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“Grassroots Organizing For Neighborhood Improvements”
Workshop

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What is Community Organizing?

What Does It Mean to You?

Simple Approaches to Neighborhood Improvements

“A Practical Manual for Grassroots Organizing and Simple Approaches to Neighborhood Improvements”

Also available on ebook: Smashwords.com
(search: Elton Gatewood)
What is Grassroots Organizing

Grassroots organizing can mean different things to different people !!!

• **By definition, “grassroots”** is the ______________________________, opposite the “establishment,” which controls the top.

  − The ______________ concentrates power in relatively few people in the highest echelons of power – typically elected officials, government bureaucrats, businesses, etc.

  − The ______________ includes virtually everyone else, those common people who do not fit within the establishment. The grassroots and the establishment can sometime be the same.

• **Grassroots is an attitude.** It is an attitude of ____________________, of ______________, of unrestrained community and political enthusiasm, of willingness to band together with ordinary citizens for a common purpose. It is what regular people do alongside others of like minds, without undue concern for conventional roles or authority.

• **Grassroots organizing** involves ____________________ organization from scratch, developing new leadership where none existed, and otherwise organizing the unorganized at the local level, i.e. neighborhood, block-by-block. It is a strategy that revitalizes communities and allows the individuals to participate and incite change. It empowers the people directly involved and impacted by the issues being addressed. It also bring people together to act in the interest of their communities and the common good. Key elements are organization-building, leadership development, and accrual of power.
Grassroots Organizing

Any neighborhood or political strategy that depends on broad grassroots support for its success need to be based on a sound understanding of how the grassroots work. Without such understanding, the strategy will tend to miscalculate its approach to handling the grassroots. This could result in failure.

Grassroots organizing is not like anything else in politics and neighborhood governance, but:

• In some cases, it is __________________________

• It can be __________________________

• Potential to ____________ an entire ____________, and

• Can turn on those who seek to _______________ it
Why People Organize?

Neighborhood organizations form in many different ways, and for a multitude of reasons.

There is ______________________________. Whatever work for you within your neighborhood is the best way to get started.”

It would be nice if people formed groups just on the basis of wanting to better their neighborhood; some do, however it usually doesn’t work that way.

Often neighborhood residents come together because of a ________________, and other concerns that threaten the health, safety and well being of the ________________. Let’s call this, “Wolf Knocking at the Door”.

• __________________, they want to form a neighborhood organization to take action as a means of empowering their neighborhood to take action.

• Such crisis can __________________ people very quickly, but without a strong and firm foundation, the organization resolves once the initial issue is addressed.

• People who are truly interested in creating and maintaining a neighborhood organization must be ________________, and possess the initiative and dedication to take action themselves

• When and where there are not crisis, the neighborhood concerns is more pervasive.

• The initial nucleus of people interested in forming a neighborhood organizations will be even smaller, and fewer residents will continue to be involved.
Basic Reasons for Organizing

• It is a basic right to be involved in the ____________ process.

• Neighborhoods are an important part of our society.

• The _________________ upon which neighborhoods and cities are established, and are the core of our social structure.

• __________ we live, work, play, attend schools, own businesses, worship, and raise our families.

• Have an e____________________________ investment, and concerned about its welfare.

• Constitutes a special insight, information, and knowledge and experience with fulfilling neighborhood improvements.

• Unless people are organized, they are incapable of looking after their own interest and dealing with the establishment.

• It is a means of____________________ the resources and energies of residents, and converting them from passive consumers of services into producers of services.

• It help ______________________ to fulfill its responsibility to find ways to involve those affected persons and neighborhoods, as a means of basic fairness.

• It seeks assurance that they are fully involved as a working partner with government and the private sector.

• It constitutes __________________, and is an exercise of the very initiative, creativity, self-reliance, and faith that specific programs seek to instill.

• It is ____________________, not an episodic event.
Deciding To Organize

Not Everyone Who Has A Problem Is Going to Organize
• Some people will keep trying _______________ solutions, even if they don’t get results

• Others will just _______________ and think about something else

• The truth is, _______________ action rarely get things done

• It keeps us separated from each other and prevent them from making the really basic changes that need to be made

Does Organizing Really Work?
• If you look at the history of our country, you’ll find that most progress was made because people organized.

• For example, The American Revolution didn’t just happen. It was organized. The people who organized it held meeting, planned strategy, developed leadership, set up communication, defined issues, took direct action, built coalitions, just as we do in our communities today.

