

# Community Organizing

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## OPENING EXERCISE

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You are a middle-aged homeowner. You have owned a home (in three different cities) over the course of your adult lifetime—a 26-year period. In all that time you never filed a homeowners claim, but in the last 4 years you have filed three claims. The first was from your neighbor's tree blowing over in a big storm and destroying your detached garage. The second was from a major flood that affected much of the city you live in, and specifically ruined the heating and air-conditioning, and part of the foundation, in your basement. The third was for a massive hailstorm that punched holes through your roof, broke car a windshield, and created major damage for you and your neighbors. In each case, a claims adjuster inspected the damage and approved claims. Each claim was for a weather-related event that also impacted many others in your community. You are then notified that your insurance company has dropped your coverage for excessive claims. You contact an insurance broker, who informs you that you will not be able to obtain coverage from any other primary insurance carrier because of your excessive claims. The best you can do is to obtain coverage that triples your insurance rate, with a deductible five times greater than your previous deductible. Your broker, when asked, shares that this is happening to many others in your community. You reflect that insurance is supposed to be a collective contribution to a pool of funds that distributes risk across a whole community. You come to realize that the pooled risk notion of insurance is simply an illusion; although it serves as a psychological security blanket for individuals, at a systems level, insurance is a source of profit—not a mechanism for distributing risk. Realizing many others in your community are in the same position, what steps would you take to organize your community?

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## OVERVIEW

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Community organizing is one of the central practice approaches utilized by community psychologists. Organizing is an intervention frequently employed by community psychologists when tackling the diverse social problems that our field addresses: alcohol and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, violent crime, affordable housing, and many others. Though there are many different approaches and varieties of community organizing, a common thread in these approaches is the engagement of individuals and communities affected by social problems in the definition, analysis, and solution to those problems (Stoecker, 2009). This emphasis on engagement of the individuals and communities affected by problems, as opposed to experts or political leaders, is resonant with community psychology's emphasis on citizen participation, empowerment, sense of community, and social justice (Maton, 2000). The alignment of these central tenets of community psychology makes community organizing a natural tool or, in Newbrough's words, a "found object," that "allows for psychology and community to be pursued at the same time" (Newbrough, 1992, p. 20). This chapter begins by describing what community organizing is. Competencies required in community organizing are then described, followed by an example

of how community organizing was applied in community context. Next, future challenges to the field and practice of community organizing are identified. Finally, key terms, and sources of more information and training opportunities are provided.

## CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

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**Community organizing** is a process through which people impacted by common concerns work together to build the social power necessary to achieve a series of partial solutions to those concerns. These common concerns, or shared self-interests, are perceived in community organizing as requiring change in community contexts or structural conditions, rather than in the modification of individual behaviors exclusively (Maton, 2000). Community psychologists assist members of a community to take sustained collective action to gain the power and resources required for improving conditions affecting their community.

### Key Features of the Conceptual Definition

This conceptual definition has several key components that anchor it to community psychology practice. One critical component of community organizing is the collaboration among people affected by a particular social problem. This collaboration is more than a tentative or episodic coming together; rather it is focused on building a sustainable and cohesive collective. Developing cohesiveness within a collective aligns closely with the concept of “sense of community.”

A second critical component to organizing is that people affected by a problem are the ones to address that problem. This is perhaps best contrasted with advocacy where individuals and groups act on behalf of others. Advocacy is certainly an important, valued, and necessary approach to solving some problems, particularly with vulnerable populations who may not be capable of acting for themselves (e.g., vulnerable children, the elderly, those with intellectual disabilities). In contrast to advocacy, organizing emphasizes the central role of those directly affected by social problems. Organizing holds that those directly affected by particular problems are most suited to understand and find appropriate solutions for those problems. In community organizing there is a so-called **iron rule** that holds that we should never do for others what they can do for themselves (Cortes, 1993). So, organizing is very clear that the issues addressed must be those that directly affect members of the organizing group; organizing does not take on issues, however worthy, that primarily impact others. This view in organizing is consistent with the community psychology value of emphasizing community strengths and in developing empowerment.

