

A SUMMARY OUTLINE
OF
A METHOD OF ORGANIZING

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Based in part on the teachings of
Cesar Chavez and Fred Ross

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Introduction:

The method of organizing this paper deals with is a slow, painstaking, door-by-door approach which is aimed at building a poor-people's mass organization through which the community can affect change. It rejects the technique of organizing around or through demonstrations, marches, banquets and the like in favor of organizing "one man at a time."

What we are concerned with is getting the power to make change. For poor people, this power rests primarily in their numbers. Thus we are concerned with creating a formal organization of the poor which, with its mass membership, will be the instrument of change within a community. Once this organization can stand alone, the organizer must move on.

This step-by-step method of organizing is applicable to most communities. In a small geographic area, this plan can be followed by one organizer. In a larger area, the plan would be followed by a team, each member using it in a separate section. It begins with the organizer entering a new town and ends with power for the poor. (No one knows how

long this process takes, but experience shows Phase IV, the Organizational Meeting, usually takes place about six weeks after the organizer begins.)

This is but one way to organize people for change. It is being used successfully by the National Farm Workers Association in rural California, by SNCC and CORE in the South, and in northern ghettos by civil rights groups and local peoples' organizations, such as the West Side Organization in Chicago.

Phase I: Enter a New Town:

When an organizer starts work in a new town, he has got to find out (gather information) what the physical layout of the town is, where and how the different economic and racial groups live, where they "hang out", something of their culture and history and how they get along.

One example of the kind of background information needed is shown in the film, "Salt of the Earth." An Anglo organizer visits the home of one of the Mexican workers and asks if the picture on the wall is of the worker's grandfather. "no," replies the worker angrily, "that is Benito Juarez, the father of the Revolution." What is well known and important to those you hope to organize has got to be important and well known to you.

It is also important during this stage to carefully think through what you will say to people when you call on them or meet them in the street. This "pitch" needs to be as direct or as subtle as you think the situation requires. It is your little bit of salesmanship; it is your calling card. Since it is also the first impression people will have of you, its importance cannot be overestimated.

A successful salesman would not say, "Good morning. My name is Joe Smith. I'm building a power for you. Want some?" What he does say is up to his imagination and estimate of the situation, but it must be worked out beforehand.

Phase II: Begin to Know People, Know Issues and Be Known:

In this period, the organizer is in the streets, pool halls, bars and is visiting people door-to-door. He is using the pitch he developed and changing it with experience; as he learns what clicks with people, what turns them on. People begin to know him, and he them; they size each other up; he makes friends and enemies.

As an organizer gets to know people, he gets them working for him. He bums cigarettes, gets people to drive him around, asks them for directions, for contacts, for information. He is always building the movement, using these tricks to meet people, encourage them, get them interested in the idea of a mass organization and get them in action. The sooner they are in motion the sooner they are a part of the movement. He also works with this (hopefully) growing number of people to gather further information

about the town, its economy, its political structure, how it is actually run and by whom. He attends city and county government meetings; visits the library, the newspaper, the hall of records, the assessor's office. Gets to know how the mayor runs the town, and who runs the mayor. Finds out who owns what, and whom.

By talking with the poor, you will begin to know their problems, and how they feel about them. You will begin to learn about the wide range of problems facing the poor, how many of these problems they share, and how each of these common problems can be an issue around which to organize. (These problems and issues form the common ground for house meetings, which begin in the next stage.)

All through this phase, you must also be looking for the opportunity to do something concrete, to solve some problem, so the people will know you are sincere. This little bit of casework must be a success, so choose it carefully. Get someone on welfare who has been denied aid, or improve a recipient's benefits. Solve a wage-claim problem. But you must do something to show your interest in the people with whom you are working and your ability to successfully deal with their problems.

As this stage develops and your role becomes clear to both the poor and the power structure, you will begin to make friends and enemies on both sides, and often in surprising places. Someone at the welfare department might call you one evening with "inside" information or advice, and someone of the poor may turn against you for not solving his problem on the spot.

Phase III: Arouse Interest:

As issues emerge from constant door-to-door visits and other personal contacts, house meetings should be arranged to bring together people who have a common problem. Personal contact and direct involvement are the backbone of an organizing effort. The organizer's most efficient way of contacting and involving the greatest number of people in the shortest possible time is the house meeting. These meetings allow the poor to develop their commitment to change and to the idea of organizing to accomplish that change. Since personal contact and involvement are lost in large meetings, these house meetings should be planned for no more than four or five people.

