

1 Introduction to Community Organization Skills

■ Community organizers use a wide variety of intervention strategies to promote social change. Social workers who engage in community practice often take on a variety of roles: They can coordinate community outreach efforts, linking people to services. They work in the constituency offices of elected political leaders. They are employed as social services planners for government agencies. They are social activists working to organize protests for groups such as ACT-UP or consumer boycotts for the National Council of La Raza. Organizers are also employed by interest groups to lobby for legislation or to analyze data to document the impact of government policies.

Community organizers use a great variety of skills to promote social change. Some of these skills are interpersonal, involving the art of motivating people to participate in organizing efforts or to alter the course of decision making by government and social institutions. Other skills are analytical in nature. They involve the collection and interpretation of data by the organizer. Analysis is necessary to ensure that the best and most effective social change strategies are used. The curriculum policy statement of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) (1994) specifies that social work students, regardless of practice specialization, must have instruction that “strengthen[s] the student’s understanding and appreciation of a scientific,

analytic approach to knowledge for the delivery and evaluation of practice” (p. 5). The purpose of this book is to provide community organizers and social work students with a guide that promotes the use of analytical skills in practice.

Most community organization textbooks focus almost exclusively on the organizer’s interpersonal skills (Kahn, 1991; Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Rivera & Erlich, 1998; Tropman, 1997). The text introduces the community organization student to a wide variety of analytical tools and decision-making frameworks that can be used for assessment, intervention planning, and evaluation.

This book also includes an introduction to using the Internet for community organization research. The World Wide Web contains a great variety of resources for researching social problems, government policies, legislation, and political campaign funding. Computer networking greatly increases the organizer’s access to information. It also gives members of constituency groups an opportunity to increase linkages with each other as well as a vehicle with which to contact decision makers.

Skills for Community Organization Practice

Analytical skills for community practice can be developed in field placements, through action assignments, or in the classroom (Johnson, 1996). Students can find it difficult to develop a consistent set of skills in the field due to diversity in the types of macro field settings available to them. Students can be placed in unions, election campaigns, social planning organizations (such as the United Way), or traditional community organizations. The role of the organizer can differ substantially across settings. Weil and Gamble (1995) have identified at least eight models of community practice.

The great variety of practice settings available to community organization students often makes skills instruction in the classroom difficult. However, a review of the literature on teaching community organization practice (Austin, 1986; Fisher, 1995; Halseth, 1993; Karger & Reitmeir, 1983; Rivera & Erlich, 1998) suggests a number of analytical or technical skills that students should acquire:

- Budgeting
- Grant writing
- Information gathering and processing
- Legislative research
- Needs assessment
- Participatory action research
- Political analysis
- Population forecasting and social indicator analysis
- Power analysis

- Program development and planning
- Resource development

These skills can be used across practice settings, interventions, and situations. Analytical methods help the practitioner identify community problems, plan interventions, and conduct evaluations.

Community Organization Practice and the Problem-Solving Model

This book is organized to help the student or practitioner use the problem-solving model to resolve community problems. The problem-solving model (also known by planners as the rational model) has the following components:

- Problem identification
- Assessment
- Goal setting
- Implementation
- Evaluation

Social workers in clinical and policy practice also use the problem-solving process to plan and conduct interventions. Gilbert and Terrell (1998) have added two additional components to this model that require specific community organization skills.

1. Inform the community about the problem.
2. Build public support and legitimacy for the action to be taken (pp. 248–49).

In addition to presenting content on community organization values and theories, this book focuses primarily on five stages in the problem-solving model: problem identification, needs assessment, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation. The book also includes material on new computer technologies (primarily E-mail and the World Wide Web) used to inform the public about community problems, influence decision makers, and organize constituency groups. The use of the Internet to conduct assessment and analysis is also described.

Values and Ethics

Before an organizer can identify community problems, he or she must have a thorough knowledge of the values and ethics associated with community practice. Although organizers often share common views about social justice

and the empowerment of oppressed populations, the ethical implications of the various strategies and tactics the organizer uses are seldom discussed (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). While the organizer may use in-depth research and analysis to identify effective strategies, his or her personal values also influence these decisions. Seldom are intervention plans “value free.”

The code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) provides a framework for making practice-related choices. The code identifies specific aspects of a social worker’s responsibility to society, clients, colleagues, and employers. All social workers are required to “advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice” (NASW code, standard 6.01; see Reamer, 1998, p. 283). CSWE, the organization that sets accreditation standards for social work education programs, also defines the purpose of social work as the “alleviation of poverty and oppression” (CSWE, 1994, p. 2). CSWE also specifies that social workers are to “empower” disadvantaged populations (see box, “Council on Social Work Education Curriculum Policy Statement”).

