



# Approaches to Community Organizing and Their Relationship to Consensus Organizing

# 1

**Purpose:** This chapter defines community, civic engagement, and social capital, and their relationship to community organizing. Various approaches to community organizing, including consensus organizing, are discussed and compared.

**Learning Objectives:**

- To define and discuss community, civic engagement and social capital and their relationship to community organizing.
- To define and analyze traditional and current approaches to community organizing.
- To define and analyze the consensus organizing approach to community organizing and compare it with traditional and current approaches.
- To analyze and compare various approaches to community organizing by applying them to specific circumstances and issues.

**Keywords:** community, civic engagement, social capital, community organizing, power-based organizing, community building, locality development/civic organizing, social planning, women-centered/feminist organizing, consensus organizing

## COMMUNITY, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

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The word “community” can mean different things to different people. Community can be used to refer to communities of association (e.g., religious communities), gender, race, or geography. Cohen (1985) defines community as a system of norms, values, and moral codes that provide a sense of identity for members. Fellin (2001) describes a community as a group of people who form a social unit based on common location (e.g., city or neighborhood), interest and identification (e.g., ethnicity, culture, social class, occupation, or age) or some combination of these characteristics. In many community organizing approaches, geography is the determining factor for community, including “. . . people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live” (Mattessich, Monsey, & Roy, 1997, p. 6). This workbook uses a definition of community that emphasizes geography, including neighborhoods, and relationships, including social and psychological connections and networks.

Scholars as far back as Alexis de Tocqueville (Stone & Mennell, 1980) have emphasized the engagement of the community as a focal point of a healthy democracy. More recently, scholars and researchers have argued that civic engagement and participation are decreasing, jeopardizing our democratic system. Etzioni (1993) warned that declining civic engagement and responsibility were eroding the fabric of American society. Putnam’s (2000) *Bowling Alone* provided statistical evidence of the decline in citizen participation over the past 50 years and its negative implications for democratic life. However, Smock (2004) argues that a “significant portion of our nation’s population has always been excluded from meaningful participation in the democratic arena” (p. 5). Furthermore, genuine political equality must be built on equal access to voting, as well as direct participation in public decision making.

Putnam’s (2000) solution to the erosion of civic engagement involves rebuilding the social fabric or social capital of communities. Social capital is defined as “. . . the connections among individuals—social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Putnam argues that social capital is important for government effectiveness, economic health, and community well-being. Social capital and networks also allow ordinary people to engage in the political process, work together to solve common problems, improve the quality of life, and take advantage of opportunities (Smock, 2004). Furthermore, the role of social capital in understanding and strengthening community organizing and development has been noted by several scholars (Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Hornburg & Lang, 1998; Keyes, Schwartz, Vidal, & Bratt, 1996), including understanding how community organizing facilitates social capital, developing supportive social networks for the production of affordable housing, and building connections that low-income communities may need in the face of diminishing federal responsibility. Temkin and Rohe (1998) found that social capital is a key factor determining neighborhood stability over time, including the overall sense

of attachment and loyalty among residents, and the capacity of residents to leverage their relationships and networks into effective community action.

Table 1.1 summarizes the types and functions of social capital. Putnam makes an important distinction between two types of social capital: bonding and bridging (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital involves dense social networks among small groups of people that bring them closer together. It is inward-looking, tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups, and accumulates in the daily lives of families and people living in communities through the course of informal interactions. Bridging social capital is composed of loosely connected networks of large numbers of individuals typically linked through indirect ties. It is outward-looking, connects communities and people to others, and encompasses people across diverse social groups and/or localities. Temkin and Rohe (1998) also found that both bonding and bridging social capital are needed to create positive community change.

Smock (2004) further distinguishes social capital and networks by their substance and function, including instrumental, affective, and normative ties.

**Table 1.1 Types and Functions of Social Capital**

		<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
<b>Types</b> Putnam (2000)	Bonding	Dense social networks among small groups of people linked through direct, strong ties	Members of a local church Members of a local block club or organization
	Bridging	Loosely connected networks of large numbers of individuals linked through indirect ties	Metropolitan bank investing in the work of community development corporation (CDC)
<b>Functions</b> Smock (2004)	Instrumental Ties	Based on the expectation of tangible, material benefits	Residents joining the CDC to develop and secure low-interest loans or grants for housing rehabilitation
	Affective Ties	Based on personal and emotional attachments	Residents joining a block club to attend regular social gatherings and get to know their neighbors
	Normative Ties	Based on a shared sense of values, principles, obligations	Joining a national organization committed to social justice for the poor and oppressed