A third critical component to organizing is the development of power. Social power, which represents the ability to influence the behavior and perceptions of others (in contrast to electoral power, economic power, or military power), is understood in community organizing as the most fundamental and necessary instrument for making social change (Warren, 1998). From the perspective of organizing, social change does not occur through

empirical or rational processes, and social change does not occur through moral or value-based reasoning (Speer, 2008). It is important to understand that organizing embraces and values both empiricism and moral judgments, but those are not sufficient to produce social change. For community organizing, the most important factor in producing change is social power and the goal of organizing is to build power among those most oppressed, forgotten, and exploited in society. This component of organizing resonates strongly with community psychology's emphasis on empowerment and social justice. Although this perspective may be understood to challenge community psychology's emphasis on research, the prominence placed on values in community psychology is consistent with this understanding.

A final key component to organizing is an emphasis on systems change. Community organizing understands that many social problems require change on the part of individuals affected by those problems. However, like community psychology, community organizing understands that many social problems are actually symptoms of maladaptive settings and institutional arrangements. Exploring institutional arrangements and social systems represents an ecological view (see Chapter 3 in this volume) consistent with community psychology. The perspective held by organizing is perhaps best expressed by the sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959), who asserted:

Whether or not they are aware of them, men in a mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues. They do not understand the interplay of these personal troubles of their milieu with problems of social structure.

Mills was advocating for the development of a **sociological imagination**—a capacity to understand the connection between personal struggles and the social conditions and systems that contribute to those individual struggles. This component to organizing aligns with the ecological analysis practiced by community psychologists (Christens, Hanlin, & Speer, 2007; Maton, 2000), as well as an understanding of primary prevention and first- and second-order change.

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## COMPETENCY AND COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

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Community organizing competencies can be conceptualized at several levels of analysis. Organizing starts with people (Checkoway, 1997) and community psychologists working in organizing settings must have competencies in listening, building relationships, challenging others, and understanding the perspectives of others. At an organizational level of analysis, organizers need to develop competencies that are appropriate for voluntary, participatory settings. Competencies for these settings include building shared leadership, developing accountability, and cultivating setting-level qualities that encourage participation. At the community level, organizers must possess an ability to build relationships with other organizations, challenge authority, understand power, and understand ecological or systemic analyses of community issues.

This description of competencies at various levels of analysis touches on some of the more critical competencies required for building a successful community organization. Although there are many varieties and approaches to community organizing, and many historical actors who have influenced community organizing (e.g., Dorothy Day, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Fannie Lou Hamer), perhaps none has been as influential as Saul Alinsky. Alinsky was important for many things, but perhaps most critical was his understanding that community organizing was a dynamic, context-dependent process. Alinsky (1971) emphasized that the practice of organizing was based on a set of principles rather than conducted in a sequential or fixed linear process. Alinsky was very sensitive to context—an approach that dovetails with the ecological approach in community psychology.

## Individual-Level Competencies

At the individual level, participation in community organizing provides a range of experiences that challenge common perceptions of social power and provides a collective context through which emotional reaction(s) to that power can be processed or reflected upon. Freire (1970) described this action-reflection process as “dynamic praxis.” At the psychological level, empowerment is a phenomenon that entails the development of leadership competencies as well as a belief in the capacity to affect change in the political and community realm.

### Skills for Community Organizing

For community psychologists working as organizers, there are several skills that are important for developing emotional and cognitive empowering processes within individuals.

**Listening.** First, organizers must be capable of listening—this listening requires sensitivity to the challenges, beliefs, and values held by individuals. Listening, however, also requires candid dialogue. Candid dialogue is a challenge inherently, but to have such dialogue across race and gender and class makes this a particularly important skill. This kind of listening is consistent with the community psychology emphasis on cross-cultural competencies. However, listening in community organizing is more daunting than just respectful engagement and thoughtful attention to others. Organizers must also be skilled in challenging others and, at times, agitating others as part of the listening process.

**Building relationships.** How can an organizer be culturally sensitive and inclusive while at the same time challenging? This raises another organizing competence: building relationships. Organizers have to be capable of building relationships that entail honesty, trust, sharing, empathy, challenge, and acceptance. Building relationships is what organizers do. Listening is a key piece of building relationships, but being a good listener will not organize a community.