Empowerment through Community Organization: Acquiring the Power to Fight Oppression

The purpose of community organization practice is to empower members of oppressed groups. Empowerment can be defined as “the psychological state—a sense of competence, control, and entitlement—that allows one to pursue concrete activities aimed at becoming powerful” (Mondros & Wilson, 1994, p. 5). Empowerment also refers to the process through which people maintain control over their own lives and communities (Staples, 1990). An individual becomes empowered when his or her self-esteem is increased. At the intrapersonal level, empowerment comes through the construction of knowledge and analysis of social problems acquired through shared experience. Within communities, empowerment occurs when social-change strategies are used to acquire goods, services, decision-making authority, and other resources. This in turn helps group members gain control over their environment (Hardina, 1996; Labonte, 1990).

Oppression is “the assumption that one group in our society [the dominant culture] successfully maximizes its life changes by minimizing those of another” (Moreau, 1990, p. 53). Oppressed groups are typically excluded from participation in government decision making and economic or educational opportunities. Oppression is most often based on the characteristics of individuals and groups. This book will use the acronym CRAASH, outlined in the following list, to describe the various forms of oppression. Specific types of oppression can include (but are not limited to):

C	Classism	Oppression directed at people of another social class (most often the poor)
R	Racism	Oppression directed at people of another race or ethnic group
A	Ableism	Oppression directed at people with disabilities
A	Ageism	Oppression directed at older people
S	Sexism	Oppression directed at people of another gender (most often against women)
H	Heterosexism	Oppression directed at people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT)

Linking Theory and Practice

Successful community organization practice requires that the social worker be able to use theoretical frameworks to make appropriate practice deci-

Council on Social Work Education Curriculum Policy Statement for Master's Degree Programs in Social Work Education

M4.0 Purpose of Social Work

The profession of social work is committed to the enhancement of human well-being and the alleviation of poverty and oppression. The social work profession receives its sanction from public and private auspices and is the primary profession in the provision of social services. Within its general scope of concern, professional social work is practiced in a wide variety of settings and has four related purposes.

- M4.1.1 The promotion, restoration, maintenance, and enhancement of the social functioning of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities by helping them to accomplish tasks, prevent and alleviate distress, and use resources.
- M4.1.2 The planning, formulation, and implementation of social policies, services, resources, and programs needed to meet basic human needs and support the development of human capacities.
- M4.1.3 The pursuit of policies, services, resources, and programs through organizational or administrative advocacy and social or political action to empower groups at risk and to promote social and economic justice.
- M4.1.4 The development and testing of professional knowledge and skill are related to these purposes.

Source: Council on Social Work Education, 1994.

sions. The concept of praxis, the term Freire (1970) assigned to the merging of theory and experience, is an important component in community organization practice. It is expected that the social worker will use his or her own experience to choose theories and skills that are appropriate to a variety of situations. In time, experience will lead the organizer to develop a personal framework for practice as well as knowledge about what works and what doesn't work in practice situations. One of the basic premises of this book is that the beginning practitioner must have a basic knowledge of current and emerging practice theories to select the appropriate practice skills for any situation. Consequently, the first few chapters in this book provide a theoretical overview for community organization practice. Subsequent chapters describe theories pertinent to specific analytical skills.

The easiest way for a community organizer to use theories in day-to-day situations is to rely on practice models. Models incorporate a specific theoretical framework and offer a prescription for how to intervene in specific practice situations. In community organization, the organizer uses models of practice to determine the degree to which he or she assumes control of the social change effort, the types of strategies and tactics used, and specific social work roles inherent in the change process. Models of community organization practice also describe the relationship between the organizer and the target system (i.e., the person or organization to be changed). Models also contain specific value statements about the relationship between the organizer and members of the action system (the constituents or partners in the social change effort).

This book introduces the reader to what Rothman (1995) has identified as the three primary models of community organization practice: social action, social planning, and locality (or community) development. Social action involves organizing and participating in activities intended to influence social change: legislative lobbying, electoral politics, unions, public education campaigns, and protest demonstrations. Community organizers work with a constituency group (usually people traditionally excluded from participation in the larger society). The group then targets government or community institutions in order to influence decision making or redistribute power or other resources. Social planning involves the use of technical skills by one or more experts to examine a variety of program options, choose the best available plan, and implement programs or services. Locality development focuses on bringing all groups in a community together to reach a consensus about community problems and their resolution.

Three emerging models are also examined: the transformative model, feminist organizing, and multicultural practice (Freire, 1970; Hyde, 1994; Rivera & Erlich, 1998). These last three models provide the organizer with a vehicle for making practice responsive to the needs of diverse populations. Freire (1970) developed transformative organizing methods with the primary intention of increasing literacy among low-income peoples in Brazil.

