

Community Organizing

Adapted from “Strategies for Community Organizing” by John R. Johnson, San Diego State University

<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~jrjohnso/CO/CO.html>

Community organizing involves working to build coalitions with different groups of stakeholders to work together in order to achieve a stated goal. There is power in numbers, and the more people who work actively together, the greater amount of work will produce faster and more effective change.

In order to build a coalition to work on a desired outcome, you must pick a goal that is important to a broader group of people and is achievable. Decide what other groups or people (possible partners) would be interested in and benefit from the achievement of the goal.

To help you with your vision, do not initially discuss how you are going to achieve your goal—just focus on what it will look like for you when the change has occurred.

Make sure the issue meets these criteria:

- Empower to Act (has some emotional charge to encourage action)
- Broad Support (for people without disabilities and policymakers, too)
- High Visibility (something the media will pay attention to, provides direct benefit to people)
- Concrete Results (you and others directly benefit from: result is tangible, practical and achievable)
- WinWin/LoseWin (advances your agenda and has broad appeal)
- Increase political power (increases your political leverage and/or support)
- Builds unity & solidarity (issue that unites people even if progress is slow or uneven)
- Can put a name and a face on the issue (personal stories)

Some other things to consider: A problem is a broad area of concern. An issue is a partial or complete solution to the issue. So when thinking about your goal, see if this will:

1. Result in a real improvement in people's lives? (the issue should directly affect you and others)
2. Can put a name and face (personal stories) on the issue?
3. Empower people? (has avenues for direct action to solve the problem—complaining doesn't solve)
4. Be worthwhile for more than just you—impact for your community/group?

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5. Be doable and winnable?
6. Be widely and deeply felt?
7. Be easy to understand?
8. Have a clear target?
9. Have a time frame that's workable for you?
10. Builds unity in your group?
11. Builds leadership?
12. Set you up for your next campaign?
13. Have a pocketbook angle?
14. Raise money?
15. Be consistent with your values and mission?

Types of Goals

- Long-term (the biggest impact on the largest number of people)
- Intermediate (accomplishes a result that results in a desirable change)
- Short term (gets you the resources, support, and power you need to achieve intermediate goals)

What do you need to think about?

- Planning
- Organization
- Recruitment
- Resources (e.g., money, supplies, office space, computers, etc.)
- Information distribution
- Support
- Communication
- Tactics

Remember that your goals will probably change over time depending on:

- Your issue and situation your needs
- The strength of the opposition
- Timing
- Your skill and effectiveness Strategies for Community Organizing

SETTING GOALS THAT ACHIEVE RESULTS: Important Considerations

1. The primary focus of a campaign is achieving results that solve problems
2. You must be very clear on what your results are.
3. You should take a “make or break” approach to achieving results... if a specific outcome is not achieved then your campaign has not been successful
4. Results should be clear, simple, and easy to understand
5. Results should drive your agenda and your goals are your agenda
6. Results are often described as specific proposals

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7. The failure to develop an achievable action plan that is result driven will cause a campaign to fail.
8. Results and goals should be stated as both reasonable and achievable demands
9. Tactical activism requires that
10. Goals are based on self-interests of constituents and therefore require the injection of your personal values into the agenda
11. Long term goals are goals that result in the achievement
12. Community organizers must give constituents a meaningful role and increase their power (e.g., community policing and crime fighting) and they should set the goals.
13. Community organizers should be careful about selecting trivial goals that if accomplished only give a false sense of power and confidence.
14. Goals should not be focused on extended fights for results that distract attention and divert energy and resources away from the real issues (e.g., fighting to camp in parks v. fighting for low-cost housing)

Long-Term Goals

Long-term Goals: overarching goals that are long-term mission statements that establish the purpose for the existence and activities of an organization

Example: Reduction of unemployment of persons with disabilities (or increased employment)

Intermediate Goals

Intermediate Goals: achieve tangible results for a group of people

- Keep it simple
- Start with what you want -- be selfish
- Think in terms of a proposal for change or action
- Think in terms of focusing on targets and tactics
- Identify goals that all of the constituency and outsiders will support
- Determine which goals need to be accomplished first and the order of the other goals
- Set goals that will increase support and draw volunteers to action
- In the beginning set goals that build your power base before you draw fire from opposition OR goals that draw fire from opposition if it increases your power base
- Do not intentionally draw fire in the early stages of a campaign that depletes your power base and places you on the defensive to protect against loss rather than expanding what you have (matter of timing)
- Examples:
- Federal and state funding and waivers for low-cost community housing and personal assistance services for persons with disabilities placed in nursing homes
- Elimination of segregated employment options for people with disabilities through the redirection of federal, state and local funding to competitive employment and training programs for persons with disabilities

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Short-Term Goals

Short-term goals: steps towards intermediate goals

- Tend to allow organizers to gather power
- Builds on small victories on the way
- Do not take a lot of time or money but require people

Examples: Getting...

