

Community Organizing Activity

8/8/06

1. What is Community Organizing?

Ask what each word makes people think of, put them together work out a draft definition with the group, use this to help:

Community organizing is a long-term approach where the people affected by an issue are supported in identifying problems and taking action to achieve solutions. The organizer challenges those he or she works with to change the way things are—it is a means of achieving social change through collective action by changing the balance of power.

2. Principles

- Listening
- Building relationships
- Action
- Celebration
- Reflection/Evaluation

3. One-on-One's

One-on-ones are an important part of community organizing, as they lay the foundation for all the work that comes afterwards. The main goal of the one-on-one is to listen, gather information and make a personal connection. The organizer must learn what community members concerns are, and find out what they identify as problems, not tell the community what the problem is. That is why an organizer meets first with people individually, rather than try to meet everyone in a group.

- Set up a 30-45 minute conversation with a key person in the community
- Introduce what a one-on-one is and ask an opening question or phrase like “please tell me more about yourself”
- Be prepared to tell your story
- Ask questions about areas where you might work together
- Thank them for their time, make sure you have their updated contact info and set up future meeting if appropriate

See attached sheet for more information on one-on-ones

4. Power

Types of Power:

- Power over others
- Individual power
- Collective power
- Power to change

Changing the balance of power

Community organizing changes the balance of power and creates new power bases. Some examples from history:

- **Civil rights:** The boycotts of businesses and busses in the South brought about desegregation and the Voting Rights Act.
- **Labor unions:** Strikes against conditions in factories throughout the early part of this century led to the 40-hour work week and better working conditions for all workers.
- **The anti-war movement:** Protests against the war pressured the gov't to end U.S. involvement in Viet Nam.
- **Fox COPS TV show:** Pressure from city youth, youth workers, and allies convinced the Police Chief to ask the racist TV show to leave (July 2006).

5. Making a Strategy

What problems has your group identified? What policies would address that problem? What is the decision-making body you need to impact? What other steps will your team need to take to change policy? Break your work down into manageable steps and tasks. Hold a meeting to discuss your plan of action and include a timeline for when things will happen and identify who is responsible. It should be realistic, feasible, and flexible.

6. Evaluation and Review

What worked well, what could be better?

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