**Challenging.** The ability to challenge someone—someone you are listening to, and over the longer term someone you are building a relationship with—is a critical competency in organizing. An organizer typically challenges an analysis, assumption, perception, or

belief. The purpose of challenging is to advance an understanding of the causes of the issues confronted by an individual, and to deepen the reflection individuals have on their own values and their place in the community in relation to these issues. The capacity for an organizer to challenge or agitate comes in proportion to the strength of relationship an organizer has with an individual. The organizer is always seeking to deepen this relationship, and that means the organizer typically “pushes” or advances this relationship through a willingness to test this relationship with a challenge. A challenge or agitation is not a harsh interaction, but it is often direct—frequently a direct question posed in a thoughtful way. Sometimes people shy away from a direct question—a question that might ask how they feel about an event that happened or a circumstance in the community. At other times, a challenge might ask what people did in a particular circumstance, or why they didn’t do something in a particular circumstance.

*Clarifying self-interest.* The issue of challenges and agitations blends into the organizing concept of self-interest. Organizers in the relationship-building process are listening for the self-interest of the individuals they are meeting with. Self-interest is not selfishness or myopic advantage over others; in organizing, self-interest is understood as those things that are important to an individual. Organizers discern self-interest by listening to the stories, experiences, and priorities that individuals share in conversation. Within this sharing, people communicate what they value—caring for an elderly parent or a child’s struggles in school or a neighbor’s victimization from crime. Listening for self-interest allows an organizer to understand what people in the community are capable of doing together. By listening to stories, self-interest can be discerned. As relationships are developed, self-interests can be connected to values. Organizers care about values because people act on values.

Finally, these skills and competencies must be blended together as organizers interact with community members. Through careful listening, organizers discern the self-interest of individuals and begin to build the relationships necessary for developing sustainable organizations. Community organizers must also have the capacity to challenge and agitate so that community members address serious yet often suppressed issues. Challenge is possible in proportion to the depth of relationship developed, which connects back to the ability to listen for the self-interest of others. Self-interests reflect deeply held values; these may be about family or children, economic security, neighborhood stability, or other aspects of life that provide meaning.

## Organizational-Level Competencies

At the organizational level, empowerment theory is relevant to community organizing because it involves the development of collective or organizational power that can change policies or practices of communities (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Empowerment is a process that can be cultivated by specific settings, or what is termed “empowering organizations” (Peterson & Speer, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, a feature of an empowerment setting would be “opportunity role structure” (Maton & Salem, 1995, p. 643), which refers to the roles available within organizational settings that encourage individual participation (Speer & Hughey, 1995). These structures are qualities or characteristics of organizations

that shape the amount, accessibility, and arrangement of formal positions or roles within an organization and that provide chances or opportunities for members to cooperate and build relationships, and strengthen their leadership skills and competencies.

When thinking about the organizational-level competencies required in community organizing, organizational empowerment theory articulates intra-, inter-, and extra-organizational components of organizational empowerment (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). **Intraorganizational empowerment** refers to characteristics about the structure and function of organizations (e.g., opportunity role structure). Some characteristics of organizations lead to greater participation and development of individuals within organizations. Organizations possessing characteristics that support and develop member skills and competencies are called “empowering organizations” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 51). Here, organizers must possess the necessary skills and competencies to develop settings within organizations that have the characteristics of empowering settings. As an example, some organizing efforts avoid electing formal officers of the organization, and instead focus on formal roles required within the organizing process. These roles, then, are intentionally rotated among individual members each meeting as a method of building collective capacity, developing skills across a broad cross-section of the membership, and inviting new members into the organization (Speer & Hughey, 1995).

**Interorganizational empowerment** refers to linkages organizations have with other organizations in a community. Organizers possess competencies to understand power relations between actors and institutions in communities. **Power mapping** is a specific technique for diagramming the relationships between entities that play important roles in relation to issues of community concern. Understanding power relations at the organizational level allows organizers to strategically target their action and their research. For example, an organizing group in Minnesota advanced a major transportation initiative, and ensured that transportation was available to low-income communities of color, by studying powerful actors shaping transportation policy. Organizers built close relationships with health professionals, national research groups, as well as other community groups, and successfully pressured for the changes they sought (Speer, Tesdahl, & Ayers, 2014). Finally, **extraorganizational empowerment** refers to methods and actions organizations employ to shape or alter the broader environments in which they are embedded. For organizers, this entails alteration of the power relations within the community systems that perpetuate problems and disparities among groups. For example, an organizing group in Kansas City was, over several years, able to alter the city’s system for developing and implementing housing policy (Speer & Christens, 2012).