- A meeting with the mayor, city council member, or county commissioner
- an agreement in principle to a proposal or a bill
- an agency to compile or release information

IT'S ABOUT RESULTS!

Will YOUR goals result in...

1. Concrete improvements in people's lives
2. Give people a sense of their own power (belief and confidence that they have power)
3. Increase the power of the people or more effective use of their power
4. The solution to the problem specified by the issue

Identifying your target and tactics (ALWAYS a person/group)

- Who can give you what you want (people targets)?
- What do they need/want from you to give you what you want (what's it going to cost)?
- What kind of influence or pressure do they respond to that would cause them to support you and your issue? (Power you have over them)
- What kind of influence, pressure or behavior from you distances them or positions them in opposition to you and your issue?

Primary Targets

1. Who has the power to give you what you want?
2. Always a person - never an organization, institution, elected body or the system
3. Can be viewed as an opponent even if they agree with you (love-hate relationship)
4. Personalizes the issue and the solution
5. Narrows the focus and direction of your campaign
6. Helps if there is more than one primary target - where power is divided or distributed there are usually more weak spots, vulnerabilities and openings (Can also divide you)
7. When and how will the target oppose you? Agree with you?
8. Places an individual in a position of being accountable to a constituency by saying yes or no.
9. Establishes a pressure point for exerting getting attention, exerting discomfort, pain and agitation, and generating a response.

Secondary Targets

1. Persons who have more power over the primary target than you do
2. You have more power over them than you do over your primary target
3. People you can leverage to exert pressure on the primary target

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4. What power do you have over your secondary targets?
5. What power do they have over your primary target?
6. How can you influence them to exert pressure on your primary target to get what you want?

Recruiting Supporters: PEOPLE ARE POWER!

1. Identify who is already working on the issue, if anyone.
2. Decide whether to join their group or start your own campaign.
3. Identify your friends, allies, and supporters.
4. Assess and identify the kinds of resources they offer.
5. RECRUIT, RECRUIT, RECRUIT
6. Connect to other people and organizations that have the same or similar issues

Some Contact Sources

Lists of People

E-mail list - yours
E-mail list - friends
Mailing lists of advocacy organizations
Personal phone book
Personal Calendar
People you work with/for
Individuals
City Council Members
Disability Advocates
Family
Friends with/without disabilities
Newspaper, TV, Radio reporters
Parents
Professors and teachers
School Board Members
Congressional Delegate
Students
Teachers
Therapists
Doctors
Personal Assistants

Organizations

DC AARP
Disability and Child /Family Advocacy Groups (Quality Trust, Family Voices, PTI, Parent-to-Parent)
Churches

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College Student Organizations (including disability student organizations)
Gay/Lesbian Groups
DC Ethnic Coalition Groups
DC Independent Living Center
DC health organizations (Cancer, Lupus, MD, MS, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Spinal Cord Injury, etc)
DC disability organizations (Arc, UCP, Autism, NAMI, Epilepsy, Brain Injury, CHADD, LDA, etc)
DC Independent Living Council
DC Developmental Disabilities Council
DC Departments of...

- Aging
- Rehabilitation
- Disability Services
- Health and Human Services
- Recreation
- Vocational Rehabilitation

Local SBAA Chapter
MOVE
NAACP
Parent Organizations (PTI)
Project Action
PETA
Planned Parenthood
Political Party Clubs
PTA
Right to Life
Direct Care Workers Association/Personal Assistant Services Center
DC Advocacy Partners
Disability Employers (Goodwill, etc)

Constituents

1. Who owns the problem?
2. Who is most directly affected by the problem and will benefit most by the solution?
3. What do they gain by winning?
4. What do they risk by losing?
5. What other risks do they take by leading this campaign?
6. What power or authority do they have over the targets?
7. What groups do they belong to already?
8. Who among them could you identify as leaders and followers?
9. Who can you identify that may place their own personal agenda ahead of the needs of the group?
10. Who can you identify who may have competing interests or conflicts?