• The best way to answer this question is to look around you and see who is organized, and who is not. Generally, the people who have the power are the ones who are best organized.

• _______________ is concentrated in the hands of a small number of well-organized individuals and groups that make decisions that affect all our lives.
Principles On Communities Organizing

Several principles provide the best means on how to organize communities strategies for neighborhood and community change and betterment.

____________________________: Known as the iron rule of organizing “Never do for others what they can do for themselves.”
• View participation as an end in itself,
• Enlarge the skills, knowledge and responsibilities of their members.

____________________________: Dedicated to fostering participation among groups that have been “absent from the table.”
• Committed to developing membership and leadership from a broad spectrum of the community

____________________________: This is a holistic function. Every issue that affect the welfare of the community is within the purview of community organizing
• Integrates a diverse set of issues and linking them to a larger vision.

____________________________: Suggest that effective governance depends on “civinness,” not consensus.
• Seek to change policies and institutions that are not working,
• Promote institutional accountability and responsiveness.
• It can stimulate participation and sharpen political discourse.
• Can lead to deeper forms of social collaboration.
“Getting Started”

Meetings

Once you have an issue or concern that people can rally around, it is time to start talking about organizing. Get a few interested neighbors together for a meeting at someone’s home. Discuss ideas, determine boundaries, choose a temporary chairperson, and begin planning.

Planning The First Meeting

Once you have a core group together, start planning your first meeting. Here are some tips:

- Arrange for the use of a facility that neutrally located within the neighborhood. Choose a room that is a bit too small for the crowd you expect, it will reflect a greater sense of unity and closeness.
- Prepare a “colorful” flyer to draw attention. State the time, place, date and purpose of the meeting. Schedule the meeting during the early evening, and make arrangement for transportation of seniors and others that need a ride.
- Personally, distribute flyers throughout the neighborhood, and be prepared to do a lot of talking. Distribute flyer through the schools, churches, merchants, and others in the neighborhood.

At The First Meeting

At the first meeting, special attention should be given to how the facility is arranged

- Since it is possible that many people may need to get acquainted, make it easy for them by arranging the chairs so that they have to look at each other. Post a map of the neighborhood. Have light refreshments available and allow time for mingling.
- Follow a prepared agenda and give everyone a chance to speak. If there are several issues, vote to prioritize them. List issues and smaller projects that can be solved immediately. This will give you a sense of accomplishment until you are able to address larger issues.
- Form committees based on the group’s interest. Ask for volunteers to choose a committee based on their interest, knowledge, and experience.
- End the meeting by giving committee assignments to deal with the problems identified. Keep the tone of the meeting sincere and enthusiastic, this will encourage ample volunteers.
Preparing An Agenda

An agenda should be *prepared in advance* of each meeting. People should receive it ahead of time. It can be postal mailed, emailed, posted on websites, and at the meeting. This will *help speed action* and discourage unrelated dialogue. The following is a sample agenda:

I. Minutes of previous meeting

II. Correspondence & Announcement

III. Committee Reports & Status of Special Assignments

IV. Unfinished Business

V. New Business

VI. Adjournment
Establish A Sound Foundation

• Setting Goals

• Assessing Community Interest

• Choosing A Spokesperson

• Doing Your Homework

• Find An Angle To Motivate People To Action
Organizational Structures and Committees

Informal or Formal Organizational Structures
You need to decide how you want your organization to function or operate. There are two kinds of organizations, informal and formal. Both serve a valuable function within the community to address issues and concerns, but function differently in achieving long term results:

- **Informal Organizations**: Normally form in response to crisis situations, and in most instances have a short life span. They often operate on a consensus basis, and once the issues are resolved, the original participants lose interest.

- **Formal Organizations**: Involve people interested in creating and maintaining a long term and legal organization to address issues that impact their neighborhood in the present and future.

Steering or Advisory Committees
Forming committees may have a low priority because membership may change. It is better to draw from among those who identify with a particular interest, rather than a particular group. Make an effort to balance the different interest. To get things started, a Steering Committee and Advisory Committees may be helpful:

- **Steering Committee**: is an excellent structure that will give you the basis for some specific point that can assist the organization get started, and in the ongoing functioning of the organization in the future in order to get the many task of the organization accomplished.

