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Ordinary people acting extraordinarily

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In 1974, when [Communities Organized for Public Service](#) burst onto the scene in San Antonio, religious leaders throughout the state took notice. Finally, a strategy for putting one's faith into action that produced results.

Not only did COPS teach ordinary citizens to act on their interests through their institutions, creating a powerful vehicle fueled by people's stories, pains and aspirations, COPS would be the big bang that helped create the universe of the modern [Industrial Areas Foundation](#), or [IAF](#).

On Saturday, leaders will convene from across the state to celebrate the network of [Texas IAF](#) organizations that COPS inspired. They are [Metro Alliance](#) in San Antonio; [Austin Interfaith](#); [Dallas Area Interfaith](#); [Border Interfaith](#) and [El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization](#); Valley Interfaith in the Rio Grande Valley; [the Metropolitan Organization/Gulf Coast Leadership Council](#) in Houston; ACT/AMOS in Fort Worth, Arlington and Mansfield; the Border Organization in Del Rio; and the West Texas Organizing Strategy in Lubbock.

We plan to honor the lives and legacies of the Texas IAF's founders and launch a political strategy to keep ordinary people's voices relevant.

Texas IAF organizations are at the forefront of keeping politics from falling entirely into the hands of professionals and elites. This month, immigrant mothers living in blighted apartments of Dallas began [rewriting their city's housing code](#) to ensure dignified shelter for their children. Last week, interfaith clergy and elementary school parents in a once-marginalized colonia in the Rio Grande Valley broke ground for [a new library](#) — the creation of which required turning out 1,000 new voters.

Two weeks prior, a Lubbock bishop pointed out that when congressional representatives attack the [Consumer Finance Protection Bureau](#), they put at risk families that need [greater protections from payday and auto title lenders](#).

All over Texas, local affiliates are continuing the work COPS/Metro started by teaching ordinary people how to act in extraordinary ways.

The organizations have big shoes to fill. In the 1980s, the Texas IAF was credited with doing the pragmatic politics necessary for passage of [House Bill 72](#), comprehensive legislation that included school finance reform.

That same decade, when it became clear that local governments of the Rio Grande Valley alone could not fund basic water and wastewater infrastructure for colonias, the Texas IAF built the political power necessary to get \$2 billion in state and federal funds invested along the Texas-Mexico border over two decades.

In 2007, when health care for children was under threat, the Texas IAF [publicly confronted the lieutenant governor](#) to push a bill out of committee and expand health care access to 127,000 kids.

Locally, organizations of the Texas IAF built the political will to establish award-winning labor market intermediaries such as Project Quest. Amid the Great Recession, the Texas IAF convinced the Legislature to invest \$5 million to \$10 million in workforce development projects.

The work of rebuilding community institutions is more important than ever. Redistricting has resulted in an increasingly polarized political climate in which competitive legislative races are few and far between.

Families have self-sorted not just by race and class but by worldview — making conversations between diverse neighbors more difficult. Parents are also working longer hours, leaving less time for their children and neighbors. The Texas IAF will redouble efforts to teach leaders and institutions to form public relationships, have conversations across dividing lines and fight for a common agenda.

The challenge before us is great and the race long. But the [Texas IAF has a four-year plan](#) to reshape the politics of Texas to build a better future for our children and grandchildren. This could be the second big bang.

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