

STATEMENT OF SCOTT HARSHBARGER

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Today, we present to the leadership of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and the public the results of a two-month governance and management review.

We were invited by ACORN to conduct a clear-eyed, independent analysis not just of the videos which caused this summer's uproar but also of the entire organization, its core weaknesses and inherent strengths.

We were asked to undertake this independent review at the height of a national controversy for ACORN, a controversy that overshadowed ACORN's ongoing implementation of an ambitious and professionally directed organizational transformation.

Our recommendations will not please rabid ACORN supporters, nor will they pacify its rabid critics. They are neither an epitaph nor an absolution for ACORN, but are a roadmap to reform and renewal, if implemented in their entirety in concert with other measures to regain the public's trust.

Our findings make clear that ACORN must continue down this path, revisiting its mission, re-shaping its scope and charter, and fulfilling completely its legal, governance and compliance responsibilities.

Our nine recommendations give ACORN an opportunity to earn the trust and credibility it needs to effectively and efficiently serve the hundreds of thousands of poor and powerless citizens who rely on the organization as an advocate for them and their families.

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The serious management challenges detailed in our report are the fault of ACORN's founder and a cadre of leaders who, in their drive for growth, failed to commit the organization to the basic, appropriate standards of governance and accountability. As a result, ACORN not only fell short of living its principles but also left itself vulnerable to public embarrassment.

This summer's video controversy is an apt example. We did not find a pattern of intentional, illegal conduct by ACORN staff involved; in fact, no action, illegal or otherwise, was ever taken by any ACORN employee on behalf of the videographers. Instead, the videos represent the byproduct of ACORN's longstanding management weaknesses, including a lack of training, a lack of procedures, and a lack of on-site supervision.

There is nothing wrong with an organization pursuing an ambitious, aggressive or even an edgy mission. But that does not excuse the need for organizational discipline and standards of excellence.

ACORN's current leadership understands full well what must be done, and with our recommendations in hand, ACORN now has a plan by which to accomplish it. Our experience tells us that these recommendations, acted on with a sense of urgency, are crucial to reclaim, maintain and strengthen ACORN's ability to serve its members and constituents.

The path toward renewal is clear, but reaching the destination will require hard choices, perseverance and patience.

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