- **Advisory Committees**: One of the most frequently used public participation techniques, and can be very valuable in the public process. They are effective because they provide a cross sampling of public views and concerns, and serve as a communication link between the group and other interested groups and agencies.
Establishing Relationships

- Within your neighborhood
- Within your organization
- With other organizations and agencies
- With “City Hall” and Staff
- With Elected Officials
- With the Private Sector

“Taking the time to build community, to get to know your people will have long-lasting benefits.”
— CLIFTON TAULBERT —
“Working Together”
Fabric That Weave Organizations

When you begin building a permanent organization, people who are part of it learn to work together as a regular group

• ________________ developed into a new community
  – The most fundamental element in organizing is relationship building.
  – Through new relationships we come to understand our interests differently and discover new resources.

• Organizations have ________________ and are ________________ and permanent
  – They have independent bases that develops after long periods of working together
  – Eventually they are able to solve problems
  – Strength that comes with the organization

• New understandings emerge from deliberation and interpretation.
  – Participants in community actions organizations deliberate to arrive at new understandings of who they are, what they do, and why they do it.
  – It members and leaders who gain experience from issue to issue

• ________________ are mobilized and deployed as an action program.
  – Some programs focus on providing services to constituency, while other focus on providing services, while others focus on making claims on behalf of it.
  – Mobilizing is dependent, while organizations build on issues, and with each strategy add strength to the next
Making An Impact

• ____________ well in advance: It takes into account what’s likely to happen

• ____________ on the experience of people: Uses their skills to the best advantage

• Involves people: People learn as much from the process as from the product

• Be ____________ : It includes what we will do if the improbable happens – and what you will do if the impossible happens

• Has ____________ : Includes not just good ideas, but the steps to carry out those ideas

• Rooted in ____________ : Start with a realistic sense of what an organization’s members can do and what they can’t do

• Based on people’s ____________ : Creates a sense of togetherness rather than of alienation and isolation

• Is ____________ : People learn more themselves, about the organization, neighborhood, about politics, and about power
Recruiting Members

A group can initially attract members through well-publicized meetings and by getting people involved. To maximize membership potential:

• ________________ the neighborhood to identify interest and skills of the residents.

• The group should ______________ a ___________________ that directly reaches every household.

• Create a file or contact list of residents to be used as a telephone tree, email list, etc.

• Wait until a few successful projects or activities have been undertaken before launching a membership drive.

• The best approach is to have volunteer go *door-to-door calling* on neighbors.

• Volunteers should be armed with printed material, i.e. brochures, newsletter, etc. to encourage residents to join.

• ________________ information on *upcoming activities* and encourage them to attend.

• *Sponsor a ___________________* for volunteers and new members where they can have fun and share experiences.
Involving And Sustaining Members

Getting members involved is only half the battle. The only way they can effectively be involved is that they are adequately informed of alternatives and their consequences, and have an opportunity to become engaged. For every member who is active in the group, there are probably two who would be involved if they were motivated properly. These efforts should be based on two-way communications that require listening and responsiveness that help them understand about the groups intent and efforts. In order to have effective citizen involvement the group should attempt to:

- **Find a place in the organization for members:** Many will offer to help, but have no idea where to begin. Develop a volunteer is with job descriptions.

- **Always welcome or acknowledge new people:** Watch out for new faces, and welcome them assertively or have member introduce someone they know.

- **Avoid the appearance of cliques:** New members who see the same people running every project will feel excluded and may not return.

- **Organizing the meeting:** People will not attend meetings that they consider a waste of time. An agenda should be provided. Be sensitive to new ideas and new people, and limit the floor hogs without being offensive.

- **Make activities and meetings fun:** Sponsor parties and celebrations to allow members to get to know each other.
Developing Leadership

What Is A ________________?
• Someone who will help show direction, and help the group go in those directions.
• Give a sense of who we are, and who the group is.
• Give a sense of vision and direction to the group.
• Appeal to the common feelings and hopes that bind a group together.
• A person that others follow.
• Inspire people to grow in their own abilities and become leaders.

