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MS. FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

ACTION

STIR IT UP

LESSONS IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY

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CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZING NEW CONSTITUENCIES

At the base of all progressive action lies a commitment to organizing the people most affected by a particular problem. The organizing process transforms people with problems into politically active constituencies that eventually build a new collective identity and reinforce or transform the culture of their communities. Especially when a community is under attack, being organized provides a chance to counteract stereotypes and to present community members as agents of change rather than as victims of the status quo.

Of all the tasks progressives have, this kind of organizing is the hardest to do and the easiest to give up. If our notion of organizing is mostly romantic, if we are unclear about why we are organizing in a certain community, the patience and courage needed to keep a group together can be difficult to sustain. Organizing requires consistent, systematic work in the form of phone calls, reports, conversations, meetings, along with the patience to deal with the failed campaigns and incremental successes that come before mass uprisings. The romance quickly wears off, and the realities of daily organization building can depress even the most stalwart extroverts among us.

By organizing, I mean an effort to build organizations that include at least these five elements:

- A clear mission and goals
- A membership and leadership structure, with a way for people to join and take roles

- Outreach systems that concentrate on those most affected
- Issue campaigns featuring multiple tactics, including direct action
- Pursuit of changing institutions rather than individuals

These elements combine to produce power and a shift in how people are treated as a result.

Organizing differs from other forms of social-change work. It does not offer immediate relief for individuals through the provision of social services. Unlike advocacy, organizing removes the middleman. It is not collapsible with electoral work because it embraces a wider range of activities. Its goals are broader than those of economic development, which tends to focus on bricks-and-mortar projects or job training and development. I also distinguish organizing, which results in an organization, from mobilization, which involves large numbers of people expressing their resistance or support, whether through a demonstration or signing a petition, without the expectation of sustained activity. Solidarity movements can open up space for the voices of those affected, but they can never replace the clarity and power of the people who have the most to gain and the least to lose. While these are all legitimate approaches to social change, they have their own methods and rules. We need to draw distinctions to use any of them effectively.

Organizing offers important advantages for activists over these other forms of social-change work. Engaging people who experience social problems provides a barometer with which to evaluate issue and campaign choices. The people most affected are the key to uncovering patterns of institutional behavior and to determining the effects of those patterns and how much we care. The willingness among those people affected to recruit others in the same situation is a major indicator of a organization's likelihood of surviving. Even the most dedicated, insightful initial group will lose its dynamism unless members are willing to pull in others. Additionally, organizations composed of people whose lives will change when a new policy is instituted tend to set goals that are harder to reach, to compromise less, and to stick out a fight longer. Self-organization also forms the basis for mass social movements. The eight-hour day was won by people who needed it, as was access to AIDS treatment, the Civil Rights Act, and civilian police-review commissions. As one organizer put it to me, "Leadership of the real people has to be the bottom line" (Gihan Perrera, conversation with the author, October 1999).

When we start organizing, it is important to consider the constituency's strengths as well as its troubles. For example, women of all ages bring substantial strengths to organizing. Women easily constitute the vast majority of members and organizing staff of community organizations and increasingly of unions. Their diverse experiences in the private and public sphere lead to intellectual and tactical flexibility. Women appear to be both attracted to and prepared for

community and political responsibilities by our life conditions, which require us to negotiate between individuals and institutions, to recruit diverse resources from an extended network that has to be maintained through regular communication, and to design creative solutions through collective problem solving.

This chapter is less about the specific techniques for building a membership than about the larger questions embedded in a strategy that emphasizes self-organization. In highlighting the key principles of good organizing, I focus on the need to pay attention to organizational structure, culture, recruitment methods, and the relationship of organizing to other approaches. I provide illustrations, mainly from four organizations. From 9to5, I draw lessons about the advantages of creating identity-based caucuses within an organization and of building a union and a community organization simultaneously (including lessons about the implications of such a structure for outreach). In the example of the Workplace Project, I demonstrate the value of building constituency-specific committees, and I track the practical shifts that strike a balance between organizing and providing services, as well as between organizing and education. In the Chinese Staff & Workers Association (CSWA), we observe how a constituency of women workers led the organization to a new set of issues, and we learn why CSWA is not a service provider. In the illustrations from Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), we can see how its structure allowed it to build a democratic and multiracial culture, how it created the Home Day Care Justice (HDCJ) Cooperative, and how organizing the people most affected by a problem drives up demands.

Principles

Four major principles form the basis of our organizing efforts. First, our organizing strategy, our plan to build or expand a particular constituency, holds implications for the way we structure our organizations. Second, every organization has its own culture, which has to be shaped and refined to make room for the participation of particular groups. Third, we need to match our recruitment methods to the people we want to reach. Fourth, if we use services to attract members, we have to be extra vigilant that service provision doesn't take over the organizing.

Building Organizational Structures

Organizing requires flexible, transparent structures that have two primary functions. Structures define roles—who makes decisions, who reports to whom, who prioritizes issues and shapes campaign plans, to name a few. Structures also reflect

values. For example, if we want to raise the legitimacy of particular voices, we might not choose a simple majority-rules voting structure.

