

ORGANIZING 101

FOR THE EVA LOWE FELLOWSHIP AND NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP FOR ASIAN AMERICAN ORGANIZING ORIENTATION

(Developed and Adapted by Emily Lee, Chinese Progressive Association-SF, 2013)

Goals

- Discuss different approaches to social change, why we need organizing as central strategy
- Discuss the impact that we want to create, what kind of organizing does that require? (Saul Alinsky vs transformative organizing)
- See where people are at and how they view organizing

Agenda (adjust as needed)

1. Intro & goals - connect to yesterday discussion about injustice/inequality (5)
2. Spectrum about approaches to social change and leadership (10)
3. Organizing Role Play (30)
4. Approaches to Social Change & Why Organize? (20)
5. Different schools of organizing - Alinsky vs Transformative (15)
6. Discussion - your experience (20)
7. Eval & Reflection (15)

1. Intro & Goals

Today we're going to talk about the different approaches for social change, and we're going to talk about organizing as one of those strategies. Yesterday, folks talked about inequality and injustice in the world we live in. Today we'll focus more on what are the ways that we can fight for justice.

2. Spectrum about approaches to social change and leadership (10)

First we're going to do a Spectrum activity to see what people think about different ways of making change and about leadership.

If you agree with the statement I read, move to the agree side. Same for disagree. If you're somewhere in the middle that's fine too. There is no wrong/right answer. You can interpret the statement however you like.

Agree - Disagree w/these statements

- Powerful and strong leaders like Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez create long lasting change and social movements.
- The most important goal of our movement should be to win concrete, practical things for communities
- Being too "political" will turn off many people in the community from joining our cause or organization
- Strong people don't need strong leaders.
- The US would be a better country if we had better politicians who cared about people

3. Organizing Role Play (30)

Explain that now we're going to do a role play to demonstrate different approaches to social change. You will choose a "role" out of a hat, and have a few minutes to review it and think about how you will act it out. There will be 2 people with different colored paper, these two people should prepare together.

- *Students at Pacific High School in SF*
- *SF Immigrant Legal Aid attorney*
- *Volunteer Tutoring outreach staff*
- *Student running for student body president*
- *Member of Asian Students United*

After handing out each role, explain that each person needs to get into character. They can use props, make costumes, etc to do this. They have a few minutes to review their role, ask the facilitator questions and get ready.

Perform the roleplays. After the roleplay, ask responses to these questions:

What is the root cause of the problem? what was the problem on the surface?

Which person would you most likely agree with?

Which person addresses the root cause of the problem?

In each situation/scene, who has power to make change happen?

What was the strategy of each person? How are they different or similar?

4. Approaches to Social Change & Why Organize? (20)

Review the chart of approaches to social change. Fill in the blanks as a group.

"It is important to understand the implications of each approach, because it shines light on how your organization makes decisions for action. They all have their value and are part of an organizer's toolkit."

So why is organizing a strategy that we would prioritize?

Points to make:

- Many times, multiple strategies will be needed to win change. Most of the time, we might use a combination of these strategies when we are fighting for something
- Organizing is the only strategy that challenges the existing power structure (bottom up approach vs. top down) and sees empowering regular people as a key part of victory.

Characteristics of Community Organizing (Butcher this up):

1. Emphasizes the **PARTICIPATION** and **LEADERSHIP** of members and leaders in organizational decisions within a structure rather than deferring to "traditional leadership"
2. Promotes **COLLECTIVE** solutions to problems rather than individual solutions

3. Challenges people to take **ACTION WITH OTHERS** rather than waiting for someone else to solve their problems

4. Promotes **SYSTEMATIC** change of powerful institutions

5. Challenges people to take **RISKS**, develop new relationships and assume new roles to **BUILD** the **ORGANIZATION**

5. Different schools of organizing – Saul Alinsky vs Transformative (15)

Saul Alinsky:

- One of his key teachings is that community organizers should start very small, choose an issue that is widely understood by those being organized and easily winnable, like getting a stop sign or light on a corner where there have been multiple accidents. Winning victories is essential, he taught, if people are to learn that they have the power to change things if they work together, which is definitely true.
- ‘one cause at a time’ approach, which was motivated by a desire to restrict the scope of their demands in order to ‘win something,’ has led to isolation, ineffectiveness, and a sense of alienation.

Transformative Organizing:

- **Transformative organizing seeks radical social change through the strategy of building an international united front to challenge the U.S. Empire.**
- Transformative organizing is based on an analysis that the United States is a structurally racist, imperialist power. Driven by the need to relentlessly expand that is characteristic of advanced capitalism, the U.S. operates domestically and internationally to control the economies and governments of every nation in the world-especially the nations and peoples of the Third World in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. That is why it calls itself “the superpower.” Transformative organizing, therefore, is situated in a worldwide movement with a strategy to challenge the U.S. Empire.
- works to transform the system, transform the consciousness of the people being organized, and, in the process, transform the consciousness of the organizer.”