## Community-Level Competencies

One of the first community psychologists to elaborate on an understanding at the community level of analysis was Ira Iscoe (1974) and his articulation of the competent community. Iscoe was concerned with the ways in which community psychologists could work in productive and helpful ways with disenfranchised communities. He was quite attentive to issues of social class and the need for community psychologists to respect the particular values and priorities held by different communities. He was also well aware of the way that

economic and material distress led to psychological harm and feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness among individuals within a community. Additionally, Iscoe understood that successful efforts to empower lower income and impoverished communities would lead to tension and conflict with the power structure. So, the key competencies for Iscoe were sensitivity to the priorities and values of impoverished communities, an understanding of developmental stages that communities move through as they build power, and an understanding of the resistance to empowering a community by the power structure. In the end, the criteria for a competent community, according to Iscoe, is a shift to a greater balance of power between what Alinsky would term “the haves” and the “have nots.”

Another community psychologist who has emphasized community-level interventions is Kenneth Heller (1989, 1992). The central competencies for working at the community level for Heller include the building of collective power, preparation for resistance from the power structure, and forming coalitions. Community psychologists are required to build collective power if they want to affect the quality of life for individuals in that community. Importantly, to build stable and sustainable collective power requires cultivating a sense of community. For community organizing there is a reciprocal relationship between building

**Photo 8.1** Community Organizing Meeting or “Action.”



Source: iStockphoto.com/EdStock

social power and developing a sense of community. Like Iscoe, Heller understands that the exercise of collective power will inevitably entail conflict. A critical competency for community psychologists practicing community organizing is to understand this inevitability, and to develop skills at addressing—not avoiding—conflict.

Finally, skills at building coalitions are critical at the community level of analysis. Coalition development is an extremely challenging process. Kadushin, Lindholm, Ryan, Brodsky, and Saxe (2005) provide a very important analysis of the socio-structural barriers to coalition development that community psychologists must be aware of in developing strong coalitions. One critical competency for building coalitions is the ability to understand organizational self-interest. Just as individuals have self-interest, so too do organizations. For example, many organizations are interested in expanding the services they provide, increasing budgets, and getting recognition for the work they do. Those building coalitions, however, rarely address these interests and instead focus on a particular goal, assuming organizations will join together because they want the same outcomes (e.g., more affordable housing or crime reduction). Another critical competency is coalition management. Coalitions are different from organizations, and coalition development requires an awareness and sensitivity to the variation in organizational forms and processes among organization members of the coalition. Relatedly, coalition management needs to reflect the particular organizational members composing that coalition. Competent coalition management is more than simply a standardized “Robert’s Rules of Order” approach to structure. Organizational members will vary in numerous ways—along race, class, geographic scale, organizational scale (budget, staff size)—and competent coalition management must tailor a coalition’s functioning to those members rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

## **Training, Education, and Experiential Opportunities to Facilitate Organizing Competencies**

Organizing competencies can best be obtained through training and experience in community organizing. Although university-based classes may offer insights into the history, theories, and models of community organizing—and may develop some of the skills of a competent community organizer—we believe that there is no substitute for engagement in actual community organizing processes to hone the competencies that are required for successful community organizing.

Many networks exist that educate and train community members in community organizing (see Summary section for potential resources). In some cases, students and community psychologists may be able to attend these trainings. Most importantly, we’d encourage students and other community psychologists to seek out experiential learning through involvement in community organizing, and to treat opportunities for engagement with organizing as learning opportunities, as well as venues for action-oriented research and practice. Participating in community organizing efforts will provide direct experience in many of the competencies described (discerning individual and organizational self-interests, building relationships, challenging others, and strengthening organizations).

As an example, one common organizing setting that could develop many competencies would be research efforts. It is common for organizing groups to invite an official or expert

to meet about questions the organizing group has developed. Prior to this meeting, community members develop questions for public officials or experts about a matter of concern. Different community members prepare to ask different questions, and getting an answer to the question posed (rather than obfuscation) develops the skill of challenging. Careful listening to responses provides an opportunity to discern the self-interest of the organization represented in the research meeting. Finally, the way the organizing group presents itself to the official or expert provides an opportunity for the organizing group to build its organization and the relationship between the organization and the invited official or expert. Engagement in this way provides an opportunity for experiential learning—not only from the direct experience through participation, but from the engagement with the organizing group as it processes and interprets the experience itself.

