

Community Organizing



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Focus of Presentation

1. How & why do people organize today?
2. What are some different approaches to community organizing?
3. What strategies and tactics are more likely to produce desired results in today's environment?

What is Community Organizing?

- “A process of bringing people together to act collectively on their common interests.” -- Tim Sampson (*welfare rights and labor organizer*)



- Creating “a structure through which people can work together to achieve a mutually agreed upon purpose.” – Center for 3rd World Organizing Oakland, CA

Roots of Community Organizing

- History of voluntary organizations in the U.S.
- Unions & immigrant rights groups
- Reform movements of the 19th C., Progressive Era, the Great Depression, & the 1960s
- Influence of the Alinsky Model
- International influences

Origins & Purposes of CO

- Community Survival & Protection
- Mutual Aid & Self-Help
- Community Building & Maintenance
- Social/Political Change: Advocacy & Reform

Key Elements:

- Different Forms in Different Cultural Contexts
- Means of Protection Against State, Eco Forces
- Major Role Played by Churches & Other Orgs.

Different Patterns of CO

- By Geography: Neighborhood or Region
(e.g., local community associations in Baltimore)
- By Identity: Based on common religion, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, or occupation
(e.g., NAACP, Catholic Charities, NOW, unions)
- By Issue: Those affecting community directly & about which it was concerned (e.g., fracking)
- By Ideology: Secular & Religious (Social Gospel)

WHY ORGANIZE?

- **Win concrete reforms**
- **Alter power relations & empower people**
- **Develop community**
- **Build capacity to win other issues**
- **Increase critical consciousness**

The Tools of Organizing

1. People
2. Structure
3. Process
4. Strategies & Tactics
5. Roles
6. Resources
7. Identifying Issues
8. Taking Action

Distinguishing “Problems” & “Issues”

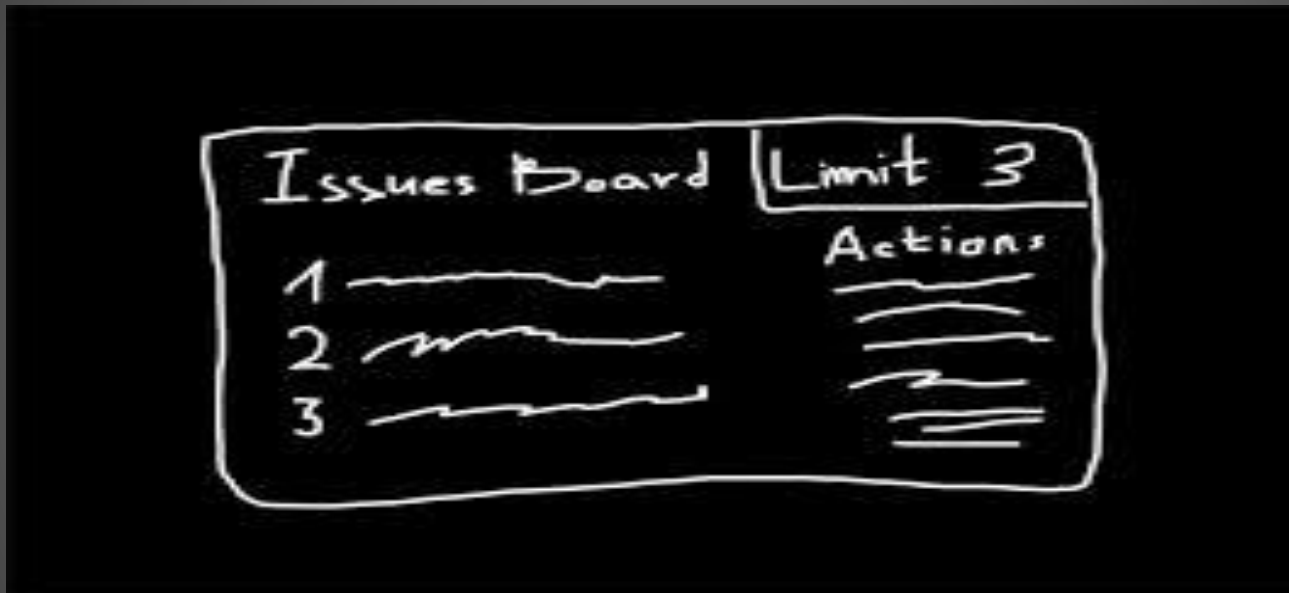


What's the Difference?
What are Different Ways of
Defining an “Issue”?

KEY FACTORS

- **Recognize that different people perceive conditions in different ways**
- **Know the community's history/culture**
- **Stay current re community context**
- **Look at community w/clear vision**
- **Communicate & acquire information**
- **Be able to project into the future**

FRAMING AN ISSUE



1. ISSUES ARE TOOLS

IN THE ORGANIZING PROCESS.