Both transformative organizing and pragmatic organizing fight for just and immediate demands, such as more low-income housing, better funding for schools, and higher wages for public sector workers. But in choosing not to frame campaigns within fundamental structural challenges to racism, police brutality, imperialist wars, and the battle for LGBTQ, immigrant, and basic democratic rights, the “pragmatists” isolate themselves from their community’s need for deep social transformation. Indeed, with its aggressive anti-Left ideology, pragmatic organizing often conciliates with Empire-building.

6. Discussion - your experience (20)

Discuss your experience with organizing.

What type of organizing have you seen happen?

What were the pros/cons of the organizing you’ve been a part of?

How would you move members from an “Alinsky” approach to a “transformative” approach to organizing?

7. Evaluation of workshop (10 min)

- Something you liked about the workshop
- Something you think could have been improved about the workshop
- What are you taking away from this workshop? What’s on your mind?

Workshop Resources:

Role Play Characters

- *Students at Pacific High School in SF* – You are a recent immigrant to SF, you moved from China a few years ago. You are still struggling to learn English, and have been doing very poorly at your classes. You have one teacher who thinks that you don't understand anything and he doesn't give you as much help as the other students. He thinks that you should have learned English if you really wanted to come to the US. A lot of your other Chinese friends are in his class too, and many of you are failing. You are very worried that you will fail the class and you won't be able to get into good colleges. You have complained to the principal at your school, but she is good friends with your teacher and doesn't do anything about the problem. Your parents work really hard and they can't help you with your studies. Recently your school was in the SF Chronicle newspaper because it had one of the lowest testing scores of all asian students in the city, and you were also quoted in the article. Recently you've been getting a lot of visits from different people who want to talk to you about this issue.
- *SF Immigrant Legal Aid attorney* - You are a lawyer with the ILA, a legal organization that helps immigrant clients with cases that address racism or discrimination. You read a recent article in the SF Chronicle about how Asian students in Pacific High School have some of the lowest test scores in the City. You know that many of those students are recent immigrants and you suspect that they may not be receiving the attention and resources they deserve. You approach a student who was interviewed in the article to ask her to bring a case against the school. You will represent her interests and ensure immigrant students are not discriminated against at Pacific High.
- *Volunteer Tutoring outreach staff* - You are a volunteer tutor at an after school program. You read a recent article in the SF Chronicle about how Asian students in Pacific High School have some of the lowest test scores in the City. You know that many of the immigrant students at Pacific High struggle in their classes. You want to invite these students to come to the free after school tutoring program so they can get help and improve their grades. You have room for 10-20 students to attend.
- *Student running for student body president* - You are an immigrant student at Pacific High. You immigrated when you were 8 years old and spent half of your life in the US. You have pretty good English and are in the top 1% of the school for academic achievement. You read a recent article in the SF Chronicle about how Asian students in Pacific High School have some of the lowest test scores in the City. You know it is hard for immigrant students to succeed in the school, your parents had to pay for private English tutoring to help you when you first started. Your teacher encourages you to run for School President, and you do - running on a platform to devote more school resources to helping immigrant students succeed. You need to talk to students to get their support and vote in the upcoming election.
- *Member of Asian Students United* - You are a youth member of Asian Students United, a youth organization in SF that empowers asian students to fight for their rights. You read a recent article in the SF Chronicle about how Asian students in Pacific High School have some of the lowest test scores in the City. ASU has chapters in several high schools, and recently you heard that Pacific High students are facing discrimination from their administration. ASU is organizing a campaign to create an "SF Student Bill of Rights" for the whole city, that will lay out every student's right to have a quality education, and to be treated with dignity and respect by school administration, teachers, counselors, and campus police. You want to talk to some of the impacted Asian students at Pacific High to see if they would be interested in starting an ASU chapter in their school and joining the campaign.

COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO SOCIAL CHANGE

	Solutions	Root Causes	Roles	Change Power Relationship?
SERVICE	Meet immediate survival or emergency needs of an individual.	Lack of academic support; students' basic needs not met	Client or recipient of services.	Reinforces existing power relationships.
ADVOCACY	Equal protection & application of law and regulations through expert representation.	Lack of information and/or access to benefits Laws too complicated for individuals to understand.	Client or recipient of services.	Only for the advocate, not for the student.
ELECTORAL	Voting and Electing, faith in the democratic process.	Current elected officials are not responsive to needs of particular community.	Potential activist in election effort.	Yes for the elected official but not for the student.
ORGANIZING	Politics of institutional change, through an analysis, direct action campaigns, & the development of leaders.	System at fault. Public institutions & corporations take away collective power from the community; system gives the administration power with no accountability by students impacted.	Member and leader of an organization where they can shape the agenda and make decisions.	YES. Seeks incremental wins and structural change over long run.