The student participants developed literacy skills and acquired knowledge about how the political structure influenced their lives, and the educator gained information about the participants' traditions and values. The educator also gained knowledge about the oppression the participants experienced. A central component of Freire's work is the development of critical consciousness, defined as

... the process through which personal and political factors interact with each other and one's work, as well as how values, ideas, and practice skills are influenced by social forces and, in turn, influence them. (Rivera & Erlich, p. 7)

Multicultural organizing is heavily influenced by Freire's (1970) work. In addition to the development of a critical consciousness, Gutierrez and Alvarez (2000) describe a number of skills that are useful in working with members of underrepresented communities.

1. Familiarity with the customs, values, and language of members of the constituency group
2. Awareness of one's own cultural biases
3. Ability to empower constituents to make decisions that affect their lives

Another model of practice, feminist organizing, also requires that the organizer work in partnership with constituents to produce change (Hyde, 1994; Weil, 1986). Members of feminist organizations share decision-making power; engage in consciousness raising about oppression; and take action, grounded in feminist principles, to produce social change (Weil & Gamble, 1995).

Assessment Skills

Though many of the skills used in transformative, multicultural, and feminist practice are interpersonal in nature, the organizer must find appropriate ways to acquire information about the values and cultural practices of constituency communities. This textbook gives the reader a description of the research skills needed to become an "active learner" who can exchange information about cultural values with members of diverse groups (Freire, 1970). In addition to presenting traditional quantitative models for community-based needs assessment, sections of this book describe approaches to research that involve members of the constituency group as participants in the research process: ethnographic, feminist, and participatory action research. These methods require the researcher to recognize that community residents and members of groups outside the dominant culture are the

best experts about their own lives, values, and experiences. Using participatory research models requires that research incorporate specific value assumptions about the role of the community organizer, the mission of social work practice, and the involvement of constituents in the community organizing process.

This book contains information on assessment tools that organizers can use to document community needs and analyze community decision-making structures and power dynamics. The ability to facilitate political, social, and economic change is essential for any social worker but is especially important for organizers. Consequently, organizers can use analytical skills to analyze legislative processes, the content of policies and legislation, political power, and the electoral process. These chapters contain specific assessment tools and information about using the Internet to conduct power-related research.

Goal Setting and Program Implementation

Once the organizer, in conjunction with constituents, completes a thorough assessment of community needs and power dynamics, he or she must establish intervention goals. This process requires that partners in the intervention process agree on action outcomes and program plans. Effective interventions require clear linkages between theories, practice models, goals, interventions, and proposed outcomes. Consequently, this book describes techniques to identify appropriate strategies and tactics that are central to the development of any social change-oriented intervention plan.

To ensure that organizing efforts are not confined to one-time, crisis-related interventions, organizers must form social change-oriented organizations to sustain their efforts. To this end, the textbook also outlines the skills necessary to sustain any organizing effort: organizational development and maintenance. Organizers should know how to plan programs, set organizational goals, identify appropriate funding sources, write fundable proposals, and raise money from donations or special events. They should also be able to construct program budgets and monitor expenditures.

Evaluation

Organizers should also act to evaluate program outcomes and processes. Although many foundation and government funding sources require that community-based organizations keep careful records of program outcomes, evaluation of practice has evolved into a distinct field of practice. New methods have emerged that require the involvement of organization constituents and staff in a process of self-evaluation. Empowerment-oriented evaluation is used to promote a continuous change that includes program monitoring, process evaluation, and outcome assessment in community-based or social

action organizations. Consequently, it becomes a tool for program development, motivation of volunteers, staff performance assessment, and program growth and renewal.

Organization of the Book

This book is organized in a way that explicates the use of the problem-solving model. The remaining fourteen chapters are organized into four distinct sections:

- Concepts and Theories for Practice
- Problem Identification and Assessment
- Goal Setting and Implementation
- Evaluation

Chapters 2 through 5 examine concepts and theories that guide community practice. Without knowledge of concepts and theories, the organizer cannot identify problems, make assessments, set goals, implement programs, or evaluate practice. In chapter 2, basic value assumptions associated with community practice are identified. The relationship between these values and the NASW code of ethics is described. The material in this chapter is also intended to help the reader develop a personal framework for making practice decisions that may involve ethical choices. Chapter 3 offers an overview of theories that guide community practice. Social work practice often relies on systems or ecological theories to bridge the gap between clinical and community practice; community organization also borrows heavily from theories derived from sociology and political science to explain conflicts among competing groups in society. These theories also help explain how coalitions and social movements develop in response to political oppression or public concern for people or entities that are not represented in the political process (e.g., children, the environment, and animals).

Chapter 4 identifies models of practice including community development, social planning, social action, feminist organizing, transformative practice, and multicultural organizing. Each intervention model is linked to the theoretical literature on social forces, interest groups, and social movements. Also described are the appropriate situations in which the organizer should use these models and the likely outcomes associated with each.