Instrumental ties are based on the expectation of tangible, material benefits; affective ties are based on personal and emotional attachments; and normative ties are based on a shared sense of values, principles, and/or obligations. Community organizing approaches differ in how they facilitate social capital and networks, the forms they take, and the functions they serve. However, they share the same goal: to develop social capital and networks in an attempt to address the erosion of civic engagement, particularly among those typically left out of the decision-making process. Community organizing provides a mechanism for ordinary citizens to impact public decision making in order to improve their social and economic conditions.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING APPROACHES

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Table 1.2 summarizes the major approaches to community organizing, including consensus organizing, by synthesizing approaches defined by Rothman (1968, 1996, 2001) and Smock (2004). Approaches and models of community organizing have evolved over the last century; however, initial approaches can be traced back to Saul Alinsky (1946, 1971), who is seen as the founder of community organizing. His approach to community organizing, called conflict organizing, was the dominant form of community organizing practiced over the past century and it continues to be practiced today (Eichler, 2007; Smock, 2004). Saul Alinsky (1971) incorporated the idea of self-interest as a motivating factor for community involvement. The goal of conflict organizing was empowerment through the development of People's Organizations in which regular people with similar self-interests would come together and confront and make demands on the power structure to create improvements for the community (Eichler, 2007; Smock, 2004).

### *Social Action*

Today's social action models have their roots in conflict organizing. Social action approaches assume the existence of an aggrieved or disadvantaged segment of the population that needs to be organized to make demands on the larger community for increased resources or equal treatment (Rothman, 1995). The goals of social action include making fundamental changes in the community, such as redistributing resources and gaining access to decision making for marginal groups, and changing legislative mandates, policies, and practices of institutions.

Smock (2004) distinguishes between power-based and transformative social action models (see Table 1.2). Power-based organizers believe there is a power imbalance and they must work to shift or build power. However, transformative models believe that the power structure/system is fundamentally flawed, and they work to radically restructure it. Power-based models emphasize

**Table 1.2 Comparing Community Organizing Approaches and Consensus Organizing**

	<b>Social Action/ Power Based</b>	<b>Social Action/ Transformative</b>	<b>Locality Development/ Civic Organizing</b>	<b>Social Planning</b>	<b>Community Building</b>	<b>Women- Centered/ Feminist</b>	<b>Consensus Organizing</b>
<b>Theory of Change/ Goals</b>	Build/shift power; build clout to represent interests	Radically restructure power and institutions	Restore social order/control; social integration	Develop expert solutions to problems	Strengthen the social fabric; connect to outside resources	Link private women/family and public issues	Power creation based on mutual self-interest
<b>Organizing/ Change Strategy</b>	Organize residents to confront power structure	Develop broad-based movement for social change	Create informal forums for residents	Solve substantive social/economic problems	Develop legitimacy; build on the assets of the community	Build women's leadership; make public responsive	Parallel organizing among residents and power structure
<b>Tactics and Techniques</b>	Conflict and confrontation; direct action and negotiation	Popular education, critical thinking, protest, symbolic action	Develop vehicles for informal and formal social control	Gather data about problems and develop solutions	Rebuild community with comprehensive plans/programs; discussion/dialogue	Shared leadership, decision-making, and responsibility; mutual support	Build relationships and partnerships based on mutual self-interest
<b>Leadership/ Governance</b>	Broad people's organization run by resident leaders	Resident organizations run by a core group of leaders	Open and unstructured forums run by residents	Formal organizations, not necessarily with residents	Collaborative partnership of neighborhood stakeholders	Highly inclusive, resident-run organizations based on equality	Community-run organizations; organize power structure as partner

(Continued)

