



Organizing Essentials

#3: Leadership Development

"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

There are numerous ways in which organizations engage in social justice and in issue/electoral campaigns. It can be helpful to compare these approaches to understand what is unique about the community organizing tradition, of which PICO California is a part.

In professional advocacy organizations, staff do most everything. They identify the issues, conduct the policy research, speak on behalf of the organization and lobby policymakers. In electoral campaigns, campaign staff typically recruit volunteers for a short period, during the months leading up to the election. When the campaign ends, the volunteer effort declines and/or comes to an end.

In contrast, in PICO California, organizers work to develop a sustainable grassroots leadership base which involves hundreds of volunteer leaders. Unlike a policy advocate, an organizer seeks primarily to be a catalyst and a multiplier, someone who catalyzes others to act and who multiplies the power and impact of the organization through building multiple teams, led by multiple leaders, in multiple congregations and communities. Unlike the electoral campaign organizer, a PICO California organizer seeks to engage volunteers in a sustained way, both during the intense times of campaigns, and during the times in which the organization is engaged more in research and in base building.

For people to get involved and stay involved in an effort, they must feel ownership; they must be engaged in identifying the issue, developing strategy, and leading the campaign. Thus, organizers must learn to not do *for* others, but to do *with* them. They engage with volunteer leaders on a regular basis to co-create the strategy. Organizers support and coach leaders to help run and facilitate community meetings, build relationships, conduct research meetings with public officials, and take various actions to elevate the issue and advance the cause. People learn by doing. The more people play a leadership role and take on roles, the more people learn the art of organizing.

As organizers and leaders build relationships with one another and form organizing teams, they create a learning community in which they seek to support one another's development as people of faith and as social change leaders. They grapple with crucial questions around power, anti-racism, moral narrative, base building, and issue strategy. This is a mutual process in which

people learn from one another, spark one another's imaginations and support one another's spiritual journey.

In this dynamic learning space, organizers agitate and challenge individuals and the community as a whole. Organizers challenge us to be bolder, to take risks, to do 1-1's and to speak truth to power. As Frederick Douglass said, if there is no struggle, there is no progress. Organizers need to learn how to introduce tension and agitation in a way that is constructive and that strengthens people and the overall effort.

To be successful, organizers must learn that their primary role is to move others to act, and to support their leadership, not to do for others or to act as their representative. This is not to say that organizers never act as the organization's representative. At times, they do. It's more that organizers consistently look for opportunities to engage and promote the leadership of others. To do so, organizers place invitations or propositions in front of leaders, and challenge them to step up and take on roles in the effort.

Building Teams

Organizers build teams. Teams or local organizing committees are the basic structure through which we build power. Organizers are responsible for bringing people together to learn the basics of organizing and to help a group of individuals develop a team identity and a way of working together. An organizing team or committee can be based in a local congregation, a school, and/or a neighborhood.

To build successful teams, organizers must work to ensure that the team has:

- Clear agendas with purpose and outcomes
- Clear roles
- Space for prayer, reflection, sacred practices
- A training program that develops skills for public leadership
- A strong power analysis that is grounded in racial and gender analysis
- Clarity about what the team wants to change, now and over the next 5-10 years
- Clear next steps for every gathering

An organizing team typically consists of anywhere from 5 to 20 leaders and meets at least monthly. A meeting may last from an hour to 90 minutes. It's important to keep meetings brief and focused, with a clear next step.

The team does 1-1's within its congregation or community to identify concerns and issues, conducts research meetings and takes action on a local issue. The team also connects with other organizing teams active in the federation through citywide or regional meetings and may have a representative on the governing board of the organization. An active federation may have anywhere from 5 to 25 local teams that are meeting on a regular basis.

Ideally, prior to a meeting of an organizing team, the organizers works with a smaller group of active leaders to plan the meeting. By working with leaders to plan the meeting, the organizer helps develop leadership skills and ownership of the effort. The following questions can serve as a guide for a planning meeting:

- What is the purpose of the meeting? Why?
- If we are successful, what will be the outcomes?
- What do we need to focus on in the meeting to achieve these outcomes?
- Who is taking responsibility for different parts of the agenda?
- What is our turnout plan?

Here is a sample organizing team agenda:

Opening

- Celebrate who's in the room (especially newcomers)
- Credential of team and federation
- Purpose of the meeting
- Reflection

Reports

- Celebration of progress on our commitments
 - Reports on 1-1 work
 - Reports on Research Meetings
- Updates on federation campaigns

Learning and Strategizing

- Receive training in organizing concepts and skills such as 1-1's and research
- Reflect on a challenge the team is facing, such as growing the effort
- Make a decision about a next step (e.g. a research meeting)

Summary and Next Steps

- Clarify decisions or commitments we've made
- Ask for volunteers to plan the next meeting
- Invite all who are interested to stay for an evaluation of the meeting
- Closing reflection/prayer

Often the primary role an organizer plays in this kind of meeting is to lead a brief training in a key organizing concept during the "learning and strategizing" part of the meeting. For example, if the group has identified an issue it wants to act on, and is considering meeting with a public official, the organizer might lead a training for the group in the basic elements of a research meeting. As part of this training, the team could draft an agenda for the research meeting and even do a role play to prepare for it (if time permits). By playing this role, the organizer can play a key role in helping develop the leaders' understanding of the organizing process.