## APPLICATION

There are many historical antecedents to community organizing practice in the discipline of community psychology. Roger Barker was a scholar who heavily influenced the development of community psychology. Barker's ecological psychology (1968) elevated the influence and role of community contexts and settings in the shaping of individual behavior. This perspective, like that embraced by community psychology, sought to balance an overemphasis on individualism with a focus on how environments shape and constrain individual behaviors. Similarly, the preventive orientation of community psychology aligns with the focus in community organizing on systems analysis that seeks to address causes of social problems, rather than treatments. One common critique of organizing efforts by those in positions of power is that organizing groups should help directly in the problems surfaced (work at soup kitchens to help the hungry; picket drug houses instead of altering police and court practices; build housing with Habitat for Humanity rather than altering affordable housing policies). The perspective of community organizing aligns strongly with community psychology's primary prevention orientation, addressing conditions that contribute to maladjustment before they become problems rather than treating people after problems have emerged, and the understanding that second-order change, altering systems and structures that contribute to problems rather than adapting individuals to unhealthy conditions, is required to have a chance at impacting the social issues of concern (Christens & Freedman, 2014).

Just as Barker's view contributed to the systems analysis practiced in community psychology, community mental health movements and the war on poverty emphasized the inherent skills and capacities of all people as well as the importance of citizen participation. The practice competencies associated with these various strands of community psychology history blend in the practice of community organizing.

## Real-World Applications of Competencies

As an example of how organizing puts into practice the competencies of organizing, the following is a story about an organizing effort during the crack cocaine epidemic. At this

time, many in working-class and low-income communities were confronting drug houses, addicted drug users, prostitution, crime, drugs in schools, and many other intolerable circumstances. On the one hand, many communities called the police with minimal or no response. On the other hand, these same communities often experienced an elevated police presence with frequent stops and searches. As an example, a woman in one community who had repeatedly called for police action on her street around blatant drug dealing and drug use, got no response to her calls but found herself frequently detained by police roadblocks where she was stopped, questioned, detained, and eventually let go. During one of these stops she was given a citation for a taillight that was not functioning.

The community organizing group described here sought to address the crack epidemic because this was overwhelmingly the issue of greatest concern to members. To launch work on this issue, the group held about 80 research meetings with police, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, prisons, schools, hospitals, treatment centers, and the like. One of the things they discovered in this research was that judges were not issuing warrants for drug arrests without at least two undercover drug purchases. Judges had made this more stringent requirement for two purchases because they had discovered in the past that the police sometimes misrepresented facts to justify the issuance of judicial warrants. In the case of the drug houses on the street of the woman described earlier, the police acknowledged that they knew these were drug houses but were unable to obtain warrants. Instead, police set up roadblocks in an attempt to find drugs, but, even according to police, these strategies were ineffective. This led to a perverse situation in which active citizens were bearing the brunt of an increasingly intrusive police presence that was ineffective in addressing the crime problem and resulting in harassment of innocent citizens while drug dealing continued unabated.

This was a period of time when the ideology of the “drug war” was in ascendance. Throughout the research process, members of the organizing effort began to piece together an analysis of the distinct responses of different institutions and how these institutions came to behave as they were confronted with the crack cocaine epidemic. When viewed individually, some institutional actions made sense. When viewed systemically, the behavior was counterproductive and had no coordination or larger vision or understanding about this epidemic. In response, the organizing effort developed a push toward a comprehensive and coordinated effort across local institutions—an effort that included enforcement, education, prevention, and treatment. Furthermore, the organization pushed back against the “war on drugs” narrative and developed an analysis they termed “a public health epidemic.”

The goal of the organizing effort was to develop a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to the crack epidemic across local institutions. Efforts to develop this coordination were met with support by some actors in the establishment, but derision by most officials. For example, at one meeting of city council members, a council member shouted at the group after a presentation about the group’s findings. This city councilwoman yelled that the group should be picketing drug houses in their own neighborhood rather than trying to tell the council what to do.

After several requests that the mayor work to develop more coordination across many city departments were rebuffed, the group decided to mobilize their organization to have a public meeting to present their analysis and push the mayor to take some initiative in planning and coordinating a comprehensive citywide strategy in response to the crack

epidemic. As preparations for this event were taking place, the organizing group continued meeting with officials. The media began to report on stories based on the analysis developed by the organizing group. Reporters following this analysis began to independently verify the perspective of the organizing group.