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11. Who may not be able to withstand intense conflict, confrontation or scrutiny?
12. What are the collective strengths and weaknesses of the individuals as an organized community?

Allies

1. What other groups stand to benefit from your campaign?
2. What other groups have a similar constituency?
3. What other groups do your constituents belong to?
4. What groups are already engaged in campaign efforts that address your issue directly or indirectly?
5. What groups will support your issue?
6. What groups want something from you?
7. What groups have something you want?
8. What groups would you be comfortable working with?
9. What groups need you but don't know it?

Supporters (non-constituents)

1. Who cares about this issue enough to want to join or help the organization?
2. How wide is the appeal of your issue to the general public?
3. Who does your issue or story evoke an emotional response such as anger, outrage, and sympathy from?
4. What do they bring to the organization in the way people, resources, and support?
5. What can they take away, divert, or distract from the organization and the issue?
6. How can they be used or mobilized to support the issue?

RECRUITMENT...THE MOST IMPORTANT ORGANIZING ACTIVITY!

The Heart of Building Power

1. Nothing kills a campaign quicker than loss of people.
2. Appeal to self-interest: What affects someone personally?
3. Appeal to the heart (e.g., emotion and conviction)
4. Professional: some persons want to get involved for career interests
5. Recruit to an activity and a result not a meeting
6. Provide an ongoing introduction, orientation, and welcome for new folks
7. Be prepared
 - Know the issues
 - Know the history
 - Know who you are recruiting
8. Legitimize yourself
9. Listen
10. Agitate
11. Get a commitment
12. Follow-up

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What is the Best Way to Achieve Your Intermediate & Short-Term Goals?

- Select the tactics that will yield results
- Be conservative in the use of certain types of tactics (e.g., direct action for the purpose of making a statement <Tennessee v. Lane> v. garnering support)
- Factors that limit resources of people with disabilities
- Advocacy-fatigue
- Ethics and cultural competence
- Types of Tactics
 - Direct Action (Strikes, demonstrations, picketing, boycotts)
 - Internet Based Information Sharing
 - Media strategies
 - Strikes
- Voter registration and education
- Litigation
- Elections
- Negotiation
- Political Action (Lobbying, Legislation)
- Public Hearings and Meetings
- Issue/Platform Surveys
- Position Statements
- Who is the target?
- Who will be involved?

Community organizing is about increasing collective and individual power

Grassroots power is acquired when:

1. The other side feels it has to consult you or include you in any planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of a decision or action it wants to take.
2. You are provided an equal opportunity to assume positions of leadership with all of the power, resources, support and authority that come with the position;
3. You succeed in winning short term and long-term social changes.
4. You learn what strategies, tactics and actions work and which don't.
5. Your actions and cause achieve widespread appeal causing people who are and are NOT members of your constituency wanting to join your efforts.
6. Those who oppose you fear the consequences of opposing or resisting you.
7. You are easily identified, easily recognized, and are considered the guardian of a cause.
8. The media, think-tanks, public figures consult you on issues you are identified with or attack you for your position.
9. People working for the cause feel good about themselves, show increased confidence in their abilities, intensify their efforts and commitment, and become better human beings as a result of their efforts.
10. You can accurately predict how your opposition will react and respond to your efforts.

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11. You can outmaneuver, outthink, outclass, outnumber, surprise, embarrass, discredit and decrease broad support for the opposition.
12. You can cause outrage or other strong emotional reactions by the general public in favor of your cause.
13. When you can become identified as the victim and the hero while your opposition is identified as the villain (David and Goliath).
14. When your actions cause any kind of response from your opposition regardless of how nasty or assaultive it may be.

