FUNDAMENTALS OF ORGANIZING

Building People Power and Leadership

"I have always thought that what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership in others" ~ Ella Baker

Keys to Organizing

Here are our main keys to organizing:

- Organizing is about **recruiting people to get involved** and **developing their leadership** to wield **inclusive people power** to achieve **social change.**
- Organizers achieve this purpose by **getting people to act as a team/community.**
- **Hone a mix of skills** including telling your story, securing commitments from others, fostering impactful teams, relentless focus on goals, adapting plans, implementing a diverse set of tactics, and improving personal productivity.
- Core skills of an organizer: **Gain real commitments** (e.g., through one-on-ones, clear direct asks, and follow up) and **develop leadership** (e.g., coaching and making snowflake leadership structures).
- **Show you care about those you are organizing with** (e.g., listen, ask questions, check-in on, recognize/praise, etc.). Remember to consistently follow up.

Defining Organizing Terms

What is an Organizer?

Organizing is about **recruiting people to get involved** and **developing their leadership** to wield **inclusive people power** to achieve **social change**.

Or for a shorter definition, an organizer recruits people to get involved and develops inclusive people power.

Organizing is about **getting people to act** and requires sharing your own **story**, building

connections and commitments, developing intersectional and lasting teams, persistently pushing an **adaptable action plan**, fostering **equity and justice**, improving yourself and your own **productivity**, and honing a culture of collective **leadership development**.

A good organizer specifically presents a compelling positive vision and **builds the power of those most impacted** by issues of injustice to move towards real justice and equity, while dismantling institutions of oppression.

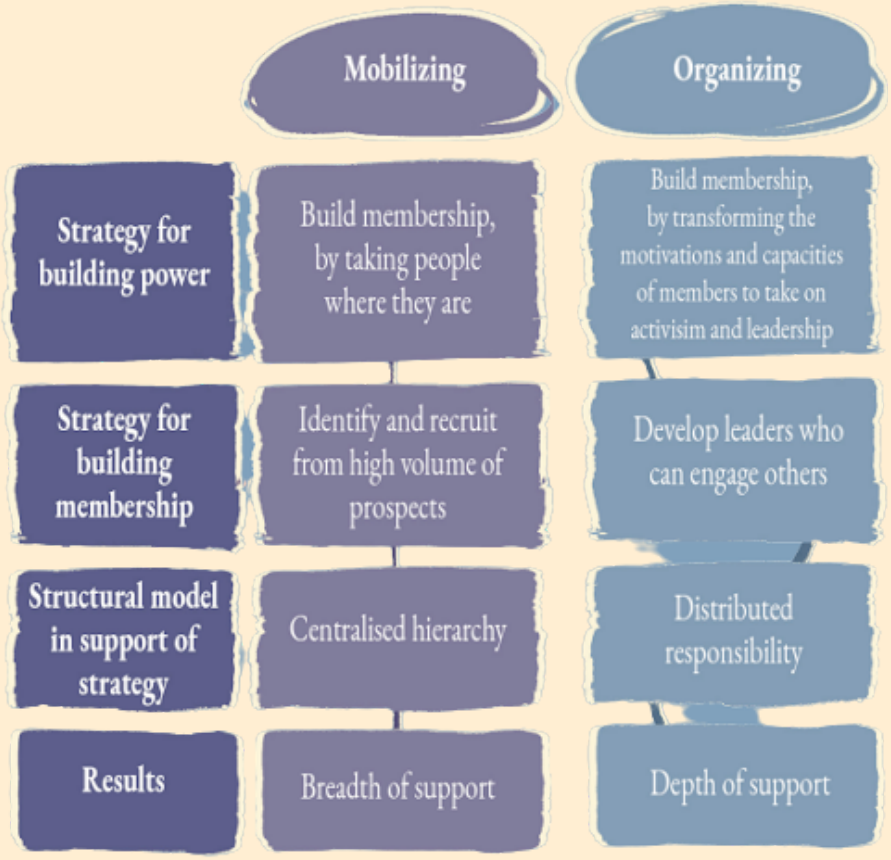
Organizing is about getting others to make an impact. It's not about what you achieve. Your whole results are based around what others accomplish. Think of organizers as “coaches” who focus on getting their “teams” to practice and improve, but ultimately it’s up to the “players” to carry out the “strategy” and “win the game.”

Difference Between Organizing and Mobilizing

Mobilizers focus on moving people to act, specifically to physically/digitally show up or take action. Sometimes this can just be small groups of people attending a city council meeting or it can mean getting thousands of people to protest in the streets.

The crucial difference is that **mobilizers focus more on getting people to show up** while **organizers focus more on developing leaders**. Mobilizing people is often part of a strategy/campaign and generally shorter-term, while organizing is longer-term.

You often need both mobilizing and organizing, just remember they are not interchangeable skills and practices.