As an example of a leadership development challenge, one particular leader was profiled in a newspaper article about the experiences she and her family confronted in a working-class neighborhood with regard to the crack epidemic. It was a powerful story that integrated the ways in which the contradictory policies and practices of local institutions contributed to the degraded quality of life experienced by this leader and her family. It turns out that this particular leader was employed as a secretary at a large, prestigious law firm. This woman was relatively unrecognized within this large firm but when this story made the newspapers, the law firm made her story a centerpiece of the firm's newsletter. As a result, this leader became identified within her firm and received several forms of recognition at work, including a special acknowledgment at an important luncheon of the partners. Attorneys and others spoke to her more frequently on elevators, in hallways, and generally her workplace quality of life was elevated.

This leader then, however, became motivated in her organizing efforts to get more attention through the media. Unbeknownst to other members of the organizing effort or the community organizing staff, she began pushing others in her organizing group to allow her to speak to the media and make other media contacts. As noted in the section on organizational competencies, to develop an empowering organizing context, leadership roles must be rotated among members and new participants should be encouraged to build their skills by taking on diverse leadership roles. Having a single individual do a single high-profile job undermines this organizational development competency.

As the organizing effort was building toward a large public meeting with the mayor, it became apparent that this individual leader was demanding to handle media relations in the organizing process. This leader was questioned about her actions, but she was adamant on doing the media work. Surprisingly, this leader refused to give up her insistence on covering media relations. After several conversations with this woman and those closest to her, the organizer began to hear stories about the workplace profile and the work recognition this woman received from the organizing effort. The organizer and several other leaders challenged her directly about this insistence on media interactions, raising the deeper goal of the organization to build power and the importance of rotating roles in developing new leadership in the process of building such power. This leader became angry and stopped participating with the group.

This example—detailing both the issue work of a community organization and the organizational development challenge with respect to an individual leader—provides an illustration of how some competencies are put into practice. The organizational development challenge posed by this individual leader is a rare event, but illustrative of an organizational development lesson. As noted in the section on competencies, knowing the self-interests of people is critical in engagement and leadership development. However, self-interest can change. For the leader working at the law firm, we might understand her self-interest shifting from ameliorating the blight of drug crime in her neighborhood to the esteem derived in her workplace. Importantly, value for the organizing process, development of the organization, and efficacy in altering city policies was elevated over the transformed interests

of an individual leader. The process of challenging this leader about the goals of building power and developing new leaders was a difficult and painful process for the organizer and other leaders. People cared for this particular individual and wanted a workable resolution to her drive for media attention. On the other hand, when leaders become fixed in organizational roles, the development of emerging leaders stagnates, the openness of the organization to the broader community becomes constrained, and established leaders evolve into “gatekeepers” who control and limit both perspectives and participation. The act of challenging individuals about their behaviors—of keeping everyone in an organization honest and accountable to collective goals—is an essential organizational competency.

At the community level, the work on the crack epidemic demonstrates the value of prevention and a systemic approach to understanding social problems. Often, particular community issues are understood as caused by a single actor or entity. Though this may be the case, cultivating a broader systemic analysis is a key community-level competency. This example also demonstrates the natural fit between community organizing and community psychology. The values of primary prevention, citizen participation, empowerment, systems change, and promotion of well-being within community psychology are demonstrated in this case.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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The field of community organizing, as with all organizations and institutions in society, is confronting major challenges. Economic restructuring, globalization, and the entrenchment of neoliberal policies represent the biggest sources of challenge to organizing. In response to this challenge, organizing must confront the capacity to operate at larger scales (Christens & Collura, 2012; Orr, 2007). Efforts within the field of community organizing have already undertaken many efforts to mobilize and build power at regional levels (Kleidman, 2004; Osterman, 2002; Pastor, 2001; Warren, 2001; Wood, 2007). Additionally, statewide and national-level organizing efforts are emerging (Gecan, 2002; Swarts, 2007; Wood, 2007).

Efforts to build power at larger scales will require new kinds of competencies to be effective and sustainable. One type of competency will be the development of strategic partnerships with key actors. Although community organizing as a field has extensive experience and knowledge in developing partnerships at local levels, the types of partnerships required to work at larger scales will require new types of organizational partners. For example, partners might be supportive in relation to the administrative needs, technical capacities, research skills, issue expertise, as well as grassroots partnerships with others in different locales.