Many activists come to social-change work with a justifiably negative reaction to the rigid hierarchies of dominant institutions, and they have three common ways of not reproducing that rigidity. Some build collectives. A larger number adopt modified hierarchies. Still others develop some combination of collectives and hierarchies. Whichever basic form we choose, we must define that choice. We will almost certainly adjust it as time goes on, but the organization's operating principles have to be clear to everyone involved at each stage.

Many organizations decline to define their structures at all, choosing to remain fluid and flexible, hoping to avoid rigidity and exclusion. In the beginning, a lack of formal structure works well for horizontal relationships among peers, when everyone has to be capable of doing many things. Often, start-ups are responding to a crisis that takes all their attention, and they can't spend much time developing a structure. However, the lack of structure can obscure power relationships in a group. In a still-relevant article titled "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," Jo Freeman wrote in 1973 (p. 286) about the hidden hierarchies that emerged as women's consciousness-raising groups shifted to politics. She argued that the lack of formal structures elevated the role of the informal structures—friendship networks and leadership patterns—that govern human interactions. Freeman pointed out that many past women's movements fought to formalize and reveal the structures of decision making embedded in informal old boys' networks so that they could confront the exclusion of women directly.

Freeman also worried that the lack of formal structure kept radical women's voices from shaping the larger movement and blocked accountability among feminists. "The avowedly Unstructured group . . . [has] no way of drawing upon the movement's vast resources to support its priorities; it doesn't even have a way of deciding what they are. . . . If the movement continues to keep power as diffuse as possible because it cannot demand responsibility from those who have it, it . . . ensures that the movement is as ineffective as possible. Some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found" (1973, p. 297).

Collectives and hierarchies each have advantages and disadvantages. In collectives people can assume great responsibility for the organization's development. When a collective makes a decision, the resistance to the option chosen has been explored and addressed so that the decision can be carried out with confidence. Collectives tend to enjoy a high level of internal trust, which helps them withstand external attacks. And, in attempting to operate in ways consistent with progressive visions of society, collectives provide an important reality check to our plan for implementing ideals. However, decision making in collectives can be slow, and

such organizations can be small and cliquish. They are easiest to build among people who are alike in culture and communication style.

By contrast, hierarchies can be efficient because they create teams that are responsible for specific pieces of work. And because they do not demand the same skills and commitment from everyone, people who enjoy taking ultimate responsibility can do so, while those who don't can find another role within the same organization. Because roles are tightly defined, hierarchies can provide systematic developmental opportunities for new people. Counter to many perceptions, people in hierarchies are often able to control decisions related to their own work. However, hierarchies can isolate individual leaders, requiring them to make difficult decisions and hanging them out to dry. Leaders of hierarchical organizations have to check constantly how much everyone else espouses the direction of the organization. People who have been abused by power, whether in their families or on the job, often react badly to hierarchies.

In truth, neither model works in its pure form for progressive organizations. Some groups—the Zapatistas and the American Friends Service Committee, for example—make every decision through a complicated process of consensus building and consultation among hundreds of people. But this is a rare model, developed over a long time and grounded in the historic culture of those communities. Most contemporary organizations are collective/hierarchy hybrids, simply because that's what they have the capacity to pull off or because they are bound by the legal restrictions of 501(c)(3) status (see the discussion of this tax regulation below).

Collectives, hierarchies, and hybrids can all be manipulated and abused by powerful and unethical individuals so that they become exclusive organizations. Therefore, whatever the structure, it needs to be clear and transparent to all involved, maintained in a fair manner, and flexible enough to be changed thoughtfully according to the needs of the constituency. Minimally, groups that are new and those that are in structural transition should consider:

- Using temporary and transitional structures
- Using a variety of decision-making models at different times
- Consistently and collectively evaluating everyone's role and contributions
- Sharing leadership, so that people make at least the most important decisions together
- Instituting requirements for leadership turnover to make room for new leaders
- Delegating decision-making power to the people responsible for carrying out a particular project
- Instituting a planning system, which reduces the need for last-minute decisions by individuals

Committees can play a key role in developing a new constituency within an organization. It seems counterintuitive to build a constituency-specific committee when you are trying to integrate that group into the larger organization. But committees make it possible for a group of people to gain critical mass and experience with the organization's purpose and culture; their doing so can help old and new groups make fast progress.

Illustration: DARE Uses Committees to Become Democratic

DARE operates through what appears to be a fairly traditional hierarchy, with an executive director who is supervised by a board of directors, which is elected by the membership in an annual meeting. However, high levels of integration allow many people to help shape the organization's priorities and tactics. Board meetings are open to the rest of the staff and membership; campaign committees aren't generally required to ask the board's approval before taking action; and DARE has made a strong commitment to recruiting former members for paid staff positions.

DARE also has a long history of building committees geared toward bringing together a specific constituency that later becomes integrated into the larger organization. For example, when DARE was a largely African American organization wanting to engage Latinos in a deeper way, it built the *Comite Latino*, which organized around Latino education issues and operated for five years, after which it was disbanded by unanimous consent of *Comite* members. This process allowed Latinos to feel strong enough to hold their own in a multiracial organization.