Other Important Terms

Here are some other terms that are useful to know:

- Activist: An activist is someone who actively supports/opposes a particular cause or "speaks truth to power."
- Leader: In an organizing context, leaders are those who serve as public voices for issues, campaigns, projects, and initiatives. A key organizer role is to develop leaders. Note - In an organizer context, leaders are generally unpaid positions so any leader that gets hired should resign their positions (i.e., since organizers develop leaders in this context).

Defining Organizing Terms

Ella Baker

Ella Baker's organizing philosophy centered on developing the capacity of people to fight for their own liberation. She said, "I have always thought that what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership in others."



Here her words "Give light and people will find the way" fit best. This is what it means to organize, according to Ella Baker.

As an organizer, it is not about being the face of the community. Ella Baker said, "You didn't see me on television, you didn't see news stories about me. The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped organization might come. My theory is, strong people don't need strong leaders."

So when asking yourself "am I effectively organizing?" evaluate your response to this question "am I developing the capacity of others to fight for their own liberation?"

Marshall Ganz

Marshall Ganz writes "Organizers ask three questions: Who are my people? What is their urgent problem? How can they turn their resources into the power to solve their problem? They answer the questions in dialogue with their constituency by building relationships, telling stories, devising strategy, designing structure and taking action."

Marshall Ganz breaks his framework into five main pieces: story, relational commitment, structure, strategy, and measurable action.

Rinku Sen

Rinku Sen writes in *Stir it Up* about the importance of, "increasing our **organizing among the people affected** and then addressing **their issues** with **sustained campaigns** and the addition of **research and media capacity**." She notes this means you need to organize for the long-term (even if issues cannot be won in short-term) and have a clear political ideology

She breaks this down through the following practices

- First, organize the most marginalized people, instead of focusing on the center.
- Second, choose issues "that enable the organizing of the worst-off, sometimes privileging those concerns over blander issues that might be more winnable."
- Third, develop a clear organizational ideology through political education and organizing practice.

Sen notes that organizing groups should be places for folks to, "have political discussions that question that status quo."

Momentum-Driven Organizing

"Momentum-Driven Organizing" is the term Mark and Paul Engler use in This is an Uprising, to describe a "a hybrid [type of organizing] between structure and mass protest" (i.e., a mix between traditional organizing models involving building a base of people/developing people and more distributed disruptive activity).

In this model, it is all about building towards/fostering the movement moment, instead of just waiting for it to happen.

Principles of Effective Organizers

Focus on Developing the Leadership of Others

Ella Baker said "strong people don't need strong leaders" which means people do not need to follow a charismatic leader if they have developed their own leadership skills. It is critical you build systems of training, coaching, and hands-on experience for your constituency to develop their skills and understanding.

Also, remember Akili's principle "We do with people, not for people." Organizers work to develop the power of those they are working with who lead and make their own decisions as a group.

Apply the 5 Core Elements of Marshall Ganz's Framework

- Public Narrative - Share your story to motivate others to action
- Relationship building - Build relationships to gain real commitment
- Structure - Develop leadership through well-designed team structures
- Strategy - Strategize and re-strategize to reach goals
- Action - Learn by doing and measuring the success of your actions

Follow Rinku Sen's Key to Build the Base Among Those Most Impacted

Remember, organizing is about building people's power, and it also means an organizer is never a "savior" for a community. An organizer develops the capacity of the constituency to fight to improve the lives of their own people.

Recruitment and Base Building

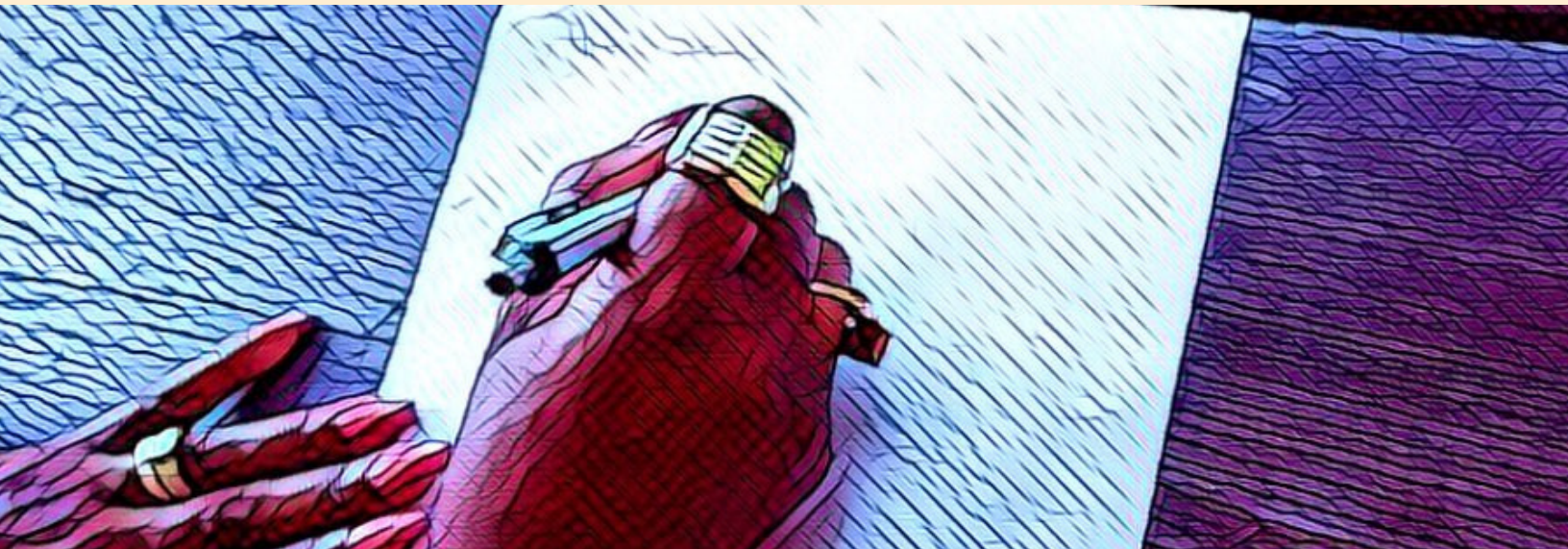
Lee Staples notes in Roots to Power, a few keys for organizers include: "ask lots of questions, spend long hours doing recruitment, and constantly push new people to take on more responsibility." Staples continues by highlighting the connection between recruitment and the ability to get others to take the lead in social change efforts.