_______________ of A Leader
• A real commitment to democracy
• Need to help other people develop their leadership skills
• Share power with others
• Able to convince other people to increase responsibility
• Think of the welfare and health of the organization
• Need to have patience
Qualities & Skills Of A Leader

Qualities Of A Leader
• Like People
• Good Listener
• Trustworthy
• Talks Well
• Help people believe in themselves
• Don’t get discouraged too often

Skills Of a Leader
• Working with people
• Able to define issues
• Know how to hold a successful meeting
• Understand how organizations work
• Know how to develop strategies, goals and establish priorities, and choose and use tactic
Expectation & Burnout Of A Leader

What People Want From A Leader

- Understanding, recognition
- Empathy, sincerity, honesty
- Ideas, direction, inspiration
- Vision
- Action, responsibility, accountability
- Consensus building

Leadership Burnout

Overwork is one problem that can affect leadership in an organization. Leadership in an organization can become emotionally hazardous, and cold effect the leader personally and the long-term survival which is critical to the growth of the organization. To provide a balance and avoid burnout, the leader should:

- Try to avoid overwork
- Set goals that are reasonable and manageable
- Share responsibilities with other members
- Develop a personal support system
- Preserve time for yourself, and
- Take time to celebrate
Working With City Hall

• Learn How Government Work

• Establish Relationship With Elected Officials And Staff

• Appoint A Spokesperson For Your Organization

• Establish Trust An Legitimacy

• Identify Potential Allies Within Government
Future Steps and Activities

Planning For The Future

• Don’t Overlook Strengthens And Weaknesses
• Learn As Much As Possible About The Neighborhood And Its People
• Understand The Problems And Opportunities
• The Planning Process Should Never End
• Involve New Members And Delegate Responsibilities

Undertaking Small Projects

• Potential Funding Sources
  — Donations, Grant writing, Gifting, etc.
• Neighborhood Project Suggestions
  — Clean-ups, Self-Helps, Beautification, etc.
• Organizing Events
  — Block Parties, Awards and Appreciation
Simple Approaches To Planning Neighborhood Improvements

Now that you have organized your neighborhood, its time to get busy planning to make neighborhood improvements. The following eight steps have been developed to assist you in addressing your needs for improvements:

1. **Assess the Problem** by discussing it with other so you understand the problem

2. **Gather Information** to convince people that a problem exist

3. **Set Goals and Priorities** so you can look at several possible solutions

4. **Discuss Solution** by looking at pros and cons, and discuss advantages and disadvantages of each

5. **Choose the Best Solution** by exploring alternatives, and selecting issues that can are easy and quickly addressed

6. **Develop Action Steps** by writing a step-by-step plan on how to implement solution

7. **Arrange Funding/Self-Help** by identifying potential funding sources or community member resources

8. **Carry Out Activities** by selecting a person(s) responsible for spearheading the activities
“Stages Summarized”
Effective Community Organizing For Neighborhood Improvements

The following summary of stages for effectively organizing community organizations is provided as a reference to further assist in developing neighborhood improvements.

Stage I. Assess the community:
• Get to know the community and the history of issues, make-up, demographics, geography, and political leadership.
• Go “door knocking” and conduct one-on-one relationships to listen and gather information.

Stage II. Create an Action Team:
• Review information gathered, and invite people to join your action team.
• Should be a diverse cross-section of the community.
• Try to build an action team of core leaders who have time, energy, and passion for the issue, and have a “con-do” attitude and represent

Stage III. Develop an Action Plan:
• Work with your team to develop an Action Plan.
• What problems has your group identified?
• What policies would address the problem, and what steps will be taken to change policy?
• What is the decision making body you need to impact?
• Break you work down into manageable steps and task
• Hold a meeting to discuss plan of action, timelines, and responsibilities
• Identify issues or projects that can give you a “first win.”
Stage IV. Mobilize to action:

Building your base of support is a necessary part of your Action Plan. While your leadership group will guide your work, more people are needed to enact or change policy. You need to:

- Identify potential supporter by going door-to-door
- Build a base of support in the community
- Determine constituents and likely allies
- Contact constituents and meet with key members
- Make presentation
- Identify elected officials who you think will be supportive
- Ask people to get involved – give them specific tasks
- Keep group focused and on track
Stage V. Implement:
Once you have achieved your goal,
- Your group will need to decide how it maintains the change
- Insure that the desired results will be sustained and enforced
- Did you accomplish what you intended?
- Decide your future, and do you want to work on other projects or changes.
- Has the group served its purpose?

Stage VI. Evaluate:
As you implement your plan of action, it’s important to review your progress, and make sure you are continuing to make progress towards your goals.

The following are some evaluation questions you may ask:
- Did the organization effort make a difference, and how?
- Did you make progress toward your goal?
- What factors were most important in achieving the goals of your efforts?
- What were some of biggest challenges or obstacles?
THANK YOU!

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