Illustration: The Workplace Project Builds a Women's Committee for Domestic Workers

Like many mixed-gender groups, the Workplace Project has created space for its women members by building a women's committee, and it has observed practical differences in groups of women and of men. Nadia Marin-Molina, the Project's executive director, identifies the benefits: "The industries where women work are completely different, as well as the ways in which they work. Without a dedicated place to nurture women's leadership, this would be a male-dominated organization. Instead, it's a partnership." Marin-Molina points to the development of the organization's two cooperatives as an example of the difference in male and female expectations and needs. "The [domestic workers'] co-op always had issues of child care. Landscaping never had that issue. The men's co-op always had more of a dependence on me to do things, especially administrative work. The women's co-op took it for granted that women were going to participate in finances and so on." While the women's committee serves as a launching point for women-specific campaigns, it also involves women in other campaigns, such as day labor and unpaid wages.

Illustration: CSWA Builds a Women’s Committee for Low-Wage Immigrants

The CSWA Women’s Committee grew from the need to develop women’s leadership and to challenge the super-exploitation that women workers face both in the workplace and in the home. Answering the question of whether women should retain a completely separate space in the organization, the Committee adopted the perspective that women should not limit themselves to leading other women but should lead everyone, including men. Women’s leadership has grown beyond the Committee, flourishing on the board, staff, and other organizing programs.

CSWA is very critical of the mainstream feminist movement, which is dominated by middle-class women. Organizer Trih Duong says, “We haven’t seen many women’s organizations address issues that affect low-income women. A lot of women’s groups say we should get more women into power, or get equal pay, but for low-income women earning equal wages as a man in our community just means equal to being a slave.” Duong adds that “many women, aside from working long hours outside, often must do the unpaid work at home raising children.” In this way, women are bearing the brunt of the sweatshop system. When President Bill Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Bill, hundreds of thousands of single parents, the majority of whom were mothers, were further exploited and forced to work for their welfare check. To truly address the needs of women workers, CSWA asserts that the valuable work of caregiving must be recognized and paid.

Illustration: 9to5 Updates Structure and Creates Caucuses to Encourage Fair Participation

When founding executive director Karen Nussbaum left 9to5 in 1993, a strategic planning process led to some structural shifts. The staff unionized and the organization created a management team consisting of two women of color, one lesbian, and people of different ages. The membership created three caucuses: women in poverty, women of color, and bi/trans/lesbian women. The women-in-poverty caucus, for example, is composed heavily of staff who come from the 9to5 constituency—welfare recipients and temporary workers who first got involved with 9to5 before their situations changed. The caucuses allow women with particular identities to support each other in their adjustment to the organization.

When choosing a leadership structure, organizations have also to consider the legal ramifications. On the one hand, in the United States, nonprofit organizations are allowed to collect tax-deductible contributions with a 501(c)(3) tax status, but the amount of time they can devote to direct lobbying and electoral work is limited. On the other hand, organizations can do as much electoral or legislative work as they want with a 501(c)(4) designation, but they cannot receive tax-

deductible donations from businesses, foundations, or individuals. Some groups of activists address this problem by forming one of each type of organization.

Likewise, unions have rights under the law that nonprofit organizations don't have, a distinction that becomes important when people organize for rights on the job. Employers are legally bound to negotiate with workers as a whole group (in other words, with unions) under the collective bargaining laws governing labor relations. Unions are allowed to have dues automatically deducted from members' paychecks, so they don't have to rely on constant fundraising from their membership or foundations. Unions are also not 501(c)(3) organizations, so they can lobby Congress to, for example, raise the minimum wage and help elect progressive candidates. However, unions also operate industry by industry and workplace by workplace and union workers are usually considered "standard" employees—full time, clearly getting their paycheck from one source, and so on. Community groups may be more effective in organizing other workers; however, when community organizations attempt to gain workplace improvements, they, unlike unions, have to contend with the lack of legal rights described above.

Illustration: 9to5 Organizes as a Union

Nussbaum says that 9to5 turned to union affiliation in 1976 out of frustration with its lack of legal power after organizing a workplace. "We'd have meetings with the boss and present a set of demands, and he'd say I'll get back to you. We had absolutely no power to enforce anything." Nussbaum recalls that the search for a union to affiliate with wasn't easy: unions were "totally male-dominated," and no union was pinning for the chance to organize clerical workers. After talking with ten unions, the fledgling group decided to make a deal with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). In 1976, 9to5 and SEIU formed Local 925, which included clerical workers in universities and nonprofits in the Boston area. Local 925 remains an independent bargaining unit affiliated with the national SEIU infrastructure. It has served as a model for the creation of other "925" locals throughout the country. Within this structure each local retains women's leadership and autonomy over its own issues and practices. Nussbaum notes proudly that Local 925, operating with a family-friendly activist structure, "ran four offices around the country, all led by mothers of young children, half of them single, yet our organizing method produced results that were as good [as] or better than those of other SEIU locals."

Even after affiliating with SEIU, 9to5 members decided to keep the National Association of Working Women (its original incarnation) going. Ellen Bravo, who started the Association's Milwaukee chapter in 1982 and is now the executive director of 9to5, notes that "someone had to continue to do worker education in places that weren't ready for a union drive. Plus, the unions weren't that focused on public policy, and

someone had to fight for that.” The Association was initially structured so that a national office provided funds to local chapters, but this arrangement proved financially untenable. Today, each of the twenty-three chapters is the result of self-organization by working women, and five of these raise enough money for staff. Each year, the Association holds a leadership conference in which priority issues are either confirmed or chosen for the coming period. Bravo says that the most important benefit of the national local model, which is a difficult structure to maintain in a way that meets everyone’s needs, is that individuals “can work on their own thing and still be connected to a larger movement, still understand and help pass national legislation.”