Remember, it's not how many business cards give away it's how many you get. You need to take responsibility for following up since others may forget.

Combine Multiple Forms of Organizing and Mobilizing

Hahrie Han notes in How Organizations Develop Activists, that groups that used both transformational organizing (i.e., leadership development) with transactional mobilizing (i.e., engaging large numbers of people to take action) were more effective.

Han continues that mobilization builds the list of people at all levels of leadership experience, and then organizations can use these lists of people who signed up or took action through the mobilization effort to engage them in organizing/leadership development.



OCOCOC Cycle - Build the Organization/Build the Campaign

The OCOCOC cycle refers to the idea that if you build the organization, it will make it easier to build a strong campaign, then if you build a strong campaign you can build a strong organization, and on it goes (i.e., Organization -> Campaign -> Organization -> Campaign).

So, that means you need to ensure to focus on both building a strong organization that engages people beyond a single campaign, and also operate issue/electoral campaigns that drive higher levels of engagement.

Demonstrate Your Dedication and Concern for Others

Akili notes "Be positive and enthusiastic...People will come because of the issues, they will stay because of you [the organizer]." Therefore you need to be a good listener, bring joy to those around you (e.g., with music, creativity, humor, etc.), and demonstrate a little charm.

Ask for Something at Every Opportunity

Whether it is asking someone to increase their involvement, to donate money, to share expertise, etc., as an organizer you should have an ask every time you meet with someone. One of the core organizer responsibilities is to ask people to do things (e.g., improve their leadership, attend an action/event, etc.).

So, you need to build a habit of constantly asking people and encouraging them to get involved. However, just make sure you know them well enough to know what they want to do (i.e., make your asks tailored to their personal interests/values).

Persistence and Appreciation of Others

As people are developing their responsibilities and skills, organizers must frequently follow up with their constituency (e.g., reminding them of tasks, actions, and meetings and also checking in on how they are doing). That is why it is so important that organizers constantly email, text, social media message, call, etc. to remind people about when to be and where, what they need to accomplish, hold them accountable for their work, and show their appreciation.

People like to feel that you care about them as an individual. So sending letters, texts, and other creative methods of follow up and appreciation is a crucial habit. Note - avoid emailing appreciation since it is impersonal.

Consistently Drive and Adapt a Clear Action Plan

This includes SMART goals, timelines, and breakdowns of actions/tasks. Akili notes, "Some is not a number, soon is not a time, someone is not a person." You have to know what success looks like at every stage of the organizing, so break down your SMARTIE goals (Specific, Measurable,

Attainable, Relevant, Timebound, Inclusive, and Equitable) into timelines with specific actions and tasks.

If you have created an action plan and only look at it once or twice, and do not use it, then you will have a much harder time holding yourself accountable for what success looks like each week.

Hone Your Personal Organization and Productivity

Akili notes, “Time is your most valuable resource you have, use it wisely.” Most organizers will not have a complete staff to work with so you are going to take on some/a lot of the work yourself, especially at the beginning.

This means applying skills such as: Inbox Zero, breaking down plans and projects (e.g., clear goals, timelines, and actions), calendaring all tasks, digital TO-DO list tracking, and just generally doing everything that you say you will get done.

Document Your Learning and Knowledge to Share With Others

Whether it is reading, listening to podcasts, hands-on learning, etc. you need to constantly be learning about organizing, organizational development, training, political education, fundraising, volunteer engagement, personal wellness, etc. Rinku Sen notes that organizers need to “be far more systematic about documenting and evaluating organizational activities.”

timelines, and actions), calendaring all tasks, digital TO-DO list tracking, and just generally doing everything that you say you will get done.

