



Organizing and Mobilizing Communities



Skills for Community Practice

- Relationship-building
 - Active listening, building trust
- Assessment
 - Leadership potential, issue identification
- Communication
- Planning and analysis
 - Strategy planning, action evaluation, policy analysis, organizational development
- Cultural competence
- Administrative/fundraising skills



Tactics in Community Practice

- Direct action organizing
 - More mobilization than organizing
- Voter registration, education, turnout
- Media work
 - Earned, opinion, and paid
- Lobbying at all government levels
- Organizational development/change
- Coalition building
- Grassroots organizing/base building
 - Necessary for success in most other tactics



Persuasion and Building Trust

- What makes you trust someone? What about someone from a different culture/background than you? What barriers to trust must be overcome?
- What makes someone seem untrustworthy?
- What styles of communication do you find most persuasive? What types of content are most persuasive to you? When do you feel your most persuasive?
- What in your history/personality makes you reluctant to trust? What impact does this have on your practice?



Collective Action in an Individualistic Society

- U.S. society and Anglo-dominant culture at odds with ideals of collective action in community organizing
- Individuals often have to learn how to come together and how to see themselves as part of a larger whole
- Organizers from the dominant culture working with ethnic minority groups may have the opposite challenge
 - We expect others to be able to act unilaterally/see their self-interest
- Skilled organizers address these issues openly through the organizing process
 - Part of consciousness-raising



Leadership Development—what it is and why it matters

- “Strategic investment in and utilization of human capital within an organization”
- Not just focused on building individual leaders, but also on creating a culture that promotes the process of leadership
 - So that new leaders can emerge and identified leaders can grow
- Leaders are the lifeblood in community organizing—their ability to attract, inspire, and challenge followers holds the key to the effort’s success
- Talented leaders are attracted to organizations that offer leadership development opportunities
 - Good leaders won’t want to just hang around/follow



Leadership Development—How to do it

- Skill and Knowledge Building
 - Cutting issues, researching policy, conducting 1:1s, working with nonprofit boards, structure and process of government, fundraising, media, direct action, identifying leaders
- Confidence Building
 - Opportunities to practice these skills and take leadership roles
 - EVERYONE who you want to develop as a leader should have a role at EVERY action/event
- Enhancing stature and connections
 - Take yourself out of the equation and build relationships directly among leaders, with public officials, with allied organizations



Mobilizing v. Organizing

- Organizing implies building a structure or organization that will outlast the particular campaign
- It involves building deep relationships with core leaders, who in turn build their own networks
- Mobilization occurs within organizing campaigns, in response to specific calls to action, but also refers to more surface efforts to bring people into action for time-limited efforts
- Organizing is about relationships; mobilizing is about numbers (but relationships turn people out better than anything else)



Direct Action Organizing

- Public events
 - Hearings, accountability sessions, public forums
- Protests/marches
 - Often what the community wants to do, but must be used judiciously
- Boycotts/pickets
 - Can be difficult to sustain and focus, and impact on target often more limited than we'd like
- Meetings with public officials
 - Carefully scripted, with leaders prepared
- Petitions
 - Keep these names to use for base building



Place-based Organizing

- Historically, most common style of community organizing
- Less popular/effective now, as geography less powerful identifying force for many people
- Usually focuses on local issues; parochialism can be harmful
- Can be models for cross-cultural organizing
 - Because place, not identity binds, but this is lessened by geographic racial segregation
- Examples: ACORN, neighborhood associations, some political organizing



Process of Place-based Organizing

- Identification of target territory
- Work with organizations within territory (where possible)
- House meetings, 1:1s, and block organizing to cut issues and build leadership
- Direct action tactics to build collective identity and power
- Dues-paying members set goals for future work
- Federate with other areas to build territory and tackle larger concerns



Interest Group Organizing

- Brings people together around an interest or identity—GLBT, immigrant, parents, women, African Americans
- Usually focus on legislation, coalition-building, public opinion, or electoral goals
- Tactics include lobbying, direct action, media
- Identification of leaders through existing organizations, response to mass appeals, public meetings/events



Class and Labor Organizing

- Many of the most lasting social policy changes resulted from labor organizing
 - 8-hour workday, child labor, health and safety laws
- As class has receded in Americans' conception of self, so too has class-based organizing
 - Always somewhat difficult in U.S. context
- Effective labor organizing requires overcoming fear and hostility on part of employers to build sense of solidarity among those who may not even see their interests as connected



The Labor Movement Today

- AFL-CIO announced new commitment to organizing
- Change to Win split off from AFL-CIO to focus on organizing new industries/areas (led by SEIU)
- New emphasis on building relationships with community organizations and working on policy issues beyond worksite representation
- Addressing legislation that modifies the rules of labor organizing



Institutional-based Organizing

- Organizes people through their membership in existing organizations (most often churches, but could also be neighborhood groups, civic groups, PTOs)
 - Can have wide but shallow commitment, then, but appeal of instant membership
- Federates these organizations through their leadership
 - 'Borrowing' the reputations of these organizations, but also their political battles/turf
- Most often regional, taking on a mix of local and state/national social problems



Questions/Discussion

- Has anyone ever tried to 'organize' you? How did it feel? Can people/communities be 'over-organized'?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each organizing strategy? What would work best in your constituency?
- What organizations do you see as having the most impact on the community organizing landscape today?
- How do community organizing and other social work skills overlap?
- To what communities do you belong, and how might you be mobilized within/through them?