**Table 1.2** (Continued)

	<b>Social Action/ Power Based</b>	<b>Social Action/ Transformative</b>	<b>Locality Development/ Civic Organizing</b>	<b>Social Planning</b>	<b>Community Building</b>	<b>Women- Centered/ Feminist</b>	<b>Consensus Organizing</b>
<b>View of Power</b>	Community lacks power; take power from the public sphere	Power structure disempowers low-income residents; challenge power	Power structure is a potential partner; share power	Power structure as employers/sponsors, and coordinators	Power structure is a potential partner; share power	Power structure is potential partner; share power	Power structure is potential partner; create and share power
<b>View of Public Sphere</b>	External target of action; oppressors to coerce/pressure	External target of action; alter current framework; conflict	Use official channels to secure services	Power structure initiates change; collaborator	Develop consensual partnerships with the power structure	Interpersonal relationships with power structure	Link self-interest of public sphere to community
<b>Social Capital/ Networks</b>	Bridging social capital based on instrumental ties	Bonding/bridging social capital based on normative ties	Bonding social capital-affective/instrumental ties	Bridging social capital based on normative ties	Bridging social capital based on normative ties	Mainly bonding, some bridging— affective ties	Bonding and bridging— affective/instrumental ties
<b>Role of the Practitioner</b>	Broker, trainer, advocate, agitator	Trainer, negotiator, advocate	Often no staff; when there is staff, role is a coordinator	Fact gatherer and analyst; program implementer	Coordinator, technically skilled leader, teacher	Enabler, teacher, supporter, problem solver	Facilitator, analyst, strategist, broker, connector
<b>Ultimate Outcomes</b>	Alter balance of power; change distribution of resources	Shift terms of public debate, alter framework of public sphere	Connect residents with government; undermine patronage system	Creation of solutions to substantive problems	Vehicle for comprehensive planning; impact public priorities	Create family-focused, resident-run, community-based programs	Leadership and partnerships developed; tangible results

bridging social capital based on instrumental ties and individual self-interest. Transformative models facilitate social capital based on normative ties that is bonding (e.g., among small groups of residents) and bridging (e.g., with groups of activists and organizations outside their neighborhood based on a shared ideological vision).

Examples of national organizations using social action approaches today include the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which was created by Saul Alinsky; ACORN (Association of Communities Organizations for Reform Now); and the Midwest Academy. Smock provides examples of organizations that utilize power-based (e.g., West Ridge Organization of Neighbors in Chicago) and transformative organizing approaches (e.g., Justice Action Group). While social action is the primary form of organizing used by these organizations, it is important to note that many have adapted their social action approaches over time. For example, the IAF uses relational organizing strategies. Chambers (2003) explains that under Alinsky, community organizing meant to “pick a target, mobilize, and hit it” (p. 46). However, under the modern IAF, the approach is “connect and relate to others” (p. 6). With relational organizing, the organizer builds relationships and connects to individuals around their interests first, and then picks targets and mobilizes (Chambers, 2003).

### *Locality Development/Civic Organizing*

Another form of community organizing is the locality development/civic model (see Table 1.2). Locality or community development is a neighborhood-based strategy used to engage a broad range of key stakeholders in developing goals and taking civic action (Rothman, 2001). The goals of locality/community development are to build the capacity of community residents to solve problems and foster social integration, including the development of harmonious relationships among diverse people (Rothman, 2001). Community development corporations are examples of organizations that use locality development. Smock’s (2004) civic model of organizing is similar to locality development; however, the main goal is to restore social order and social control by creating informal forums for residents to discuss issues and concerns and partnering with the public sphere to address those concerns. Civic organizations facilitate bonding social capital based on affective (e.g., small homogeneous groups of residents) and instrumental ties (e.g., sense of collective identity and cooperative action). While self-interest is the initial motivating factor for involvement, personal relationships develop as members work together on common issues that go beyond purely personal concerns. The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy is an example of a program that uses the civic approach to community organizing (Smock, 2004).

### *Social Planning*

As seen in Table 1.2, social planning is a form of community organizing that focuses a technical process of problem solving regarding substantive social problems that utilizes the expertise of professionals (Rothman, 2001).

The goals of social planning include the design of formal plans and policy frameworks for delivering goods and services to people who need them (Rothman, 2001). The power structure itself initiates change as employers and sponsors of comprehensive planning efforts aimed at addressing substantive social and economic problems. Social planning facilitates bridging social capital based on normative ties. The focus is on the interests of participating agencies and the community at large, rather than the individual self-interest of residents. Examples of organizations that facilitate social planning are local community planning departments and United Way agencies.

### *Community Building*

Another model of community organizing is community building, which encompasses elements of both locality development and social planning approaches (see Table 1.2). Community building focuses on strengthening the social and economic fabric of communities by connecting them to outside resources (Smock, 2004). The goal is to build the internal capacity of communities by focusing on their assets/strengths, and engaging a broad range of community stakeholders to develop high-quality and technically sound comprehensive plans (Smock, 2004). Community building facilitates bridging social capital by creating social networks among large numbers of agencies and institutions based on normative ties (i.e., a shared vision of the common good of the community). The focus is on the identifying the common interests of agencies who have a stake in the neighborhood. An example of a community building approach is the Asset-Based Community Development Institute founded by Kretzman and McKnight (1984).