When neither a community organization nor a union is the right structure to build, some people look to cooperatives, particularly for “self-employed” contract workers, who are regularly hustling jobs. Co-ops use a variety of membership structures. Some are worker-owned and include a limited number of members who are employed by the cooperative. Others are associations of people who work together to train and support each other as well as to fight for new public policies. Co-ops can provide short-term advantages for small numbers of people by consolidating their labor power and forcing employers to negotiate in order to get work done. The two groups in the illustrations below were led to the co-op model by, respectively, the desire to learn more about a particular industry and the desire to get around the gatekeepers and established institutions that controlled the industry. However, co-ops also have significant disadvantages. They do not have legal collective bargaining power, and they are often slow to make a dent in the established wage rates and labor practices of an industry. By looking at cooperative models in domestic work and child care, we can learn about some of the advantages and disadvantages.

Illustration: The Workplace Project Builds a Cooperative

The housekeeping industry posed major challenges to the Workplace Project’s ability to win real change for workers. The Project learned how little it could rely on government intervention during an attempt to reform the employment-agency practice of charging workers illegal fees. Marin-Molina says that employment agencies “charge \$25 for the application, then the first week’s salary up front. Sometimes the job may not really exist or [is] already given to someone else, or people go in and only work a couple of days so they never get paid for a whole week, [even though they] have already paid the fee.” This practice is widespread among employment agencies, despite its illegality. By law, the entire application fee is supposed to be refundable, and the agency cannot charge more than 10 percent of the first month’s wages.

When the Project attempted to change this practice, it found the lack of government enforcement to be the biggest hindrance to establishing a new code of conduct. The Project targeted six of the most exploitive agencies to sign a statement of

principles. Marin-Molina reflects that the fear generated among agency leaders by the Workplace Project could only go so far. After some of the agencies signed the statement of principles, “we sent women in as testers to see how the agencies treated them and tried to get the Department of Labor to move, but we would have needed thousands of women organized who knew their rights every time they went in.” Furthermore, the Department of Labor didn’t consider the statement binding but “said they’d help with enforcement if we did everything.”

Many of the other problems in domestic work arise from the tremendous control that each employer has over the worker, “whether it’s because she doesn’t have a bank account or believes that her immigration status depends on the employer,” says Marin-Molina. The intimacy in the relationship between a woman employer and a woman domestic also aggravates the power imbalance. (For a fuller discussion of the dynamics between employers and domestics, see Chang, 2000, and Romero, 1992.) Domestic workers rarely have a job description or regular hours, and they are frequently asked to perform outrageous tasks for long hours. Unpaid wages are also a frequent problem in domestic work. Marin-Molina says, “One woman worked twelve years for an employer who said he was keeping \$150 a week as savings for her. At the end of twelve years, she asked for the thousands of dollars owed her. He simply said no. People whose employers pay them less but promise to help them get a green card come in years later when they find out their employer never filed any paperwork for them.”

In this context, and after a successful experience building a landscaping cooperative, the Project’s women’s committee decided to build a cooperative to prevent exploitation in the industry. The twelve core members of the cooperative conducted extensive one-on-one outreach at Latino churches to find interested women. They enrolled in courses covering the principles of cooperative formation, including worker control and ownership and democratic decision making. They then formed four committees: finance, marketing, rules, and education. They developed a system of equitable distribution of jobs to members. Once every member is assigned a client, the assignment cycle starts again following a sequence based on each member’s level of participation in co-op activities. Clients pay \$50 for the first three hours of work and \$15 for each additional hour. Members pay 10 percent of what they earn in dues.

The co-op has offered some distinct advantages and benefits to the Project, and it has also revealed limitations of the co-op model. The Project built the co-op in a way that maximized the participation of all co-op members. (Maximizing participation was, incidentally, more difficult to do with the landscaping co-op, whose members were largely male and who “resisted doing a lot of the administrative work, expecting me to do it,” recalls Marin-Molina.) That emphasis on participation eventually paid off. “The housecleaning co-op has emerged as one of the most stable groups we’ve ever had,” she says. In addition, she notes that building co-ops “helps us understand the industry really really well,” an invaluable boost to the base of knowledge that informs future strategy.

But obstacles have slowed down the process of building the co-op and making it profitable. Members have previously experienced the industry as workers, not as

employers, so they don't know basics like how to estimate the cost of a job. In addition cooperatives have to compete within industry standards. "While you're trying to meet the goals of paying a living wage, other businesses aren't doing that, [so] you immediately run up against how come you're charging so much; even socially conscious groups don't necessarily want to pay for that. You start out with the idea that we set up this business, everybody will have a job, it will generate lots of money for the organization. Grand schemes, then the realities of running a business get in the way," Marin-Molina says.

