

Homeless Organizing Academy

Organizing 101

What is Community Organizing?

- 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. The tactics and strategies employed by the organizer are similar to the processes of leadership including timing the issue, deliberate planning, getting the attention of the populace, framing the issue in terms of the desired solution, and shaping the terms of the decision-making process.

Why do groups engage in Community Organizing?

- Community organizing helps to bring out many voices to add collective power and strength to an issue. Community Organizing is a key part of an overall strategy to make changes in a community that are widely felt, and that reflect the wishes of the people who are directly affected by community problems. This requires the organizer to not only listen and be responsive to the community, but also to help community residents develop the skills necessary to address their own issues in an ongoing way.

Why is it important to have groups directly affected by a problem actively engaged in solving that problem?

- Because the so-called “experts” do not necessarily have our interest at hand, so it makes sense for us to be at the table when decisions are made about things that affect our lives and our livelihood.

Why is it important to have a collective approach as oppose to an approach that focuses on individual solutions?

- Focusing on individual solutions does not address systemic problems that a community may face, but only fixes the problem for a single person or a small group of people.

What are some qualities of a good organizer?

- Community organizers think strategically about their work while always keeping the final goal in mind and continually making contributions to the goal. This is especially important in community organizing campaigns to enact or change policies. Qualities include:
 - Imagination
 - Sense of Humor
 - Blurred vision of a better world
 - An organized personality
 - Strong ego/sense of oneself
 - A free, open mind, and political relativity
 - Ability to create the new out of the old (*Saul Alinsky, 1971*)

What are an organizer's responsibilities? (View Chart)