### *Women-Centered/Feminist Organizing*

The women-centered/feminist model challenges the traditional separation between the private lives of women and families and the public sphere (Smock, 2004). Elements of both locality development and social action are included in this model. The locality development aspects of the model are encompassed in feminist concepts, including caring and nurturance, democratic processes, inclusiveness, respect, and skill/leadership development and utilization (Rothman, 1996; Smock, 2004). The social action aspects of the model include a desire for fundamental cultural and political change in the patriarchal system by making the public sphere more responsible and creating community-run, family-friendly programs (Rothman, 1996; Smock, 2004). The goal is to create balanced power relationships through democratic processes, and relationships are built through understanding and responsibility rather than individual self-interest (Eichler, 2007). Women-centered models facilitate primarily bonding social capital (e.g., small social networks of women) based on affective, intensely personal ties (Smock, 2004). Bridging social capital is also developed by fostering bonds between small networks of women and external institutions and communities. Smock



describes several examples of women-centered/feminist organizations, including the Templeton Leadership Circle in Portland, Oregon.

## DEFINING CONSENSUS ORGANIZING AND COMPARING IT WITH OTHER APPROACHES

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The focus of this workbook is on consensus organizing. Table 1.2 describes the major components of the model. Consensus organizers believe that power can be created, shared, and harnessed for the mutual benefit of communities and the external power structure. Consensus organizing uses a technique called parallel organizing in which community organizers mobilize and bring together the interests within the community, as well as the political, economic, and social power structure from outside the community (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001; Eichler, 2007). The goal of consensus organizing is the development of deep, authentic relationships and partnerships among and between community residents and stakeholders, and members of the external power structure to facilitate positive and tangible community change. Eichler argues that consensus organizers recognize the value and power of engaging honest and dedicated people from both the community and the power structure.

Consensus organizing encompasses elements of several of the community organizing approaches described above, but is also different from these approaches in several ways. Similar to locality development and community building, consensus organizing focuses on the community's assets or resources, and engages a broad range of stakeholders from the community, including residents, local faith-based organizations and businesses, schools, and other organizations. However, consensus organizers simultaneously identify and engage a core group of members of the external power structure who could help and support the community. Consensus organizing functions like power-based models in its focus on developing the leadership of a core group of individuals in the community who are respected, but may not currently hold leadership positions. However, in contrast to conflict or power-based models that tend to work primarily through established organizational networks (e.g., churches) to engage large numbers of residents, consensus organizers build a core group of new leaders and organizations with broad representation by cutting across lines of existing neighborhood interests, leaders, and organizations (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Furthermore, consensus organizers seek to establish and build the capacity of community-controlled local organizations that cross racial, ethnic, and class lines and bring together residents, as well as other community stakeholders such as local social service agencies, businesses, and institutions, including hospitals and schools (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Similar to women-centered/feminist models, these local organizations foster shared leadership, decision making, and responsibility, and create community-based programs that improve the quality of life of the community.

Similar to Saul Alinsky and the power-based models, consensus organizing incorporates the concept of individual self-interest as motivator for change; however, consensus organizers harness the individual self-interest of both residents and members of the power structure for the mutual gain of the community (Beck & Eichler, 2000). Furthermore, conflict-based, power-based, or transformative organizers believe power must be taken, shifted, or restructured using confrontational, aggressive, in-your-face tactics, while consensus organizers believe power can be shared and created through dialogue and the development of strategic partnerships based on mutual self-interest (Eichler, 2007; Smock, 2004). Furthermore, the power structure does not have to be forced to act in ways that support community change, but can be engaged and organized in support of social justice goals (Beck & Eichler, 2000).