Illustration: The HDCJ Cooperative Forms to Pursue Collective Bargaining

The HDCJ Cooperative was started as a group within DARE by four day-care providers who repeatedly received their paychecks from the state late. After the HDCJ Campaign had waged a five-year struggle to make family day-care workers in Rhode Island state employees so that they could be eligible for health insurance and after it had rejected the option of affiliating with a union so it could retain independent women's leadership, the Campaign reformulated itself as an independent cooperative hoping to pursue collective bargaining. After formalizing its structure, the HDCJ Cooperative set up services for its members. These included a substitute provider pool that could replace primary providers during vacations and when they were sick, a toy lending library, a bulk purchasing program, a parent referral program that placed fifty children in the first nine months, and a reading program through which a volunteer arrives monthly to read to children in day care and to distribute books. The Cooperative has maintained its commitment to group advocacy to resolve individual problems with state agencies, as in the case of an immigrant member with a temporary green card and working papers whom the state refused to pay after one year of service.

The biggest challenge is to translate all the energy and history of the Cooperative into a collective bargaining agreement. Collective bargaining is limited by law to official unions, so creating a collective bargaining unit out of subcontracted workers will require confronting regressive labor laws. Currently, the Cooperative is simply exploring the possibility of raising the reimbursement rates paid by the state. As the Cooperative develops, child care and other state contractors and workers will be watching to see whether this new organizational form can permanently expand the scope of public responsibility for child care working conditions.

To determine the constituencies for your organization and to ascertain which kind of organizational structure will serve them best, complete Exercise 2.1.

Actively Shaping Group Culture

Every organization has a distinct culture that is defined by a lot more than holiday events and the food eaten by its members. Organizational culture includes the

language commonly spoken, rules written and unwritten, humor, rituals, and attitudes about other communities and social change. Most organizations pay little attention to shaping their own culture, so it gets shaped haphazardly, according to the culture of whoever is around at the time. All cultures, including those of organizations, are fluid. They are never totally at a standstill, although change might take place slowly.

We usually think about the effects of the existing collective identity and culture on our organizing, but we rarely think of the opposite: how organizing affects identities and culture. Although academics have charted this process, the principle is self-evident. Any time someone tells her story of becoming an activist, we can track how the experience changed that person. But often our overly simplistic sense of community autonomy keeps us from seeing this change in identity clearly. Several years ago I had an organizing staff study the ways in which gender identities were manipulated to reinforce racial and class hierarchies. When I posed the question “If we were to reorganize people into a best-scenario identity, what would that identity include?” I was confronted with shocked resistance. Organizing people into an identity is something the right wing does, not our side, I was told. But it seems to me that if we don’t organize people to embrace identities that enable a fight for liberation, we are lost to the other side’s image of us. None of us comes into ourselves in a vacuum. We are influenced either by the Gap billboard or by the antisweatshop organizer.

For example, in Los Angeles, the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) has made it clear—both within and outside the Korean community—that the vast majority of Korean immigrants are not business owners but low-wage workers in Korean businesses. That distinct identity as workers has taken shape through clashes with Korean owners and regulatory agencies. Embracing a class identity has also enabled low-wage Korean workers to clarify their self-interest in relation to other communities of color. KIWA’s membership now includes Latinos who also work in Korean businesses, and KIWA was responsible for turning out the Korean vote against the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209, allying itself particularly with the black community (Toney, 2000).

Until recently, the work culture of most political organizations excluded women and those people not in a traditional family structure from employment. Certainly, organizers are required to make sacrifices to do the work. But the extreme notion of what it takes to get the work done in political organizations is profoundly discouraging to many people who have been good organizers and leaders, particularly those who lack the option to leave their children or their elderly parents with someone else for long periods of time. Working in what Bravo, of 9to5, calls a “maniacal frenzy,” does not “inspire people to get involved. It inspires them to see the maniac and say, oh good, you do the work for me, and see you later.”

Illustration: DARE Builds a Multiracial Culture

As described previously, when DARE was primarily an African American organization, it created the *Comite Latino* to more deeply engage Latinas in the organization. Over five years, key elements of the organization's culture changed to accommodate immigrants. Rather than holding membership meetings and confrontations with decision makers only in English, DARE began to use simultaneous translation machines to conduct bilingual (eventually trilingual) meetings. In addition to a program that consisted largely of externally oriented campaign activities, DARE members began to invest time in educational and community-building activities so that members could learn more about each other's roots. Two aspects of DARE's culture that did not shift were the commitment to raising money from its constituency and the notion that all leaders are responsible for helping to generate operating funds. All these elements of organizational culture allowed DARE to become a multiracial organization over time.

To determine your organization's culture and which aspects of it, if any, need to be changed, complete Exercise 2.2.

Matching Outreach to the Constituency

Outreach needs to be matched to a group's constituency, but it should be personal and systematic. Rather than using a particular form just because we've heard that it is the most disciplined or best way, it is important to test different methods and refine them over time. (Exhibit 2.1, beginning on p. 40, describes the elements of five basic outreach methods.) For example, door knocking works well to identify neighborhood and geographically defined issues but is not as useful for identifying people who are less concentrated, such as nurses or women who have been denied welfare benefits. To reach these people, it makes more sense to be outside the welfare office or at the hospital during shift changes. When trying out a new method, allow enough time before throwing it out to assess its usefulness in getting people to engage in at least one activity.

