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## **New Report on Women Organizers Highlights Challenges and Recommendations for Labor Movement**

Washington, D.C. - The Berger-Marks Foundation today released the report *Women Organizing Women: How Do We Rock the Boat Without Getting Thrown Overboard?* The report highlights the experiences and insights of a group of highly skilled women union organizers brought together during a November 2004 retreat.

Recognizing that women now comprise close to one-half of the American workforce, the report is a call to action: unions must organize large number of women to stem the current decline in union membership and it cannot do so with an overwhelmingly male force of organizers.

Facilitated by National Labor College President Sue Schurman, 19 participants explored the challenges women organizers face and discussed ways to increase the ranks of women organizers and support them in their work.

The report notes: "Recruiting, training and retaining a skilled cadre of professional women organizers are critical to successful union growth."

Participants identified several major challenges they face as organizers and obstacles they believe prevent other women from entering the field of union organizing.

"Organizing is the hardest job I've ever had, but it's the most rewarding work I've ever done...You gotta have the fire in the belly to do this work," said Robin Gould, a CWA organizer.

Time demands and travel associated with union organizing figured most prominently among them. Because most unions still undervalue organizing as a whole and undervalue the role of women organizers, many participants view themselves as "second class among the second class."

Organizers said they approached men and women differently in organizing campaigns. The major reasons for using different approaches, these women agreed, stem from differences in how men and women relate to others and process information. The report includes participants' recommendations for improving the position of union organizer and sets a roadmap for the Foundation as it looks ahead.

Among the major recommendations:

- ✓ Unions need to put more resources and value into organizing as a union career.
- ✓ A systematic program of training and on-the-job mentoring will increase senior organizers' effectiveness and will assist their efforts to recruit and retain more women organizers.
- ✓ More organizing drives should be based locally and supported by union locals.
- ✓ Give organizers more control over their schedules and take advantage of modern communications tools (like email, cell phones and laptop computers) to allow organizers to do more work off-site or at home.
- ✓ Allowing for organizing in teams and "job-sharing" campaigns will provide mentoring and support for women organizers and also will address, in part, childcare issues.

"The Foundation is looking very seriously at these and other recommendations. We look forward to playing an increasingly significant role in supporting women union organizers," said Berger-Marks Foundation Chair Louise Walsh. "We already have a grant program for organizers and plan to expand our support over the next six months."

The full report is available for download at [www.bergermarks.org](http://www.bergermarks.org) or you can request a hard copy at [info@bergermarks.org](mailto:info@bergermarks.org).

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*About the Foundation: The Berger-Marks Foundation was established with a bequest from the estates of Edna Berger, the first female lead organizer for The Newspaper Guild-CWA, and her husband, the legendary Tin Pan Alley song-writer Gerald Marks. The Foundation seeks to bring the benefits of unionization to working women and to assist organizations committed to those principles. Its goal is to assist working women who want to organize other women and provide financial assistance to women who are engaged in union organizing projects.*