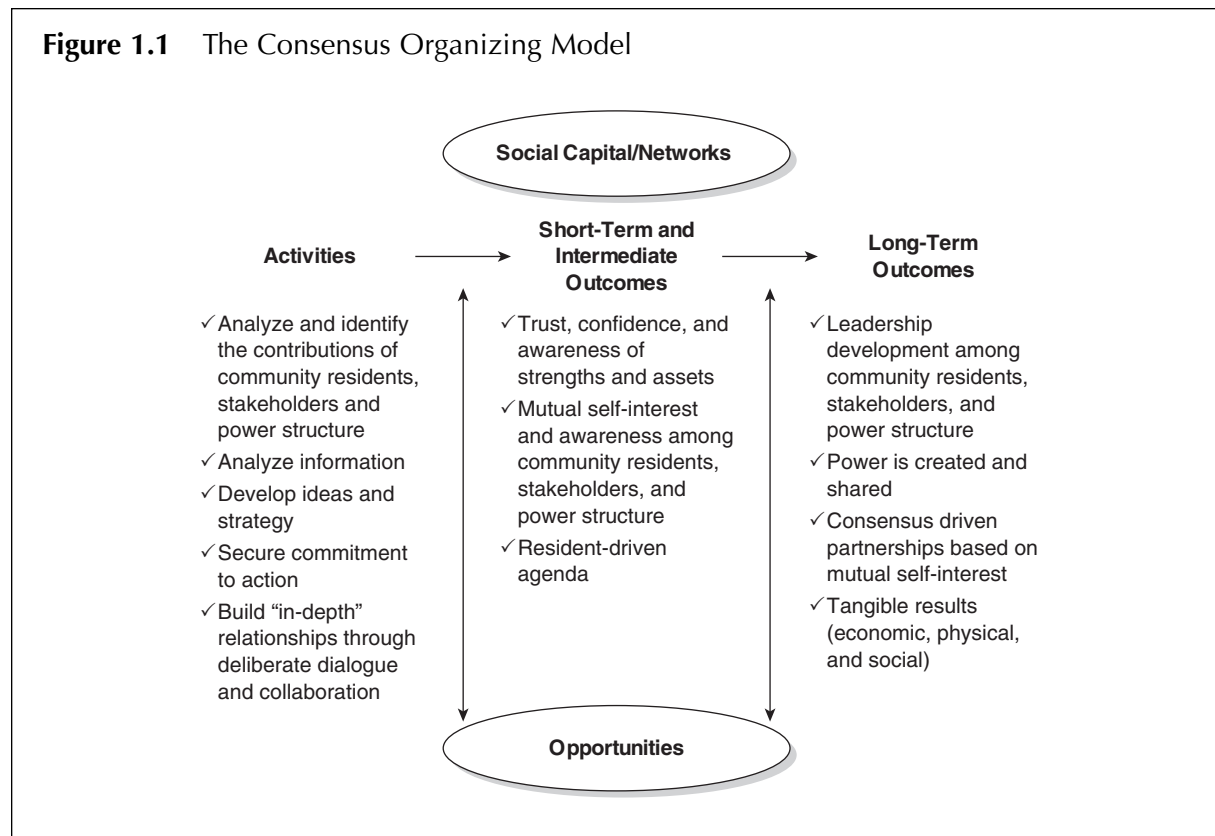
Consensus organizers facilitate both bonding and bridging social capital based on affective and instrumental ties. Consensus organizers build both bonds and bridges within low-income communities, and foster bridges between residents and other community stakeholders and members of the external power structure (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Dense, personal relationships are developed among residents and other community stakeholders and between residents and members of the power structure based on mutual self-interest. Bridges between low-income communities and the external power structure are intended to go beyond providing charitable contributions and other types of investment to include technical and political support for low-income communities (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Consensus organizers believe the desire for individual gains and benefits (e.g., self-interest) can be harnessed as a motivation for improving the community, and therefore relationships are built on instrumental ties that are both personal and communal. Thus, the goal of consensus organizing is to develop and knit together the interests of the “wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the policy maker and the consumer” (Beck & Eichler, 2000, p. 93). The deeper and wider the partnership, the greater the capacity for community change.

Examples of organizations developed through the consensus organizing model will be discussed throughout this workbook. One example is the Consensus Organizing Demonstration Project, a multi-site community organizing effort to form community development corporations spearheaded by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation in 1991 (Chaskin et al., 2001). Current examples of consensus organizing projects include the Price Community Builders program, and the Fostering Community Connections program sponsored by the Consensus Organizing Center at San Diego State University.

## THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR CONSENSUS ORGANIZING

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Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual model for consensus organizing. At the heart of the model is the development of social capital and networks among

**Figure 1.1** The Consensus Organizing Model

and between residents and members of the external power structure, and the creation of opportunities for positive community change. The activities on the left side of the model lead to the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes in the middle and right-hand side of the diagram. The major activities of the consensus organizer include analyzing and defining the self-interest and potential contributions of residents and other community stakeholders, as well as members of the power structure. They do this mainly through the community analysis, which will be described in detail in Section III of the workbook. Consensus organizers also analyze information gathered through the community analysis, engage the community in developing ideas and strategies for improving their community, and secure their commitment to act on their ideas. Finally, the consensus organizer’s key role is to build in-depth relationships among and between residents, stakeholders, and members of the external power structure through deliberate dialogue and collaboration. The consensus organizer is the initial bridge between the community and external resources, building connections based on mutual self-interest, ideas, and energy.