Whatever methods we choose, they must be systematic and geared toward personal contact. Contact and relationships help to motivate members to take on new responsibilities, which in turn create collective identity. For example, some organizations have hotlines people call with problems related to police violence or workplace violations. Technology has also given us new options for getting to those people who have identified their interest in a particular problem, and it has certainly given us new options for communicating with our base if it has access to technology.

We can do new outreach year-round or in cycles, but we must do it repeatedly, and we must measure it. Numbers remain important to organization building. An

organization does not need huge numbers to be effective, but it does need a renewable leadership and a base big enough to carry out campaigns that match the group's political ambition.

Illustration: 9to5 Systematizes Outreach Strategies

Amy Stier, 9to5's organizing director, spent most of her life in unions before coming to the National Association of Working Women. Stier notes that different roles and resources force unions and community organizations to take different approaches to worker organizing. Among the differences, community organizations have a larger and more amorphous constituency than unions, whose constituencies are based in workplaces. Unions tend to focus on a narrower set of issues, and the pressure of elections and contract negotiations create stringent timelines for them. Community organizers, with far fewer resources than unions, tend to move slowly, and their fights lack the single common enemy available in the form of a boss in union struggles. Stier adds that, "in unions, we had a much more structured way of targeting, recruiting, and developing relationships, but here you have to be willing to take an approach that's not as regimented, give people more opportunity over a longer period of time to be involved."

The expansion of its constituency from clerical workers to a broader range of women workers required 9to5 to broaden not only its issues but also its organizing methods. In Milwaukee, for example, 9to5 conducts its outreach through the Milwaukee Poverty Network Initiative, whose organizers, Linda Garcia-Barnard, Mildred Naredo, and Tracy Jones, have found a variety of ways to reach nontraditional workers and poor women. They go to welfare agencies and make presentations at other organizations that serve women in economic crisis, particularly those that serve people of color and immigrants. Each organizer has developed additional turf of her own. Naredo is expert at hitting the bus stops; Jones, a former temp who worked with 9to5 to win a sex-discrimination case against a temp agency, applies for temp jobs specifically to survey and recruit temp workers.

9to5's organizing process in Milwaukee is designed to provide multiple options for involvement. The organization holds monthly women's gatherings, conducts events in partnership with a citywide jobs coalition, and helps turn out people for Keep Families First, a legislative organization. Stier notes that 9to5 tries to combine issue work with outreach as much as possible, as when it demanded that the mayor create five hundred new jobs. Through new outreach 9to5 built a list of people ready to apply for those jobs and got many to participate in the action on the mayor. Stier notes the importance of keeping good data so that people can be given several opportunities to participate. "We make sure we have a permanent contact for them [members of its constituency], usually their mother's number. We follow up within a week. We do reminders, take care of logistics. We probably keep people on our lists longer than we should, but we have experienced people showing up after three or four

Exhibit 2.1. Basic Approaches to Outreach.

	Street Outreach	Presentation	Door Knocking	Personal Visit	House Meeting
What	Meeting people where they hang out, gather, or work when the constituency is defined by issue (e.g., youth at schools, riders on the buses, welfare recipients at the welfare office)	Reaching out to people where they meet when the constituency is defined by issue (e.g., office meetings, schools, churches); needs immediate follow-up after the presentation	Doing outreach door to door in a defined community; lends itself to immediate neighborhood issues (e.g., tenant organizing, neighborhood organizing)	A one-on-one meeting with people in their home from an identified list of targeted people	A meeting at a person's home with close friends and close relatives
Role	Three-minute one-on-one; ask for a commitment	Five- to twenty-minute presentation or speech about your organization and what you do; primarily educational, usually with a broad pitch	"The rap" (ten to fifteen minutes)	A personal-visit "rap": find out more about the people, their issues, their history in the neighborhood, etc. (twenty to thirty minutes)	Help the person coordinate and host the meeting (i.e., make a list of people to invite, plan the agenda and role, role play the "ask") (forty-five minutes to one hour)

Turf	Where your targeted constituency is already gathered	Where your targeted constituency is already gathered	Geographically defined neighborhood or community	In the person's home	In the person's home; works only across relationships—i.e., does not account for neighborhood turf, economic status, etc.
Significance	Cold contact, minimal relationship established; follow up with a phone call or personal visit	Luke-warm contact (have already established some connection), educational with broad pitch; follow up with phone call, get them to a meeting or personal visit	The most challenging cold contact; good for doing research and identifying potential leaders; follow up with getting a commitment or setting up a personal visit	The second level of contact, usually follows any of the methods previously mentioned; good for deepening a relationship and knowledge about a person; follow up with a commitment, house meeting, or get them to do outreach with you!	Good way to test leadership and commitment to the organization, good way to fundraise, good way to recruit more people into the organization

Source: Reprinted with permission from the Center for Third World Organizing.

attempt[s].” The organizer’s skill plays a key role in providing multiple opportunities for involvement. Stier says, “Insincerity can be spotted miles away, especially in populations with radar fine-tuned to that. You have to have a patient willingness to talk through the obstacles and be able to articulate why the issues are important enough and how winning will ultimately remove the obstacles. A good organizer has to be able to tell whether she’s spending time with people [she] should be spending time with. And, of course, be tenacious.”

