

Preface

■ This book is intended as a guide to advanced community organization at the graduate level. It includes information on technical and analytical skills that are often used in practice but are seldom discussed in community organization courses devoted to case studies, theories, or “action” projects. Some of these skills are taught in field practicum, but practicing organizers often develop them in response to situational demands of the job.

I found that a master’s degree in social work and a Ph.D. from a public policy program did not prepare me to conduct demographic analysis, research legislation, or develop funding proposals. Consequently, this book is intended to help community organization students gain the skills they are likely to need in practice. It also contains three chapters on practice models and theories to help students link theories to specific aspects of practice.

I have organized the text around five basic assumptions:

- Organizers must be cognizant of basic theories and models of practice and be prepared to apply them to a variety of practice situations.
- The organizer must be able to use his or her research and analytical skills to conduct an assessment of the situation at hand, the issue involved, the power resources associated with the target and action systems, and probable outcomes.

- Theories, research data, and “practice wisdom” must be combined for the effective development of community intervention plans.
- Computer technology and the Internet provide the organizer with a valuable source of information that can be used for assessment and analysis. It can also be utilized to establish linkages with constituents, colleagues, and decision makers.
- The organizer should use process and outcome evaluation methods; intervention plans should contain evaluation criteria and clear outcome goals.
- Intended beneficiaries as well as organization members and participants in organizing campaigns must be fully informed of the consequences of taking action and must be involved in both intervention planning and evaluation.

In this book, I use the term constituents to describe members, beneficiaries, and others who participate in organizing efforts. Mondros and Wilson (1994) define constituents as those people for whom the organization speaks. Consequently, while an organization’s constituency contains both leaders and dues-paying members, it also includes people who benefit from any intervention planned by the organization.

Using Computer Technology

Throughout the book, you will find references to specific types of computer and Internet technology. The following terms and definitions are used:

E-mail. E-mail provides a vehicle for computer users who are connected to the Internet to send mail electronically (Giffords, 1998; McNutt, 2000). This mode of communication is less expensive than sending messages via regular mail. Participants must subscribe to an Internet service provider (ISP). Most large employers (universities, corporations, and government) provide Internet services to their workers. Individuals and small nonprofit organizations are typically charged a monthly fee (\$10–\$20 per month) for Internet service from private ISPs.

LISTSERVs. A *LISTSERV* is a device that provides a mechanism through which a large number of users can receive the same E-mail message at once (Giffords, 1998; Grant & Grobman, 1998; McNutt, 2000). Each individual subscriber can send the same message to all other subscribers. To subscribe to the *LISTSERV*, a participant simply by sending an E-mail and asking to become a member. Most *LISTSERVs* do not require members to pay a fee. However, members can be required to adhere to certain rules of behavior (for example, no racist or sexist messages or rude comments).

LISTSERVs usually focus on a specific topic and allow members to engage in detailed discussion about the issue. Participants may receive literally

hundreds of messages from members over the course of a week, or they may choose to subscribe to a digest service that summarizes the individual messages contributed to the list. LISTSERVs work best when a list administrator or facilitator takes responsibility for processing subscriptions and making sure members follow the rules of protocol.

Chat Rooms. Chat rooms are live conversations that take place during a predesignated time by sending text to a specific “window” or location (Giffords, 1998; Grant & Grobman, 1998). Readers can access your typed words just after you type them. Consequently, you are able to “chat” in real time with other correspondents. A facilitator imposes order and decides when individuals are allowed to “talk.” This is essential because chat rooms often contain multiple users. Chat rooms can be used in community practice for meetings or to allow individuals to network.

Bulletin Boards. Electronic bulletin boards allow users to post messages regarding a topic of concern for others to read. Bulletin boards are available on Web sites maintained by organizations. Unlike chat rooms, bulletin boards allow people who are not online at the same time to communicate with one another (Giffords, 1998).

World Wide Web. The Web allows individuals and organizations to post information on pages or sites using a type of document called hypertext (Giffords, 1998). Most computer manufacturers install Web page creation software on their computers’ hard drives (in addition to other types of software). Posting information on the Web is a low-cost way of publishing information and making it accessible to the public. To use the Web, each computer user must have a navigator or browser program on his or her computer.

Search Engine. The various ISPs provide a selection of search engines that allow users to access information on the Web related to a variety of topics or to locate individuals and organizations. The most commonly used search engines are Alta Vista, Excite, Infoseek, and Yahoo. The search engine determines what information you will be able to find on the Web (Giffords, 1998).

Web Site and Computer Resources Listed in This Book

This book provides an extensive listing of Web sites for community organization practice. Be aware that Web addresses often change rapidly. Most of the addresses listed in the book were confirmed as close as possible to the time of publication; however, some of these addresses may have changed or fallen into disuse. Consequently, if the address provided here doesn’t open the Web site you want, try entering the name of the organization or site into your search engine.

Note also that the Web sites listed here are not exhaustive. Since this textbook pertains exclusively to one field of practice—community organi-

zation—some major social work sites (for example, the Social Work Access Network) are not included here. Sites listed are those evaluated as useful for organizers. Readers are encouraged to search for additional sites. Many of the sites listed are related to liberal or progressive politics, but some tilt to the political mainstream.

Many sites maintained by small progressive organizations are not listed here. The list of Web sites barely scratches the surface in terms of its coverage of diversity issues. However, a number of major organizations that represent the interests of women, people of color, older people, persons with disabilities, and gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered people are listed in the text (for example, the American Association of Retired People, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Organization of Women, the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, and the Human Rights Campaign). The reader should search these sites for links to other organizations that are similar.

As more information becomes available on the Internet, some sources are beginning to charge money for access to their sites (Giffords, 1998). Before using Web sites that charge for information, try to carefully evaluate the product. In addition, you should be aware that most Web sites require you to furnish personal information such as addresses and phone numbers when you register as a member or a customer. Assess whether you want to provide such information. Particularly of concern is the use of credit card information to purchase products on the Web. If you choose to purchase services on the Internet, please make sure that the provider uses a secure server so that unauthorized persons do not gain access to your credit card number (Johnston, 1999).

Although the author has made every attempt to screen the sites listed here, a listing in this text does not indicate endorsement, especially in terms of those sites that charge for their services.

References

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for Community
Organization
Practice

