used its own [Web site](#) and partnered with KidsWell state advocates to deliver the voices of “real moms” who testified at legislative briefings, wrote op-eds, and spoke at town hall meetings to share their positive experiences with the ACA. MomsRising's prolific story collection has been helpful in allowing many different voices to express their gratitude for health insurance and the ACA and to counterbalance the negative press.
- **Young People** – A key demographic for the health insurance exchanges and a leading topic for the media are those healthy young people who are needed to ensure a healthier risk pool. Through the KidsWell initiative, Atlantic funded the Young Invincibles (YI) to use their savvy knowledge of young people and new media to reach this targeted group. YI set up field offices in several target states to help educate and enroll young people. Most recently YI partnered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to launch the *Healthy Young America* video contest, with over 100 prizes totaling \$30,000 to help give a voice to young people and raise awareness about the new health insurance options.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR STATE AND LOCAL VOICES

In addition to our national grantees, the KidsWell initiative funds collaborations of state child health advocates in seven target states: California, Florida, Maryland, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. These states were chosen because of their diverse geography, demographics, and political landscape.

- **Voices from Opposition States** – Some of our most important voices come from states with leadership that opposed the ACA.
 - Texas Well and Healthy, funded partially through the KidsWell initiative, coordinated with MomsRising and others to help answer questions and spread the word about the Health Insurance Marketplace through [blog posts](#) and [live tweet chats](#). In a state where many residents will not get health insurance coverage because Texas refused to take federal dollars to expand Medicaid, they are also trying to harness that energy on the [Texas Left Me Out](#) Web site to capture the voices of those left behind.
 - State KidsWell advocates also helped provide a voice for young people. With adolescents having a higher rate of uninsurance than younger children, the Mississippi Center for Justice, in collaboration with Students Involved in Community Change, released [ACA Achieve](#), a music video featuring young adults who live in Shelby, a small town in the Mississippi Delta. The video highlights the voices of young adults and their families in Mississippi and how they will benefit from the ACA.
- **Local Elected Officials** – The National League of Cities (NLC) is giving voice to many of the local elected officials who are concerned that their residents will go without health insurance. With 22 cities participating in a Children's Health Coverage Leadership Academy and 12 of them receiving planning grants that can lead to larger implementation grants, NLC has allowed cities in opposition states to lend their voices to help get children health insurance coverage.

As The Atlantic Philanthropies and the KidsWell initiative wind down our grantmaking, we hope that the resources invested in building relationships to share the power of a common voice will provide a model for future investments. We also hope that lifting up the voices of communities to strengthen the children's health policy agenda will be an Atlantic legacy that continues until every child has access to affordable and comprehensive coverage.