2. YOU NEED TO PLACE THEM IN THE
CONTEXT OF YOUR OVERALL GOALS.

A Good Issue

- Improves people's lives
- Alters power relations & builds leadership
- Is winnable
- Is worthwhile, widely & deeply felt
- Is easy to understand
- Has a clear target & time frame
- Unites, does not divide
- Is consistent with your values
- Builds your organization for the future



An Issue is “Winnable” IF:

- **It creates & sustains community motivation**
- **Has potential to achieve easy initial “victories”**
- **Assists in consciousness-raising**
- **Is easy to link to other issues**
- **Serves as the basis for long-term organizing**

How to Identify Good Issues

- Listen to people!!!
 - Get people to talk about their hopes, anger, fears
 - Visit people where they live, work, worship, hang out, and play
 - Use door-to-door canvassing or surveys.
 - (Be careful to distinguish people's attitudes from their willingness to take action.)*
 - Organize small group meetings.
 - Attend meetings of existing organizations/groups

How Opponents Can Steal Your Issue(s)

- Pre-emption
- Co-optation
- Tid-bitting
- Procedural Delays
- Redefinition
- Divide and Conquer
- Tokenism



Moving From Issue to Action in 10 Not-so-Easy Steps

1. Identify the issue
2. Test the issue
3. Find community
Leaders
4. Hold leadership
Meetings
5. Focus the agenda
6. Hold a larger meeting
7. Build the organization
8. Make it an action
organization
9. Possible results:
Victory -- Partial victory --
Defeat
10. Move on to new
issues

Next Steps

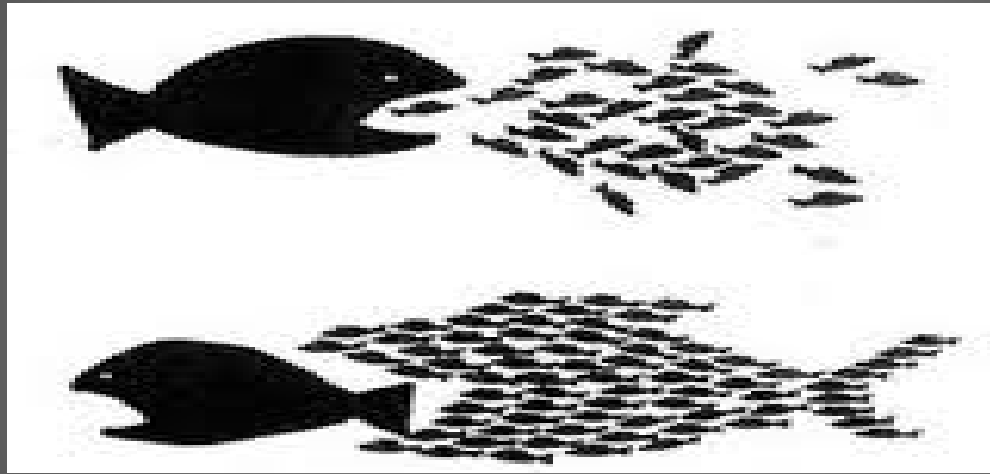


**Developing
Goals & Strategies**

A STRATEGY IS:

- The answer to the question: “How are we going to reach our goal(s)?”
- The overall plan for how we’re going to get where we’re going.
- A vehicle to produce or induce change in an institution, organization, social/political system, community, or society.

The Central Strategic Question:



How can events & actions be used to identify people's self-interests & help them learn to struggle and keep struggling?

Sources of Strategy

- Ideas about how society & its institutions function
- Views on nature & causes of social, economic, & political problems
- Perspectives on the nature & scope of political & civic participation
- Values regarding appropriate means to produce/induce change.

Strategic Goals

1. Obtain specific social, economic, and psychological benefits to participants
2. Provide self-help & mutual aid (as needed)
3. Increase effectiveness of services, programs, policies; create new ones as needed
4. *Achieve institutional change:
 - Significant & permanent change in structure, policies, & practices of institutions
 - Change distribution of power & resources

Common Strategies

- Legislative: Pass or defeat a piece of legislation
- Political: Inject an issue into the political process & force leaders to take a stand on it.
- Economic: Hurt the image, profits, reputation, etc. of a business to win concessions from it.
- Disruptive: Create problems for the power structure to force it to address your issue(s).
- Educational: Increase public awareness of issue.
- Embarrassment: Use pressure to get concession.

What is a “good” strategy?



KEY: Select a specific strategy to achieve a specific goal.

