



# HIGHLANDER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER

## Strategic Plan, 2007-2011

— Executive Summary —

The Highlander Research and Education Center approaches its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007 as a world-renowned beacon for progressive organizing. Highlander is widely acclaimed as a leadership development center for grassroots activists across race and generations, and as a critical resource for the social justice community for research, best practices and movement building.

In addition to marking the 75th anniversary of Highlander's transformative work in the South and Appalachia, 2007 also marks the end of a year-long strategic planning process that moves Highlander into the future of the progressive movement. Highlights of the plan include:

- **Developing a new multi-racial, intergenerational organizing and leadership training institute** for groups in the Deep South, Appalachia, and immigrant communities across the region.
- **Expanding our Young and Restless program** to include a focus on activists and young leaders in their 20s, and to strengthen intergenerational and cross-generational organizing.
- **Strengthening efforts to be good stewards of Highlander's land and facilities**, including building a new dormitory that is fully accessible and meets strong environmental standards.
- **Restructuring staff** to better support the demands of our education programs, enhance our external communications, and consolidate the operations teams that support our work.
- **Using Highlander's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary for education, celebration, and inspiration**, and as the occasion for a capital campaign to upgrade and expand our facilities.

### History

Highlander's work is grounded in the simple but radical premise that those most directly affected by social and economic problems should take the lead in solving these problems. Since its founding in 1932, Highlander has played a vital role in many of the most important social justice movements in the South and nationally, including the labor movement, the Civil Rights movement, the environmental justice movement, and the global justice movement. In the mid-1990s, recognizing the South's changing demographics and the need to develop new leaders for social justice, and continuing its long tradition of taking on cutting-edge issues, Highlander expanded its program for young people and developed new programs for immigrant activists, while supporting efforts to build bridges across differences of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and geography.

### Mission Statement

*Highlander serves as a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for justice, equality, and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny. Through popular education, participatory research, and cultural work, we help create spaces — at Highlander and in local communities — where people gain knowledge, hope and courage, expanding their idea of what is possible. We develop leadership and help create and support strong, democratic organizations that work for justice, equality and sustainability in their own communities and that join with others to build broad movements for social, economic and restorative environmental change.*



Participants in Highlander's annual Cultural Workers Weekend, cosponsored by the We Shall Overcome Fund.



Highlander provided interpretation and other support at the rally in Knoxville for the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride.



Youth activists develop organizing and leadership skills at Highlander's Seeds of Fire Youth Leadership Camp.

---

# The Context of Our Work

Southern history is a legacy of brutal exploitation and courageous resistance. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita highlighted the South's continuing structural racism, poverty, environmental degradation, and failing infrastructures, as well as exposing the government's abandonment of those in need.

For the last 15 years, globalization has devastated the South's economy, while tax policies and government cutbacks have shredded the social safety net. Companies that profited from relatively cheap southern labor are moving their factories to even cheaper labor markets internationally. Job opportunities are shifting to lower paying jobs without health insurance. In many rural areas, the only growth industries are prisons and the military.

Changing demographics driven by globalization are also profoundly affecting the South, posing particular problems for a region still struggling with unresolved racial issues. Real economic fears are heightened by conservative divide-and-conquer tactics, which encourage both white and African American workers to blame immigrants for "taking our jobs" and reinforce a climate of fear and violence fueled by reactions to September 11th. Targeting immigrants rather than corporate greed and inequitable government policies has fueled a resurgence of racism, as evidenced by the rise of anti-immigrant organizations and escalating attacks on immigrants.

The South is also marked by widespread environmental degradation. The broken levees in New Orleans, mountain-top removal, the uncontrolled sprawl of chain-store strip malls, and the loss of family farms to corporate farming are all examples of the environmental problems facing the

region, and all contribute to the demoralization of people whose lives have traditionally been connected to the land.

These problems affect all poor and working people, and they have a particularly profound impact on young people, who face systemic discrimination and/or disinvestment in education, employment, law enforcement and more. The Right's divide-and-conquer strategies also scapegoat LGBT people, as demonstrated by campaigns to pass anti-gay legislation at the local, state, and national levels.

