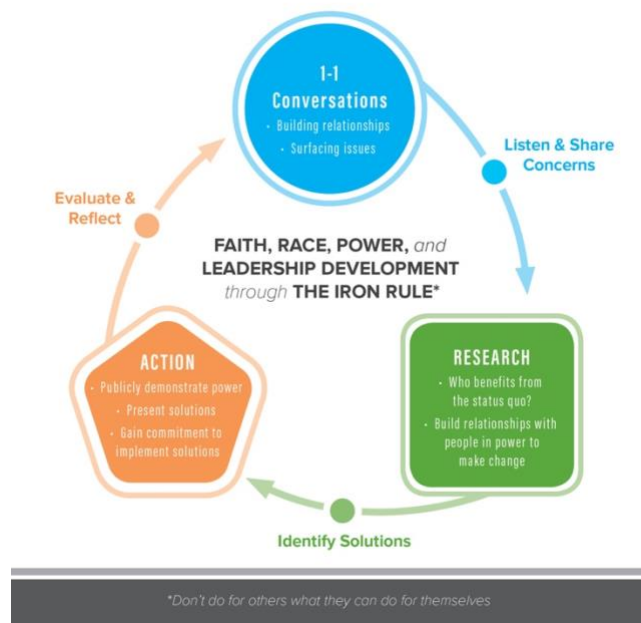


Organizing Essentials

#5: The Organizing Cycle

In PICO California, we build people power and take action through using a coherent model or approach. To develop an organizing effort in a congregation or a local community, we help people learn organizing through taking a series of steps.



1-1's and Listening Campaigns

The first step in building people power is about building relationships through 1-1's. In this phase, people intentionally reach out to their friends, neighborhoods and/or fellow congregation members and learn about their concerns, the challenges they are facing and their hopes for their community. At times, this 1-1 phase may occur through a formal listening campaign. In a listening campaign, a team or organizing committee spends a period of several weeks or a few months reaching out to others. During this period, the team meets regularly to share with one another what they are hearing and to reflect on what the feedback means in light of their faith traditions. Through 1-1's and listening sessions, the organizing committee is able to identify an issue or a topic they want to pursue in the research phase.

Research

In research meetings, leaders deepen their understanding of the issues they seek to act upon and build relationships with those who have the power to make the change. They have the opportunity to give testimony, to press officials for answers and to articulate the vision and the values of the organization. For many, a research meeting may be the first substantial conversation they have had with a mayor, a senator, or other people in power, about what their community needs and why. Research meetings also offer leaders the chance to develop skills in running a focused meeting, to stay on an agenda, and to debrief the meeting afterwards. Organizers work with teams and lead them into research. They prepare leaders to run the research meeting and lead the debrief after the meeting. Once leaders gain experience, they can prep and debrief meetings as well.

Through the research process, leaders work together to “turn a problem into an issue,” or “cut an issue.” They identify solutions to the problems they are seeking to address and identify who has the power to make the change. This is also an opportunity to understand how systemic racism has historically impacted a local community and to analyze issues and policies from the lens of racial equity. It is not by accident that communities of color experience escalating rents, higher rates of police stops, predatory lending and other forms of oppression. Research meetings are a key steppingstone in the development of an issue campaign, and in preparing leaders to drive the campaign.

It’s important to note that during the research phase of the organizing cycle, organizers and leaders must continue to do 1-1’s to keep their larger community informed and engaged. It can also be critical for the team to share their analysis through reporting back to the larger community, through presentations, email and social media posts. The team can celebrate its progress as leaders learn, develop strategy and flesh out their campaign.

Action

Following the research phase, organizers and leaders identify how to take action to elevate their issues and concerns, to demonstrate people power and to hold policymakers accountable to the needs of the community. Actions can take many forms. Often, a team will choose to hold a large townhall meeting event through which community members give testimony and the team presents its issues and solutions to policymakers. In the townhall, the team seeks a clear commitment from policymakers to respond to the issues and to work with the community to make progress and change. For local policymakers, this may be the largest community gathering they encounter, and one of their few experiences in facing a well-organized group that has clear demands. This may also be one of the few experiences in which people name racial dynamics and historical oppression and call upon policymakers to confront these concerns in an explicit way.

In addition to townhall meetings, organizers and leaders may choose to move other forms of actions, including press events, marches and testimony and turnout at public meetings. In PICO California, we believe that “action is the oxygen of the organization.” It is through action that we learn together, take a stand for what we believe in and move an agenda forward.

Evaluation and reflection

While evaluation and reflection are woven into every phase of the organizing cycle, it is especially important for a team to take the time to reflect on its experience following action. This period of reflection can help leaders and organizers not only examine their progress in making change but also gain an understanding of how they have changed as individuals and as a community.

A Transformational Process

The above descriptions tend to focus on the organizing cycle from the perspective of activities, or what people do in each phase. It's also important to think of these phases from the perspectives of individual and community transformation and prophetic action. In this way of understanding the cycle, we look at how leaders experience a deep *encounter* with one another through 1-1s, and how they come together to *disrupt* patterns of racism and oppression. In the research phase, leaders *reimagine* what their community could look like if it were grounded in values of human dignity and justice. In confronting the powerful, leaders take *prophetic action*. Finally, leaders pause to *reflect* on the values they are living out as individuals and as a collective.