The short-term and intermediate outcomes of consensus organizing include trust, confidence, and awareness of community strengths and assets among residents and external resources, developed through mutual self-interest and awareness. A resident-driven agenda also emerges that both residents

and members of the external power structure can embrace and support. The long-term outcomes of consensus organizing include the development of leadership among residents, stakeholders, and members of the external power structure, and the creation and sharing of power and partnerships based on mutual self-interest and consensus. A major outcome of consensus organizing is that real community change occurs, producing tangible economic, physical, and/or social changes in poor communities. In summary, consensus organizing builds on, extends, and goes beyond other models of organizing to build dynamic partnerships among both residents and power brokers to create tangible community change that can be owned and celebrated by everyone involved.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of bridging and bonding social capital from your everyday experiences? How is an understanding of bridging and bonding social capital helpful in understanding social networks? How would you explain social capital to someone else?
2. Which of the community organizing approaches explained in this chapter appeals the most to you? Which one would you be more likely to use and why?
3. Briefly explain the main differences between consensus organizing and the community organizing models presented in this chapter. What are the main similarities?
4. How might you utilize consensus organizing in solving problems and issues that you are aware of through your own experiences (e.g., personal, work, volunteer)?
5. What are the main activities involved in consensus organizing? What experiences have you had in carrying out similar types of activities? What outcomes resulted from your activities? How were your outcomes similar to and/or different from the outcomes of consensus organizing?

### CASE STUDY EXERCISES

**Instructions:** The following case studies present actual community organizing projects developed using social action/power-based and consensus organizing models. The purpose of this exercise is to analyze the major goals, strategies, tactics, and components of each of these models. Break into small groups to read each case study and answer the questions that follow. Afterwards, have a large group discussion about your answers.

## **Case Study A: Social Action/Power-Based Organizing: ACORN—Organizing Workfare Workers in Los Angeles, CA**

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is a national social action group made up of low- and moderate-income families working to promote strong communities and social justice issues, including housing, schools, neighborhood safety, health care, job conditions, and more. It was founded in 1970 and currently works in 75 cities in the United States, Canada, the Dominican Republic, and Peru (ACORN, n.d.).

After the passage of welfare reform in 1996 (Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act [PRWORA]), ACORN organized workfare workers in Los Angeles from 1996 to 1998, using both labor and community organizing strategies to build an organization called the Workforce Workers Organizing Committee (WWOC; Brooks, 2001). Labor strategies included going to work sites and recruiting members, and asking them to sign cards authorizing ACORN/WWOC to represent them in labor negotiations with the local Department of Public Social Services (DPSS; Brooks, 2001). The community organizing strategies involved planning meetings, large membership meetings and direct actions on targets to make demands (Brooks, 2001).

ACORN was actually formed out of the National Welfare Rights Organization, so organizing around workfare and welfare issues brought ACORN's organizers back to their roots in developing campaigns to address welfare issues (Brooks, 2001). ACORN organizers were concerned about how PRWORA would affect individuals receiving welfare because they felt POWRA was exploitative of low-income workers, and that the work requirements could create a pool of free labor displacing full-time workers (Brooks, 2001). The time limits and work requirements imposed by PRWORA could also become mandated for General Assistance and other workfare programs. Workfare workers interviewed during the recruitment felt that workfare had a stigma attached to it, their wages were often two to three times lower than those of other workers doing the same work, and workfare didn't help them get wage-based employment. Furthermore, workfare workers faced health and safety issues on the job, inadequate training and equipment, and lack of support services (Brooks, 2001).

ACORN organizers visited 500 workfare sites to interview workers about their concerns and recruit them into WWOC (Brooks, 2001). Then these workers were invited to attend the WWOC meetings and events to discuss the issues, strategies, tactics, and targets. After this, a meeting was held to elect the officers of WWOC and develop an action plan to address the issues of concern about workfare. Within a week of this meeting, a direct action event was held, which targeted workfare supervisors at a local hospital, resulting in a series of demands being met by the supervisors (i.e., workfare workers would have the same uniforms, bathrooms, and cafeteria discount as other workers) (Brooks, 2001). Over the course of the year and a half, WWOC held weekly

planning meetings, monthly membership meetings, and direct actions. A democratic structure was used where members participated “in all activities and decisions made by and for the organization” (Brooks, 2001, p. 81). In addition, members also participated in leadership training.

ACORN and WWOC also engaged allies for the effort, including clergy, churches, civil and immigrant rights organizations, labor unions, legal and community organizations, and some Hollywood celebrities (Brooks, 2001). This was important because of the political climate surrounding PRWORA, which was primarily anti-welfare-focused, and the nature of the targeted constituency, who were mostly able-bodied males without dependents. These allies supported the campaign by endorsing it, assisting with research, speaking at actions, and getting other people to turn out for events (Brooks, 2001).