At the national level 9to5 identifies organizing opportunities through the national hotline that operates out of its Atlanta office. Bravo notes that the hotline is one way in which the organization tracks “the realities of women dealing with sexual harassment, workplace health hazards, problems with getting family and maternity leave.” Each caller is encouraged to join the Association. Enthusiastic callers are encouraged to become activists with access to broader sets of materials and organizing advice; they then form local clusters with other workers, respond to policy proposals, and speak to the media. If callers are driven by workplace issues that lend themselves to unionization, 9to5 refers them to the AFL-CIO in their area.

Illustration: DARE Finds That Organizing the People Most Affected Drives Up the Stakes

When DARE started working on its Jobs with Dignity living wage campaign, the organization set out to ensure that the people who would be directly affected by passage of the city ordinance developed solutions because it knew that workers would have the most at stake and would fight hardest to win. Unsurprisingly, the campaign attracted lots of women and men of color, who had the hardest time finding permanent, good jobs in Providence and who had been excluded or underserved by some local unions. To flex the campaign’s political muscles, DARE took on fights to improve the lives and working conditions of members; at the same time, starting with teaching assistants, it developed leadership skills in its members and provided them with experience that would strengthen the campaign as a whole.

Janet Santos Bonilla, a long-time DARE member and city worker, recruited her friend Sara Gonzalez, who had been unjustly fired from her job as a temporary teaching assistant for the Providence public schools. Three days, one direct action, and a meeting with the superintendent later, Sara had her job back. But the campaign realized that being reinstated into her minimum-wage, no-benefits, “temporary” job, in which she had worked for nearly three years, was simply not enough. Bonilla hosted a house meeting with others in the same situation, and the teaching assistants formed a subcommittee of Jobs with Dignity. Their “Teacher’s Assistant Bill of Rights,” outlined clear demands to improve working conditions, such as procedures for performance evaluations and inclusion in trainings and, most important, permanent hiring.

That spring, DARE recruited Gonzalez into the organizer-in-training internship, during which she recruited more teaching assistants to testify and conduct actions at

school board meetings. This activity got the attention of the press and of the teachers' union. Once the union started working with DARE, the school department agreed to hire teaching assistants permanently for all vacant positions in the fall. A year after they began their struggle, eighty teaching assistants were making double the wages they had before, with full health coverage, vacation and sick pay, pensions, and union membership.

Inspired by the victory of the teaching assistants, bus monitors began organizing their own subcommittee, winning a similar commitment in writing: after working sixty consecutive days, they would receive "long-term" status (with higher wages and benefits) and would be made permanent after another sixty consecutive days. Being able to win union support, higher wages, and permanent employee status fuels the commitment of these constituencies to hold out for the best possible living wage policy.

Completing Exercise 2.3 allows you to plan your organization's outreach strategies. The example shows how the form might be filled out for an outreach program designed to recruit tenants in low-income neighborhoods.

Limiting Service Provision

If service provision is a part of your organization, think carefully about its relationship to your organizing efforts and be vigilant that it does not overshadow them. Many organizations have used services to build a group and to provide desperately needed resources. There are increasing examples, too, of direct action membership organizations integrating other approaches into their work. ACORN, for example, runs mortgage services that help people get house loans and avoid redlining. Centers for immigrant workers provide job training and placement services.

Some organizers, including myself, fantasize that running services will bring the people most affected right to our doorstep, identified and available to be organized. There are three problems with this fantasy. First, people go to service providers for different reasons than they go to a political organization. This is not to say that none of the people in a soup line or waiting for legal services are interested in organizing, but they might not be acting on that interest at that moment. Second, service provision is easier to conduct than organizing; organizing is more demanding because you have to get people to do something. As a result, if different pieces of work are competing for attention, the services usually win. In addition, when one constituency resists the entry of another into the organization, the often overwhelming demands of providing services can be a convenient excuse to stop organizing. Even unions, which we perceive to have enough money to do both, gave up their organizing for decades in order to service their existing members. Third, service provision is far easier to fund than organizing, so some activists

Exercise 2.3. Outreach-Planning Worksheet.

Constituency (describe conditions in detail):

Example: Tenants in low-income neighborhoods, majority of color, lots of monolingual immigrants

Activity	Turf	Role of Organizer	Ask for	Follow-up	Potential Pitfalls	Dealing with Pitfalls	Timeline
Door knocking	Neighborhood	Knock, talk on established rap, and track information	Feelings about just-cause eviction Contact information Yes to community meeting \$5 contribution	Twenty-minute visit	Can't get in Bad info Tip off landlord Language needs	Ask to speak to people outside the building or get someone in the building to door-knock with you Verify information afterward Assume landlord will know, watch for retaliation Carry translated materials and get agreement to send back someone who speaks that language	June 6– August 1

try to use the same people for both service provision and organizing only to find that the tasks require different skills.

Although it is difficult to integrate organizing into a service organization, it can be and has been done. Occasionally, as in the case of Seattle's El Centro de la Raza, service providers and organizers work side by side; in this case, their coordination grew organically out of the community's organizing efforts. Some service organizations incubate political organizations effectively. For example, Mothers on the Move, an education-reform organization in the South Bronx, developed out of an adult literacy class that focused its learning on the educational system affecting participants' children. Eventually, Mothers on the Move left the literacy group and became independent. The Central American Refugee Center, which provides immigration and other services to Central American immigrants and refugees, builds into its service budgets a portion of the salary of an organizer working on community education and organizing.