Organizers primarily practice their craft in neighborhoods and communities. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the theoretical literature on community that moves beyond the traditional conceptualization of the geographic community to focus on communities of people defined by race, culture, social class, common problems, and the formation of a collective identity. This chapter also describes the rules of inclusion and exclusion that determine the degree to which individuals participate in the life of the community.

The second section of the book, chapters 6 to 9, focuses on specific analytical tools used for problem identification and needs assessment—the first two steps in the problem-solving model. Chapter 6 describes methods used to involve community residents in problem identification. This chapter also contains a description of research methods typically used to assess community problems.

A detailed assessment of communities is never complete without an analysis of power. Chapter 7 contains an overview of the theoretical literature on power in communities. Analytical techniques that can be used to assess the power of individuals, policy makers, interest groups, and social movements are described. Chapters 8 and 9 contain information about analytical techniques related to two specific types of social action: lobbying and electoral politics. Although most social workers will not be employed in organizations primarily devoted to these activities, most social change initiatives require that the organizer participate in efforts to influence legislation. Consequently, it is important for the organizer to know whether individual legislators will be reelected and what interest groups contribute to their campaigns. Chapter 8 presents descriptive information about how to analyze the content of legislation and monitor the status of new legislation as it moves through Congress or the state legislature. In chapter 9, methods used to predict the outcome of political races or identify likely voters are described. Both chapters contain detailed information about how to use the Internet to conduct power analysis.

The third section of the book examines techniques for setting goals and developing intervention plans. Chapter 10 describes strategies and tactics that the organizer should incorporate into an intervention plan to help the organization and constituency group acquire power. Strategy choice is determined by a combination of the organizer's preferences and values, the model of practice chosen in response to the situation at hand, and the preferences of the constituents involved in the intervention. Chapter 11 presents procedures that can be used to plan programs and services or build organizations. Each of these chapters contains an overview of the intervention-planning literature and describes specific analytical procedures. Frameworks for making planning decisions are also provided.

The fourth section of this book contains information that pertains to the implementation stage of the problem-solving process. Once a program is planned, the organizer needs to find the resources to operate it. Chapter 12 includes an examination of the various types of funding available for community intervention and describes the impact of various types of funding (such as government, foundation, corporate, and individual donations) on community-based social action agencies. The chapter also lists Internet resources that can help organizers identify appropriate funding sources. A step-by-step process for developing grant proposals is also included. Chapter 13 describes procedures for constructing and analyzing budget infor-

mation. This chapter also provides information on Internet sites that an organizer can use to monitor the budgets of government agencies.

The last section of this book pertains to evaluation of practice. Chapter 14 examines evaluation as the final stage in the problem-solving process. As in clinical practice, the organizer must be able to document whether the social change initiative has been effective. If such an effort has not been effective, the organizer will do one of the following:

1. Adopt new strategies and tactics to increase effectiveness
2. Examine the organizing process in order to document barriers to success

In this chapter, qualitative methods, used to examine the organization process, and quantitative methods, used to examine effectiveness, are described. Research methods that organizers can use to involve constituency group members in the evaluation process are also examined.

Chapter 15, the book's conclusion, contains an evaluation of the implications of computer technology for organizing in the new millennium—both an assessment of current computer applications and a prediction of how technology will be used in the future. The use of E-mail to contact constituents and decision makers and the creation of Web pages to transmit information have important implications. The new technology has great potential for increasing linkages among organizations and neighborhood residents and to increase community access to both decision makers and the decision-making process (Grant & Grobman, 1998; Tropman, 1997). Unless computer applications are used cautiously, however, they can increase divisions between those with power and those who have comparatively little voice in social, economic, or political decision making.

Summary

Analytical skills for community practice are applicable to a variety of practice settings and situations. The community organizer must be prepared to be an active learner, finding out about the customs and values of the diverse populations involved in the organizing effort. The organizer must also be prepared to document community needs and evaluate the outcomes of interventions. To generate financial resources and carry out interventions, the organizer must be able to construct and monitor budgets, write grant proposals, and identify appropriate funding sources. To implement successful community change efforts, the organizer must be able to analyze community power dynamics, identify influential interest groups, and monitor the status of pending legislation. Access to the Internet allows the organizer almost unlimited opportunity to conduct much of the analysis needed for community practice.

■ QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. How are the analytical skills needed by the community organizer similar to those skills used in clinical or policy practice?
2. Describe the role of the community organizer in a variety of organizational positions:

Activist

Program planner

Grassroots organizer

Community development specialist

Political campaign manager

Which of the skills described on pages 2–3 could be used in each of these job positions?

3. Describe how the values identified in the NASW code of ethics or the CSWE curriculum statement pertain to community organization practice. Give specific examples.
4. Give examples of oppression exhibited toward members of the demographic groups listed in the CRAASH typology on page 5. Give examples based on your own experiences or situations that you have observed.

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