Multiple groups were targeted as part of the campaign, given the bureaucratic and political nature of the issue (Brooks, 2001). The targets included: workfare employers/sites, DPSS offices (personal target was the director of the local office), and the LA Board of Supervisors (e.g., who controlled DPSS budgets, priorities, and appointments of directors). The tactics at the direct actions included making demands, chants and songs, street theater and props, disturbing business as usual, displaying banners, signs, and flyers, and meeting with the press (Brooks, 2001). More than 30 direct actions were held, which won ACORN/WWOC a seat at the table for negotiating sessions about workfare conditions and policy decisions.

The campaign led to several substantive changes in the workforce/General Relief polices in Los Angeles, including a grievance procedure, a brochure listing clients’ rights and responsibilities, improved health and safety regulations, more equitable treatment at workfare sites, and priority hiring lists for workfare workers by private and public employers (Brooks, 2001). In addition, the General Relief workfare program was changed into a new program similar to other welfare programs (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF) and offered assistance with job search, education, training, and/or workfare (Brooks, 2001). The following factors were considered key to their success: “(1) the depth and breadth of the membership,” “(2) winning the moral high ground” (e.g., getting support of clergy and other community leaders), “(3) persistence,” and “(4) the combination of labor and community organizing tactics” (Brooks, 2001, p. 78).

### *Questions About the ACORN Case Study*

1. What were the goals of ACORN’s organizing campaign?

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2. How were members of the external power structure viewed? Did these views change during the course of the campaign?

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3. What was the problem? What were the strategies and tactics used to solve the problem?

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4. Do you think that social capital/networks were developed as a result of this organizing campaign? If so, explain.

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5. What were the outcomes of this organizing campaign?

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6. What other issues would be suitable for a social action/power-based organizing approach? Please give one example and explain why.

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**Case Study B: The Evolution of Consensus Organizing:  
Perry Hilltop Citizens Council, Pittsburgh, PA**

Mike Eichler, the founder of consensus organizing, developed the model while working as a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) volunteer in the Perry Hilltop neighborhood in Pittsburgh in the mid-1970s (Eichler,

2007). The neighborhood association was concerned about the activities of local real estate companies, which were trying to generate commissions in the neighborhood by engaging in “blockbusting.” This practice involved destabilizing the neighborhood and encouraging resident turnover by stirring up fears that the racial balance would change and property values would plummet. Eichler, who was trained in conflict organizing through the Industrial Areas Foundation, responded the way conflict organizers are trained to respond: He organized residents to direct their hostility and put pressure on the real estate company responsible for the blockbusting.

Black and White neighborhood residents were trained as “testers” in order to prove that the blockbusting was occurring (Beck & Eichler, 2000). The testers went separately to the blockbusting real estate company to say they were looking for a home, giving the agent the same information about their income, savings, credit rating, family size, and housing desires (Eichler, 2007). White testers were steered to suburbs that were virtually all White, and when they asked about seeing a home in Perry Hilltop, the agent steered them away from the neighborhood. The agent steered the Black testers away from the suburbs and encouraged them to look at homes in Perry Hilltop (Eichler, 2007). With this disparaging information, residents picketed the real estate broker, sued the company, and eventually won the lawsuit (Beck & Eichler, 2000). The company was sued for \$5,000; however, their sales in the neighborhood had grown significantly during this time, making the \$5,000 a drop in the bucket compared to the revenue they gained from increased sales (Beck & Eichler, 2000).

Eichler realized that if the residents wanted to make real changes in their neighborhood, they would need a new approach (Beck & Eichler, 2000; Eichler, 2007). His solution, which was to get residents involved in selling real estate, energized the residents. With their special knowledge of the neighborhood and their neighbors, the residents would have a natural advantage in the marketplace, and they could use their status as realtors to dispel the cloud of suspicion and fear that made blockbusting possible. However, they discovered that real estate agents couldn’t operate without a broker who had held a license for three years (Beck & Eichler, 2000). Eichler assisted the residents in developing several lists that they used to negotiate with potential brokers, which included the neighborhood’s self-interests and strengths, and the broker’s self-interests, noting areas of overlap (Beck & Eichler, 2000). They approached the biggest brokerage in the area and presented the proposal; however, the owner felt that property values in the neighborhood had not bottomed out yet (Eichler, 2007). The owner of the brokerage said he wanted to wait at least three years until property values in the neighborhood had bottomed out. After that, he said he would help sell the properties very cheaply to yuppies, who could then gentrify the neighborhood. While the residents were clearly disappointed, the owner’s response energized them and made them realize they now had to do something to prevent this scenario from happening. Having at least been treated with the blunt honesty appropriate



among businesspeople discussing a serious business proposal, the residents were ready to try again.