In looking to the future, there is space for community psychologists to support the development of competencies needed for the discipline of organizing ~~as it advances in the future~~. The use of technology and social media will become important, particularly the manifestation of these tools in the context of low-income populations who may have access issues and particular social media preferences. With regard to capacities that support organizing’s ability to increase the scale of its efforts, research and support in the area of collaboration across extended networks will be valuable. It is important to note that many community organizing networks (PICO, Gamaliel, NPA, IAF, OFA, NOI) already possess capacities in this regard. Nevertheless, as efforts at larger scales become more

central to the success of organizing, a deeper understanding and broader scope of practices and competencies will be required. One such understanding will be how extended networks of organizing groups across broad geographic scales can collaborate on issues anchored in diverse ecological contexts. Similarly, operations at multiple political scales must integrate the diverse ecological forces driving the interests of actors at macro, meso, and micro scales. Additionally, competency in operating at such scales necessitates competency in other domains as well, such as cultural understanding, management, policy analysis, and group process.

## SUMMARY

### Key Points

- Community organizing is a dynamic process, driven by a set of principles around which people, organizations, and communities behave and function.
- Organizing addresses individual and collective processes simultaneously.
- Organizing understands social power as the critical component to achieving the necessary change in addressing social problems.
- Organizing requires the development of strong organizations, and this requires intentional development of organizational processes that encourage participation and development of skills among individual participants.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What kinds of community psychology competencies are associated with the organizing process of challenge and agitation?
- How might the self-interest of an individual or an organization change over time?
- Can you describe an example of changing self-interest that you have experienced?

## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Community organizing:** Process where individuals and communities affected by problems collaborate to analyze this problem and exercise social power to address this problem.

**The iron rule:** A principle in organizing that prioritizes power and responsibility to those directly impacted by social issues, as long as these individuals are capable of addressing those issues.

**Sociological imagination:** Understandings of how social-structural forces are manifested in the lives of individuals.

**Intraorganizational empowerment:** Characteristics that represent the internal functioning and viability of empowering organizations.

**Power mapping:** A practice in community organizing of identifying the relative power and position of various community actors and decision makers.

**Interorganizational empowerment:** Relationships, collaborations, and alliances across organizations.

**Extraorganizational empowerment:** Organizational actions that make changes in the policies or systems that affect communities.

## RESOURCES

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### Recommended Reading

- Alinsky, S. D. (1971). *Rules for radicals: A pragmatic primer for realistic radicals*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Wood, R. L., Fulton, B., & Partridge, K. (2013). Building bridges, building power: Developments in institution-based community organizing. Interfaith Funders. Retrieved from <http://www.soc.duke.edu/~brf6/ibcoreport.pdf>

### Organizing Networks and Training Websites

- Center for Third World Organizing: <http://ctwo.org>
- Direct Action & Research Training Center: <http://www.thedartcenter.org>
- Gamaliel Foundation: <http://www.gamaliel.org>
- IAF: <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org>
- National Organizers Alliance: <http://noacentral.org>
- National People's Action: <http://npa-us.org>
- New Organizing Institute: <http://neworganizing.com>
- PICO Network: <http://www.piconetwork.org>

### Other Recommended Materials

- COMM-ORG: The on-line conference on community organizing: <http://comm-org.wisc.edu>
- Community Toolbox: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en>

### Suggested Activities for Further Competency Development

- Practice the skill of discerning the self-interest of others.
- Examine the organizational processes of the groups in which you belong. How do these processes support or discourage participation and skill development among members?

## Worksheets

### For Self-Exploration or Self-Development

- Think about your own self-interests—how do you know what they are? Think about how you spend your time and the activities you are involved in—are these consistent with what you identify as your self-interest?
- Practice your listening skills with friends by having serious conversations—challenge people in these conversations about why they act or feel the way they do. How do you feel in asking those challenging questions?

### For Assessment of Knowledge, Skill, and Abilities Relating to the Competency

- Reflect on the organizations of which you are a part—in what ways do you contribute to those organizations? Do you bring in more members? Are you a leader in some capacity? Are you able to bring people together? Are you able to get the organization to reflect or reconsider their actions?

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