General Guidelines about Tactics

1. No one has to care about your issue or campaign - the extent to which they do care and are willing to act is a measure of some of the extent to which they will assume some level of personal risk or cost
2. To understand what motivates someone to act you must be able to watch, listen, read and predict people
3. The most important question you must be able to answer to build your power-base is what will cause constituents, followers, allies, and supporters to move from complaining and talking to action.
4. To exercise power you must BE where the action is.
5. Newton's Three Laws of Motion Applied to Community Action
 - The Law of Inertia: An object remains in at rest or in a state of motion until an external force is applied to it. Things don't change by themselves. You need to act. (NEED FOR ACTION)
 - Law of Force/Momentum: $F = MA$: Translation: the amount of force you exert is equal to how quickly you move and the number of people you have moving. If you want to exert more pressure, force or influence you need to move quickly and you need a lot of people. Also, the amount of effort you need to exert to get others to move is dependent how many there are of them and how fast you want them to move. (MOTIVATING OTHERS TO ACT)
 - Law of Opposites: For every action there is an equal and often more powerful reaction - therefore, before you act be able to accurately predict the reaction. (OPPOSITION)

10 Cardinal Rules for All Tactics

1. Plan before you act (People who fail to plan, plan to fail).
2. Don't respond, strategize.
3. If you don't have a clear objective (e.g., demand), don't do it. Never use a tactic simply because it seems like the thing to do.
4. Assesses the potential impact - understand the risks and be able to predict the fallout.
 - Remember that sometimes you get what you ask for so make sure you know exactly what you are asking for.
 - Don't jeopardize your campaign because you have a preference for one tactic over another.

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- Be ethical in your tactics.
5. Tactics must be doable and preferably fun.
 6. Evaluate your results - success comes from learning and doing what works
 - If what you do didn't accomplish what you wanted make sure you know how and why.
 - If what you did damaged your campaign make sure you know why and don't allow it to happen again.
 - If what you did accomplished what you wanted make sure you know why and use it again with discretion.
 - Remember that whatever works against your opponent makes them that much smarter about dealing with you.
 7. Use the element of surprise. It can be extremely effective and give your campaign momentum. Therefore, be careful about how much you allow your opposition know about what you are doing. However, don't surprise your allies and supporters.
 8. Once you gain momentum don't let up.
 9. Know when you have achieved what you set out to achieve - have a make or break it point for your campaign (When this happens we will have won).
 10. Celebrate your victories; learn from your failures.

General Rules for Executing Tactics

1. Stay within the experience and ethical boundaries of the group and if possible your allies and supporters
2. Act outside the experience of the target (surprise/deception)
3. Ask the target then demand from the target
4. Make an appointment rather than hoping for a surprise encounter
 - doesn't give them an excuse to blow you off
 - forces them to say yes or no to a meeting giving you a measure of their responsiveness
 - prevents your group from being disappointed and embarrassed
5. Case the joint and do your homework
6. Hold dress rehearsals
7. Make sure you have only one spokesperson and he/she is present
8. Ask people to come early and make sure they are informed of any new developments
9. Send press releases to the media early (a week ahead)
10. Keep to the simple facts
11. Keep your information current, reliable, and accurate
12. Keep your demands clear, direct, simple, and directly to the point.
13. Evaluate the results.

Manage and Monitor Opposition and Resistance

1. Why will your efforts will be resisted?
2. Knowing your opponent
 - What is their agenda?
 - What are their goals?
 -

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- Identify their resources?
 - What kinds of tactics and strategies do they use?
 - Who is their constituency? Who supports them?
 - What are their strengths and weaknesses?
 - What are your strengths and weaknesses?
3. What strategies and tactics can you use to minimize or counter your opponent?
 4. What do you need to do to increase your base of support, power and resources?
 5. Do not become so focused on your opponent that your opponent can misdirect you with his/her own actions.
 6. Keep your goals and agenda as your primary focus of attention.

EVALUATING YOUR OPPOSITION

1. Who are your opponents?
2. Who are those persons who will try to stop you from getting what you want?
3. Who are those persons who will stand to lose something?
4. What will your victory cost them?
5. What do you know about your opponents?
6. What are their strengths?
7. What are their weaknesses?
8. What kind of information can you gather about your opponents?
9. What kind of access do you have to your opponents?
10. What do they do that you can do better?
11. What do they do that you don't want to do?

Questions to Be Answered Before Your Campaign Begins:

1. What is the name of your campaign?
2. What are the goals of your campaign?
3. Who are the targets of your campaign?
4. Who will be involved in working on your campaign (Agents of Change)?
5. What strategies and tactics will you use?
6. What resources and assets will you need?
7. Who are your allies and opponents?
8. What concrete practical results will you achieve?