The key to combining service and organizing is a thoughtful plan that takes into account the differences between the two strategies. Often, the leaders of a service organization have not considered all the implications of creating a whole new constituency-owned structure within the organization. When the people you have thought of as "clients" suddenly make decisions, that can be destabilizing. Sometimes the service organization's funding or reputation is threatened by the actions of the organizing group. When service and organizing are combined in one group, each needs to keep its autonomy and identity.

Illustration: The Workplace Project Rethinks How to Use Legal Services

A lawyer who had worked on both individual cases and organizing campaigns resisting employer sanctions, Workplace Project founder Jennifer Gordon believed that "legal advice would draw in people who might otherwise not come to the organization, at a time when they're strongly experiencing the problems that I wanted to take on as an organizer." Gordon had in mind a new way of providing services that would build a relationship of trust and respect between the advocate and the person; she saw "the legal case as a road that I would travel with the worker. When we reached a road block, that would be an opportunity for us to talk about why legal services won't solve the problem in a bigger way." Gordon began talking to immigrants every morning about their workplace problems (especially the issue of back wages), drawing them into the legal clinic, and from there seeking out those who expressed an interest in organizing to participate in a workers' organizing course.

Initially, in exchange for the services they received, people were asked to sign a contract agreeing to attend the workers' course and to commit time to ongoing organizing. Later, this system was adjusted. The clinic's individual in-take system was replaced by ongoing Friday workshops, in which people shared their problems and

solutions. As a result, all people with individual problems could immediately join an industry team through the Friday afternoon workshops. That got them straight into organizing mode, without a stop at the advocate's office. The coordinator of the legal clinic now provides research support to the industry teams. Monthly membership meetings reinforce this process: the first hour people meet in their industry teams; the second hour focuses on a multi-industry campaign.

Workplace Project leaders pledged to evaluate the new system according to the amount of back wages won, the number of industrial teams, and the number of people who remained involved through the whole process. Marin-Molina says that the Project has tripled the number of people who are active in the organization since the system was changed. She attributes this growth to the fact that, from the first interaction, activities are carried out by a group rather than individually. She says, "Before, we talked about organizing, but we were giving individual consultation. With [the] previous workers' course, people might have missed a cycle and not be[en] able to sign up for a class for three months; they could have gotten bored or gotten their problem solved. Now, people are immediately channeled into organizing." From August 2000 to July 2001, the Project had 270 people come to the group workshops, and 60 of them participated on an industry team; 40 of those graduated and became members of the Workplace Project; and about 30 of those have stayed active on the teams. In the previous year, out of sixty who graduated from the workers' course, only ten remained active for six months or more.

Illustration: CSWA Provides No Services

Staff Member Wah Lee says, "When someone comes into CSWA, we tell them very clearly who we are. We are not a service or advocacy organization. We ask them to stand up for themselves and encourage them to bring other workers to get involved." Since many people come in to inquire about a specific issue, membership is not usually an immediate option. Instead, people are invited to participate in committee activities. In 1991, garment worker Fun Mae Eng came to CSWA when her employer withheld her wages. She soon discovered that the prospect of recovering her back wages through the legal system was dim. With support of the garment committee at CSWA, Mrs. Eng decided to organize her co-workers to picket against their employer, who later ran away. Undaunted, Mrs. Eng and her co-workers took their case to the next level and aggressively pursued the manufacturer. Their organizing efforts, combined with legal action, led Mrs. Eng and her co-workers to successfully win their back pay from the manufacturer in 1992. The first such effort to pursue a manufacturer, Mrs. Eng's case inspired other garment workers in New York to stand up for their rights and also sparked a movement across the country to hold manufacturers accountable for sweatshop conditions. A couple of years after being involved in CSWA, Mrs. Eng and other co-workers paid membership dues (\$30 a year per person) and became members. In 1999, Mrs. Eng became chair of the Health and Safety Committee.

Conclusion

Organizing is essentially the process of creating politically active constituencies out of people with problems by focusing on their strengths and the solutions embedded in their experience. It is the basic work of progressive social change. For groups that are new to organizing, it is most important to define a clear constituency and a systematic plan for involving people. Having a clear but flexible structure, in which people can become leaders but not get permanently attached to a position, will help make the effort inclusive. For groups that have already been organizing for a long time, it is important to review the organization's constituency, structure, and culture during all strategic planning processes, so the group can be deliberate about expanding or deepening its work. Experienced groups tend to become complacent about and limited in their outreach; they work mainly among already established leaders and activists rather than continuing to expand their base. Groups that combine organizing with services need to be completely clear about the differences between their various strategies, what they are trying to get out of each, and how they will deal with potential conflicts between the two. The illustrations in this chapter show that organizational forms must be crafted creatively, with transparent structures and cultures that are actively shaped by members. Today's organizations, built through systematic outreach, will form the backbone of the next mass movements, which are already emerging to deal with issues like abuses by global capitalism, the prison industry, war, attacks on civil liberties, and environmental degradation.