A Good Strategy Is:

- Well-planned
- Involves people in all aspects of its planning & implementation
- Flexible & contextualized
- In-depth
- Rooted in reality (i.e., feasible)
- Based on people's culture & experience
- Educational

-- Si Kahn, *Organizing*

Good Strategies

- Provide a long-range framework
- Consider results likely to follow from tactics used
- Provide a method to be used for each tactic
- Use tactics consistent with its basic goals
- Use success & repression to its advantages
- Help in making decisions re use of people's assets
- Help assess pros/cons of external offers of "help"
- Provide flexible action framework as needed
- Connect local issues to larger nat'l/int'l efforts
- Suggest creative ways for people to live, work, etc.

How Do you Choose a Good Strategy?



What factors do you consider?

Criteria for Selecting Strategy

- Clarity about goals
- ID forces to be defeated/ neutralized
- ID potential allies
- Deciding the most effective approach to offset opposition
- Community identity
- Risks involved
- Potential aftermath
- Timing
- Context
- Community history
- Capacity to mount & maintain a campaign to implement it.

Strategies & Group Mobilization



Connection Between Organizing Strategies & Tactics



Note: Strategies are distinct from tactics in that they involve the overall plan of a group.

Where/When Does Social Action Begin?

- “Free Space”/ Autonomy
- Cultural Freedom
- Defense of rights, traditions, institutions
- Changes in:
 - Ways of learning
 - Social relationships
 - Consciousness
- Legitimacy of :
 - Organization
 - Issues
 - Tactics Employed

Q: How does a group acquire & sustain its legitimacy to its members?

Ability of a Group to Take Collective Action is a Function of:

- Extent of shared interests
- Intensity of its organization
- Degree of mobilization
- Extent of external threat
- Power (various forms)
- Existence of opportunity &/or threat



Remember: (1) Any mobilization limits resources

(2) Opportunities are finite

(3) Mobilization & opportunities limit gains

Some Organizing Guidelines

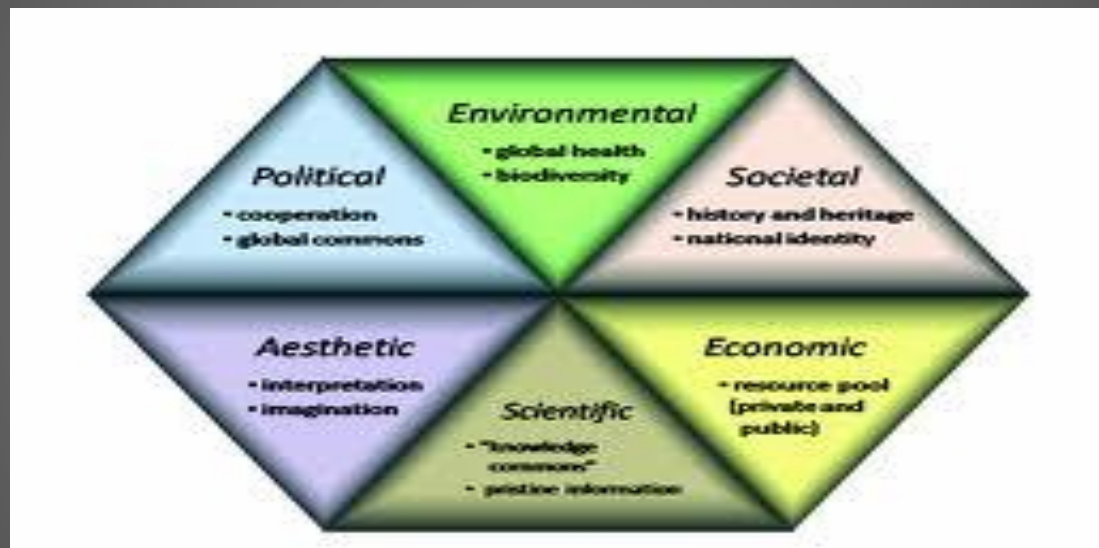
- Keep people informed
- Keep planning within your group: Why?
- Do opposition research
- Don't act w/o info
- Highlight group gains
- Know group's resources
- Keep mgs moving; focus on short-term & allow time for venting & free flow of ideas.
- Balance old & new members in group
- Phase-in activities
- Give progress reports
- Use publicity carefully

KEY STRATEGIC QUESTION:



**How can a group increase
the range of its gains
and limit its losses?**

What role should values play in strategy selection?



For example: How do values determine whether to use consensus or conflict strategies?

Other Questions to Consider

1. How do we identify a group's interests to help formulate strategies?
2. How do we distinguish & act upon differences between individual and group interests?
3. To which part of a group do we pay attention?
4. Which actions are most significant?

Some Final Words

"COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IS ALL ABOUT BUILDING GRASSROOTS SUPPORT. IT'S ABOUT IDENTIFYING THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU WITH WHOM YOU CAN CREATE A COMMON, PASSIONATE CAUSE. AND IT'S ABOUT IGNORING THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM OF COMPANY POLITICS AND INSTEAD PLAYING THE GAME BY VERY DIFFERENT RULES."

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Questions or Comments?



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION
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