At these meetings, the problem can be discussed, ideas for its solution developed, and other problems brought up. Also at these meetings, the organizer is judging ability and commitment, identifying those with potential leadership ability, and bolstering the confidence of others. The organizer has the further task of focusing attention on the mass organization to be built, and for which these house meetings are but a step. To do this quickly, and also to reach the people quickly, sometimes may requires several meetings a day, but it is a rare day when none are held.

Specific information will need to be gathered about the problems developed, so a set of priorities for action can be worked out. When you know what is required for stop signs, street lights, road paving, welfare rights, and local political change, you will be able to set up a plan of action to accomplish these, based on the principal of taking on easy issues first, so success can breed success.

From these meetings, the development of a priority of issues and the emergence of local leaders will come further casework, done by the organizer and some of those he has organized. After taking people to the welfare department, or discussing welfare problems with them at a house meetings, the organizer can select those who he thinks can do casework in this (or other) fields and help develop their knowledge to do so. This permits him to concentrate on other things and at the same time develop those within the organization who will assume leadership.

As casework goes forth, and the number of house meetings at which the poor begin to discuss their problems grows, the list of allies and enemies will naturally grow also.

NOTE: We have been dealing with the steps an organizer follows in a town he is working in alone. In other areas, whether they be large rural centers or big-city ghettos, a team of organizers would follow this same plan, dividing the area between them. They would hold their house meetings in their own areas, but set up a common organizational meeting and organization.

In the rarer case, one organizer, working alone, would take on a large area and split it up himself, organizing in one section after another, and creating smaller, local organizations (block clubs, etc.). The very serious drawback here is that he must then try to unify these organizations into a mass membership group, and their leaders (and possibly some members, too) will have a vested interest in resisting him.

Phase IV: The Organizational Meeting:

As mentioned earlier, this meeting should be held about six weeks from the time the organizer begins work, and is the focal point of all his activity to date. The longer this meeting is postponed, the greater is the chance that community interest will die. The formal organization created at this point is the force for change in the community and brings together all the people the organizer has contacted, helped, spoken to at house meetings along with others who will come once the meeting is announced.

This meeting, which perhaps as many as 200 people will attend, will serve to focus the attention of the poor on an organization they themselves have created and are now formally establishing and will attract to it those who might have been afraid to attend a house meeting with only two or three others present. It will also focus the attention of the power structure on the fact that the poor are organizing and on the organization they, the power structure, will now have to deal with. This is the “numbers game” – it shows both

sides how many people you have been able to bring together and, hopefully, these numbers are a source of strength to the poor and bring to the power structure a sense of awareness of the potential of the organized poor. Poor people come to this meeting as individuals and leave as members of an organization dedicated to change.

At this meeting, permanent committees should be established to deal with a constitution and by-laws, fund-raising, communications and specific problem areas (welfare, housing, police, etc.). At this point, the organizer's observations of leadership abilities, interest and commitment on the part of the people are brought to bear in temporarily staffing these committees.

It is best at this meeting to also elect only temporary officers, for a term of about two months. This will allow them who have developed into leaders to further prove their abilities and dedication, and show the true motives of those who are in it for personal gain. It will also allow others in the group, and those who join after this meeting, a chance for development and to prove themselves. A word of caution should be added: this is the most likely time for the power structure to try to buy off, or scare off, the leadership, and the organization should guard against this.

Phase V: The Institutional Phase:

The institutional phase is defined as the point at which a mass membership organization is formalized, begins to hold regular meetings, elects permanent officers and becomes the established community power base and instrument of community action and change.

It is during this phase that most organizations die or cease to be effective. Leaders enjoy their positions and become more interested in keeping them than in using the power of the organization to make needed social changes. Or they are bought off. This means they either leave the organization for an "establishment" job, or remain with the organization but identify with the "establishment." The membership, too, may cease to see the need for change. Once some changes are brought about and their immediate needs met, some members may no longer see the need to fight for other, more subtle and far-reaching changes, or to extend their newly-won benefits to others.

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1. Gather information
 2. Develop "pitch"

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| <p>Begin To Know People, Issues And Be Known</p> <hr/> | <p>3. Develop local leaders</p> <p>4. Specific information on problems to set priorities for action</p> | |
| <p>1. In the street</p> <p>2. Door-to-door</p> <p>3. Change pitch as necessary</p> <p>4. Get people working for you</p> <p>5. Information gathering as a tool of organizing</p> | <p>5. Casework with and by local people</p> <p>6. Know allies and enemies</p> | |
| <p>6. Case work</p> | <p>Organizational Meeting</p> <hr/> | <p>Institutional Phase</p> <hr/> |
| <p>7. