

Lesson 8: Introduction to Community Organizing

Goals/Purpose

This lesson introduces participants to key concepts of community organizing. Participants also gain an understanding of how community organizing works, and explore how it is an effective tool for making real improvements in their communities.

Objectives

- List examples of self-interest and community interest, and describe how they relate to community organizing
- Describe how community organizing works and why it is used
- Describe how community organizing is different from other ways of making change

Total Time

90 minutes over 1-2 sessions

Agenda/Activities

- Introductions/Icebreaker (Raffle Ticket)
- Self-Interest
- What is Organizing?
- Ways to Make Change (optional)
- Road Map to Community Organizing
- Closing

Facilitator Preparation

- Icebreaker (as the group forms, youth can take on this role)
- Write Up Agenda
- Definition of community organizing
- Definitions of “service”
- Make large posters outlining a windy road for road map activity (1 per small group) (See Tools for a sample road map)
- Copy & cut community mapping steps on different color cardstock (1 set per group)

Materials Needed

- Newsprint
- Markers
- Tape
- Raining Rocks Story (1 copy per group)
- Raining Rocks questions (1 copy per group)
- Road Map to Community Organizing handout (1 copy per person)

Tools

- Raining Rocks Story
- Raining Rocks questions
- Road Map to Community Organizing



The Basics

Direct action community organizing is one way to fix a problem. The thing that makes this method different from other ways of fixing problems is that it works to challenge the power structure (pyramid of power) that allowed the problem to happen in the first place.

One well-known movement that successfully used direct action community organizing is the United Farm Workers, spearheaded by Cesar Chavez. By building coalitions with faith communities across the country and forging the support of unions, students, and consumers, Chavez built national support for a long-standing boycott of grapes. Non-violent tactics like picketing and a 340-mile march to Sacramento also focused attention on the struggles of farm workers. These combined actions resulted in the first successful U. S. farm workers union and significant benefits for farm workers. Notably, the farm workers movement crossed both racial and class lines, and involved women, such as Dolores Huerta, in strong leadership roles.

Direct action community organizing is when people who are affected by a problem decide on a solution, and with the strength of their numbers put pressure on politicians or whoever can make concrete improvements to the problem to do so. It's about changing who has power; it's about people coming together and building power to get what they want.

Two key concepts in community organizing are **self-interest** and **community interest**. Many people see self-interest as a bad thing but it's not. Self-interest is your concern for your priorities, your health and safety, and those of people that are connected to you (friends, family, neighbors). Community interest is a collective concern for priorities, health, and safety shared by a group of people. Self-interest and community interest motivate people to come together to get power and make change.

In this section youth are asked to think about their self-interest. They are also asked to consider different ways of making change, and the power that a community can have when its members decide to work together to solve a problem.

1. Self Interest

10 minutes

Materials: none

After the raffle ticket icebreaker, have a short discussion about self-interest and community interest, and how they are related to community organizing. Use the following to guide your discussion:

- Ask youth to share their responses from the raffle ticket icebreaker **“Why did you come here today?”** (eg., meet new people, fun, make my school or community better). Explain that these are examples of self-interest.
- Read aloud the definition of self-interest: a concern for your own priorities, your health and safety, and those of people close to you.
- Ask participants: **Do you think self-interest is good?**
- Explain that self-interest can be good because it gets people involved in things that are important to them.
- Next ask: **What if your interest goes against what is good for most others? Is it still ok?**
- Ask participants to complete the following sentence. **If self-interest is what's good and important to one person then community interest is what 's important and good for _____.** (Answer: a number of people.)
- Explain that it is important to balance self-interest with community interest.

Explain the connection to community organizing: People in power often use their power to satisfy their own self-interest. In community organizing, people come together to use their collective power to make sure that community interest is met.



2. What is Organizing?¹

30 minutes

Materials: Raining Rocks Story (1 copy per group), Raining Rocks questions (1 copy per group)

a. Explain that we are going to answer the question, “What is organizing?” The definition we use is **“the process of bringing people together to use their collective power to win improvements in people’s lives and challenge the power structure.”**

Let youth know that you are going to read a short story and then we’re going to answer a few questions that will show what community organizing looks like.

b. Read the Raining Rocks story out loud (see Tools at the end of this section for handout).

c. After the story has been read out loud, divide the group into three small groups corresponding to the three main groups in the story. Group (1) will be the villagers who want to go up the mountain, Group (2) will be the villagers who want to continue the rescue, and Group (3) will be Filthy Richbanks and his friends.

Each group answers the questions for their group (see Tools for handout). Each group should pick a recorder and someone to report back to the whole group.

d. Facilitate report backs of each small group.

e. Ask if anyone wants to comment on what they learned or observed.

f. Then synthesize the activity:

- Point out that the exercise is about how to respond to a problem in the community. Some people want to minimize the damage of the fall and others want to stop the rocks from falling.
- As we can see from Harrison Hotel it is only through the second approach that the boulders would actually stop. This is what organizing looks like -- looking at the root of the problem and getting people together to fight to fix it.

¹ Adapted from *Political Education Manual*, SOUL: A School to Build a Movement.

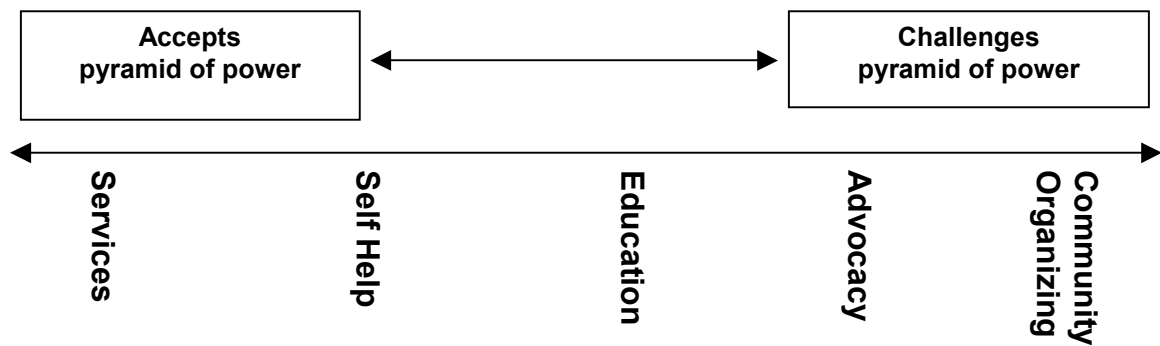
g. Ask, **Does this mean that other ways to make change are not important?**
 (Answer: No. There have to be many ways to fight the problems in our communities and we need to respect all people who are trying to make change and find solutions. However, we believe that organizing is the best way to make lasting change and address the root of the problem. Organizing can bring people together so that they can create and support the solution to a community problem.)

3. Ways to Make Change (optional)²

20 minutes

Materials: chalk and chalkboard or poster of ways to make change

Draw the diagram below on the board to use as a guide for discussing different ways to make change.



a. Explain that there are different ways to make change and the major ones are listed here on this graph. We're going to go through an example to see different ways to fix a problem.

The problem we're going to look at is "there is nothing for young people to do." Young people could go about getting things to do in many different ways.

² Adapted from *Organizing for Social Change*, Midwest Academy.

b. Go through each way to make change. Define each method for participants; write a one-to-two word explanation below each method as a guide for participants. Then **ask the group to come up with an example of how to fix the problem using that method.** Add the example next to that method on the graph. Repeat for each method of change.

- **Providing Service:** Supply basic services to people who need them, often to meet basic needs such as food, health care, etc.

What it looks like: An organization like the boys and girls club could provide recreational activities for teens and charge membership to cover the costs.

- **Self Help:** People affected by a problem do something to help each other.

What it looks like: Teens plan and host weekly or monthly activities like dances, picnics, and sporting events.

- **Education:** Letting people know about issues so that people affected by the issue can understand the problem.

What it looks like: A group of youth survey other teens about the lack of activities for young people. They get an article published in the newspaper to let other teens and parents know about the problem. They also include a list of resources about the few teen activities going on in their community.

- **Advocacy:** A group or organization that cares about a problem pleads the cause on behalf of the group affected by the problem.

What it looks like: The PTA or residents association could give testimony to the mayor that the city should fund after-school activities for youth.

- **(Direct Action) Community Organizing:** Bringing people together to use their collective power to win improvements in people's lives and challenge the pyramid of power.

What it looks like: Teens organize. They come together and agree on a solution that meets their needs. With their strength -- and the support of parents and other teens -- they pressure the politicians and officials responsible to provide more teen activities.

c. Discussion:

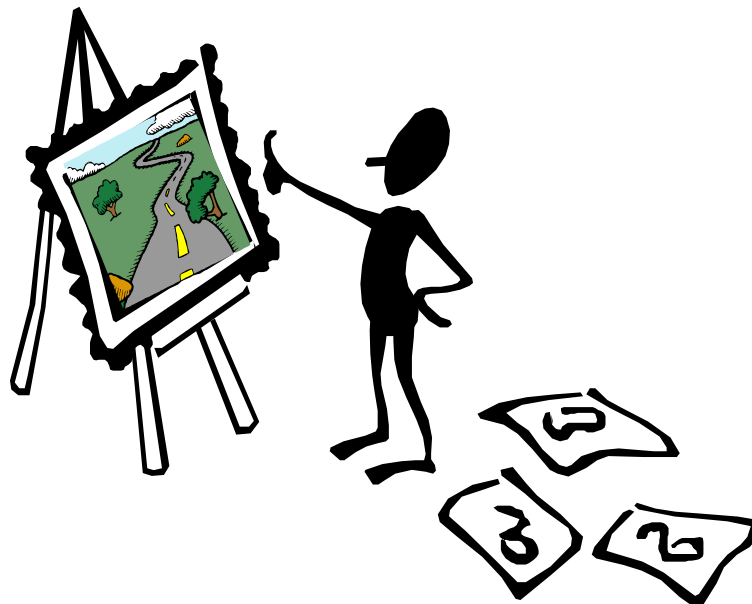
- Point out that each way of making change is connected differently to the pyramid of power challenging the pyramid of power. Services do not challenge the pyramid of power, community organizing is based on
- Reinforce that community organizing is the approach we're going to use because it (1) builds power within the community (2) lets you (the community) come up with the best solution for yourself and (3) seeks long-term solutions to the problem.

4. Road Map to Community Organizing

30 minutes

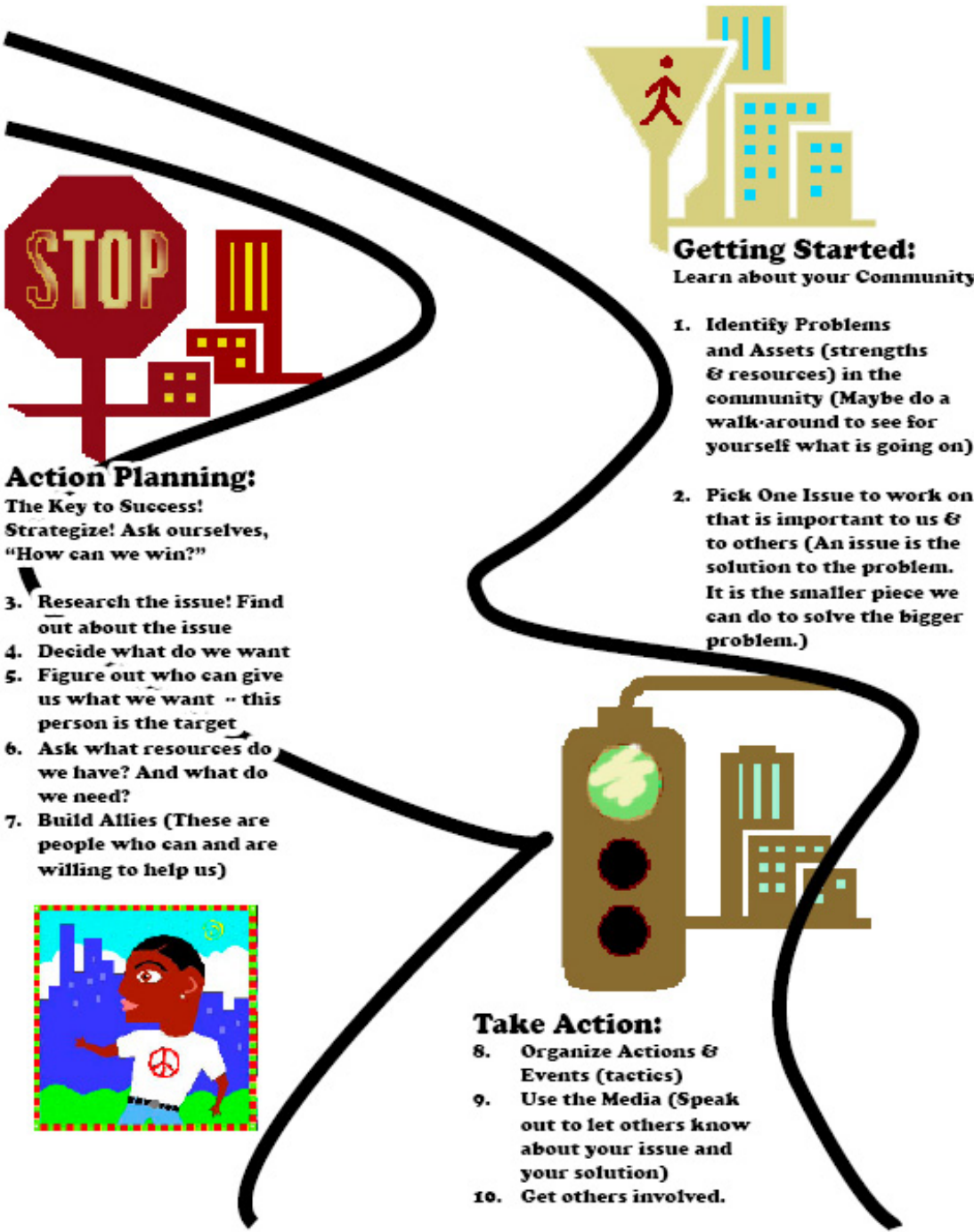
Materials: blank road maps on newsprint (1 per group), a set of 'pit stops' (1 per group)

- a. Remind the group that when we talked about power we went over some victories won through community organizing (eg, TIGHT, ECYC, and ETA). Now, we are going to get down to the specifics about how community organizing works and the different steps to successful organizing.
- b. Explain that this activity is going to be like a road map. Each group is going to get a road map and a set of pit stops. It is your job to decide together where the stops belong on the road map. Each map has 'road signs' on it – these are guides to help you figure out where the different pit stops belong.



c. Use the following road map as a guide:

Road Map to Community Organizing



d. Divide the large group into smaller groups of 3-5 people. Ask each group to identify a reporter and a timekeeper for the group. Give the groups 10 minutes to complete their road map.

e. Once completed, post the road maps where everyone can see them. Give each group 3 minutes to report back to the large group about their roadmap.

Compare the different ways groups mapped their route. Groups might want to make some changes after discussing together.

Acknowledge that there is a general order to how community organizing works but that often making change takes a long time. So, sometimes changes happen while you are working to fix the problem and you might make changes along the way or repeat some steps.

f. Emphasize that the action planning is critical to success! It might take some time to research the issue and build relationships with the people on your side (allies), but it is worth it – because this will help you WIN.

Tools – Lesson 8



Road Map to Community Organizing



Action Planning:

The Key to Success!
Strategize! Ask ourselves,
"How can we win?"