The next brokerage that the residents approached accepted their proposal (Eichler, 2007). This broker was smaller and had more modest goals than the first one, and felt he could make money by working with the residents. Residents documented their efforts in the neighborhood newsletter, and everyone got involved in helping the four residents who agreed to become real estate agents. The four residents studied for and passed the real estate exam the first time even though the average failure rate was 75% (Beck & Eichler, 2000). The brokerage opened an office in a renovated building in the neighborhood, with the four resident brokers as staff. People in the neighborhood helped the agents get business by keeping their ears open for families who were planning to leave the neighborhood for normal versus racial reasons. Because the agents were residents themselves, their credibility also helped instill confidence in potential buyers. However, the lenders were reluctant to lend because they were worried about the stability of the neighborhood. In addition, the appraisers were assigning much lower values to the homes than the asking prices.

Discovering that local banks consistently refused to lend funds to prospective buyers, the owner of the brokerage was angry and worked with the neighborhood brokers to address this issue (Beck & Eichler, 2000). They decided to approach the appraisers from a position of strength, letting them know about the value of the improvements neighborhood residents had recently made to their homes (Eichler, 2007). As a result, the appraiser concluded that the true values of the property were above the loan amounts, and the bank began making loans. The resident real estate agents also worked to end the blockbusting-induced panic by spreading the word of their own successes. As neighborhood homes sold at respectable prices, the fears of other residents about the value of their own properties diminished. In the end, the neighborhood stabilized and the blockbusting ended. The neighborhood remains racially mixed and a pleasant place to live to this day. Twenty years later, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette highlighted Perry Hilltop as one of the best racially mixed neighborhoods in the city (Eichler, 2007).

### *Questions About the Consensus Organizing Case Study:*

1. What were the initial goals in solving the “blockbusting” problem in Perry Hilltop? How similar and/or different were these goals after the lawsuit was successfully won?

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2. How were power and members of the external power structure viewed initially? After the lawsuit?

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3. What was the problem? What were the initial strategies and tactics used to solve the problem? How did the definition of the problem and the initial strategies and tactics change after the lawsuit?

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4. What social capital/networks were developed using the initial strategies to solve the blockbusting problem? What social capital/networks were developed later using consensus organizing strategies?

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5. What were the outcomes of the initial campaign to solve the blockbusting problem? How did these outcomes differ from the outcomes achieved using consensus organizing strategies?

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6. What other issues would be suitable for a consensus organizing approach? Please give one example and explain why.

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**FIELD EXERCISE**

**Instructions:** Choose one of the following exercises to conduct in the field. You will build on and continue this exercise in the next two chapters of the workbook. Please answer the questions that follow for the field exercise you have chosen.

- Interview a community resident to find out about their community and an issue or challenge their community is currently facing. Choose an appropriate community organizing approach that you believe would be most helpful in intervening to address this problem or issue and describe why.
- Find an article from your local newspaper on a problem in a poor neighborhood. Choose an appropriate community organizing approach that you believe would be most helpful in intervening to address this problem or issue in this neighborhood and describe why.

Answer the following questions to guide you in completing this exercise:

1. What issue, challenge, or problem did you discover?

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2. What has been done so far to address this issue? How do the efforts used to address this problem so far fit with the community organizing models you've learned about in this chapter? For example, are the strategies being used similar to any of the strategies that might be used by any of the models?

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3. What community organizing approach would you use to address this problem? Is it different that what is being done now? If so, how? Why would you use this strategy?

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## WEB RESOURCES

- Center for Third World Organizing: <http://www.ctwo.org>
- Civic Engagement and Social Capital: Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America: <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/putnam.html>
- Consensus Organizing: Consensus Organizing Center: <http://www.consensus.sdsu.edu>
- Community Building: Asset-Based Community Development Institute: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>
- Locality Development/Civic Organizing: Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS): <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/policing.html>
- Social Action Organizing (power-based and transformative):  
ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now):  
<http://www.acorn.org/>
- Industrial Areas Foundation: <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/>
- Midwest Academy: <http://www.midwestacademy.com/>
- Instituto Paulo Friere: <http://www.paulofreire.org/>
- Social Planning: United Way of America: <http://national.unitedway.org/>

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