In response to these problems, activists across the South are building grassroots organizations to address local, regional, and national issues. These efforts include work around the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast and in communities where hurricane survivors have been relocated, resistance to stripmining and mountaintop removal in Appalachia, and organizing in immigrant communities for fair and just immigration reform. The last year in particular has seen historic activism and visibility in immigrant organizing. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants held unprecedented marches, rallies, and public events all over the country, including cities and small towns in the South, deepening a much-needed national dialogue on race and basic fairness.

These conditions present tremendous challenges, as well as opportunities, to those organizing for justice, and are critically relevant to building a progressive movement in the South over the next five years. African Americans, Appalachians, and immigrants all share rich histories of struggle. Connecting these communities and movements has tremendous potential to build a strong base to move both the region and the country forward.

---

## Issues, Constituencies, and Methods

The challenges facing the South present critical organizing opportunities between and among communities, particularly African Americans, Latinos, and low-wage workers of all races — offering an opening for cross-race and cross-issue organizing that will strengthen our region and lead the way for progressive movements in other parts of the country.

### Framing the Issues

Based on this analysis, Highlander will frame its work for the next five years around four broad, interconnected issues that are critical to making strategic progress toward a more just and humane society:

- Economic Justice
- Racial Justice
- Environmental Justice
- Democratic Participation

### Core Methods/How We Work

A common set of methods unifies Highlander's work, reflecting our core values and principles and underlying all program activities. These methods include: popular education, strategic convenings, cultural work, field work, participatory research, linking historical and current struggles, and documentation for dissemination and learning.

### Constituencies

We will impact these four broad issue areas by working with people in the following constituencies/communities:

- African Americans, particularly in the Deep South
- Immigrants, with emphasis on Latinos
- Poor/working-class whites, particularly in Appalachia
- Youth, especially people of color and rural
- Lesbian/gay/trans, especially people of color and rural

# What's New in Highlander's Programmatic Work

Two key programmatic goals will frame Highlander's work over the next five years:

- **Fostering the development, leadership and increased capacity of progressive grassroots groups in marginalized communities**
- **Building authentic multi-issue and cross-constituency relationships and networks for collective action capable of advancing movement building**

Efforts to achieve these goals include the following:

**Broadening the We: A Multi-Racial Organizing and Leadership Training Institute** — Highlander is taking its leadership development work with specific constituencies to the next level by developing a multi-racial organizing and leadership training institute that will include 30 people from 15 groups: five groups each from the Deep South, Appalachia, and immigrant communities. Right-wing strategy is dependent on vicious divide-and-conquer tactics, and this institute will help groups develop stronger capacity to address their specific issues, as well as strengthen their relationships, skills and analysis to connect people and issues across difficult divides to build a broad-based movement. In addition, in order to help address the need for intergenerational organizing models and leadership transition in the region and nationally, a majority of participants will be age 35 and younger.

**Broadening Highlander's Immigrant Leadership Development Program** — Highlander's immigrant leadership development program will continue to serve Latino immigrants and will broaden its outreach to include immigrants of African, Asian, Asian Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern descent, whose numbers in the South are also increasing. To support this work, we will also expand the capacity of our multilingual program.



*Participants in Highlander's Immigrant Leadership Development Program helped organize the East Tennessee Rally for Real Immigration Reform.*

**Expanding the Young and the Restless Youth Organizing and Leadership Training Program** — Highlander will maintain its commitment to and programming for youth aged 13-19 and will expand its work to include a specific focus on young activists and leaders in their 20s. Activists and leaders in their 20s are already engaged in a wide range of social justice efforts in the South as paid staff and volunteers, yet they face many institutional barriers, and older leaders and organizers often do not recognize their knowledge, skills, and leadership. This period of life is also a time when young people make the critical decision about whether to commit

their lives to social justice work. Highlander is committed to strengthening intergenerational and cross-generational organizing through gatherings that address the challenges and opportunities facing activists in their 20s and by ensuring that our other programs include the different generations involved in movement work in the region.