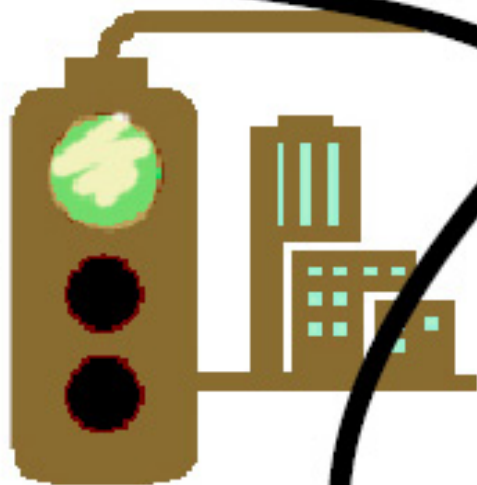
3. Research the issue! Find out about the issue
4. Decide what do we want
5. Figure out who can give us what we want -- this person is the target
6. Ask what resources do we have? And what do we need?
7. Build Allies (These are people who can and are willing to help us)



Getting Started:

Learn about your Community

1. Identify Problems and Assets (strengths & resources) in the community (Maybe do a walk-around to see for yourself what is going on)
2. Pick One Issue to work on that is important to us & to others (An issue is the solution to the problem. It is the smaller piece we can do to solve the bigger problem.)



Take Action:

8. Organize Actions & Events (tactics)
9. Use the Media (Speak out to let others know about your issue and your solution)
10. Get others involved.

RAINING ROCKS STORY: A PARABLE³

Once upon a time there was a little town in the mountains called Swisstown. One winter, a villager taking a walk in the hills finds a man lying in the snow – he has been hit by a falling rock. The villager, being a very caring person, uses her jacket to bandage the injured man and carries him back down to the village.

The next day two more people are hit by falling rocks, and they are rescued by other villagers. The next day, four people are hurt, then eight, then twenty. Life becomes dangerous for all villagers, because rocks keep falling down. A couple of villagers sneak up the mountain and discover that the rocks are being thrown by a millionaire, Harrison Hotel, and his friends who hope to build a luxurious hotel and golf course in Swisstown. They are throwing the rocks hoping to get rid of the villagers so they can take over the land.

The Disaster Relief Agency shows up in town. They set up a huge rescue operation. They set up a clinic to heal the injured, send dogs to find injured people who are lost outside, a shelter for those whose homes are destroyed, and social workers to help people deal with the traumatic effects of the falling rocks. Finally, The Disaster Relief Agency makes a giant net to place over Swisstown to stop the rocks from falling.

One day, the net breaks and rocks fall on the village, injuring hundreds and destroying homes, schools, and stores. The Disaster Relief Agency is working furiously to heal and provide shelter. From then on, rescue work becomes an important part of the villagers' lives. Everyone becomes involved in helping those hurt by the falling rocks.

Three months later, at a town meeting, a group of villagers get together to make a proposal. They are sick and tired of the falling rocks, of their people being hurt, and they want to change the situation. They propose that the villagers unite and go up the mountain to demand that Harrison Hotel stop dropping the rocks.

Some disagree, saying that Swisstown's rescue and relief efforts can't afford it. If anyone leaves, there won't be enough people power to rescue and tend to the injured.

The town is split in two groups – those who want to stay and keep up the rescue effort going, and those who want to march up the mountain and confront Harrison Hotel.

³ Adapted from *Political Education Manual*, SOUL: A School to Build a Movement

RAINING ROCKS QUESTIONS⁴

GROUP ONE: Villagers who want to go up the mountain

- Discuss the questions and pick one spokesperson who can explain your answers to the larger group.
 - In the story, what is your strategy in dealing with the falling rocks problem?
 - Do you think your strategy is successful? Why or why not?
 - How would the scenario end if your strategy is used?
-

GROUP TWO: Villagers who want to keep up the rescue effort

- Discuss the questions and pick one spokesperson who can explain your answers to the larger group.
 - In the story, what is your strategy in dealing with the falling rocks problem?
 - Do you think your strategy is successful? Why or why not?
 - How would the scenario end if your strategy is used?
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GROUP THREE: The Millionaire and his friends

- Discuss the questions and pick one spokesperson who can explain your answers to the larger group.
- Which of the two groups do you think you could work with more closely to achieve your goal?
- Which of the two groups is more threatening to you and your goal to build a golf course and luxurious hotel?
- What is your strategy in dealing with the two groups in order to achieve your goal of building the golf course and luxurious hotel?

⁴ Adapted from *Political Education Workshop Manual*, SOUL: A School to Build A Movement