*Activists from 15 to 65 met at Highlander's Intergenerational Think Tank to develop strategies for intergenerational organizing and draw strength from each other to move forward.*

**Strategic Convenings** — Highlander will intensify its ongoing effort to organize meetings and workshops that address the critical issues of our time. Strategic convenings planned for the coming years include a series of Black/Brown dialogues, meetings on immigration and wedge issues, and a gathering for progressive people of faith.

**Cultural Organizing** — Highlander is developing a series of strategic partnerships and collaborations to increase the visibility of progressive cultural initiatives. These efforts



*Highlander's Hip Hop Activism Workshop explored how hip hop can be used to move people toward social change.*

include expanding and strengthening the regional network of artists and cultural workers working with grassroots social justice organizations and establishing residencies for cultural workers in local communities.

---

# What's New in Highlander's Structure and Operations

To meet its programmatic goals, Highlander will need increased staffing, increased physical capacity, and increased funding. Goals for the operations necessary to support this work include:

- **Supporting and encouraging organizing through use of Highlander facilities and resources**
- **Increasing the financial resources to continue and expand Highlander's work**
- **Planning and implementing a capital campaign in conjunction with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary to expand and enhance Highlander's facilities**

Efforts to achieve these goals include the following:

**Developing New Opportunities for Social Justice Education** — Highlander is developing new formal and informal opportunities for social justice education by establishing new partnerships and expanding the use of the Workshop Center, the Harry Lasker Memorial Library and Resource Center, and our Web site. These efforts will broaden Highlander's relationships, expand access to Highlander's resources for grassroots groups, create educational opportunities for movement building, and help financially support our work. Highlander is marketing the availability of the Workshop Center and Horton House for weekday use and exploring additional opportunities for earned revenue streams.

**Strengthening Efforts to be a Good Steward of Highlander's Land and Facilities** — Highlander is strengthening its efforts to be a good steward of its land and facilities by making measurable strides toward operating in accordance with green principles, by building a new dormitory and a new library that are accessible for people

with disabilities and that meet the standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, and by establishing a maintenance endowment for the ongoing care of our buildings.



*The newly renovated Horton House provides an accessible, energy-efficient site for small meetings, workshops, and retreats.*

**Organizational Restructuring** — Highlander is restructuring its staff to better support its education programs and consolidate some of the administration and operations teams that are necessary to support a residential workshop center. Highlander will also establish a new position to enhance its external communications and cultivate increased visibility for its work.

---

## Celebrating Highlander's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Highlander will use the occasion of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary for education, celebration and inspiration, including a gathering on the grounds in 2007 and gatherings in other parts of the country over the following year. We will also conduct a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary capital campaign to raise funds to build a new dormitory and a new library and make essential repairs, energy and environmental upgrades, and accessibility improvements to our current facilities.

**The Planning Process** — The Board and staff of Highlander are grateful to the friends, constituents, colleagues, funders, and donors who participated in the strategic planning process, and to the consultant team of Kathie deNobriga (Pine Lake, GA) and Hasan Davis (Berea, KY) for their work. Special thanks to the Hill-Snowdon Foundation for their financial support.

The planning process was led by an eight-member planning team of Board and staff working with the consultant team. The process included an internal organizational assessment, sessions with staff and Board, and confidential phone interviews and surveys with people in current and previous programs, donors, funders, and friends.

We present the strategic plan in a spirit of enthusiasm and grounded optimism that Highlander and the progressive movement will move forward to bring about positive social change and a renewed commitment across the country to equality, justice, and democracy.

For more information or to join us in this work, contact:

**Highlander Research and Education Center**  
1959 Highlander Way  
New Market, TN 37820  
865-933-3443  
Fax: 865-933-3424  
[hrec@highlandercenter.org](mailto:hrec@highlandercenter.org)  
[www.highlandercenter.org](http://www.highlandercenter.org)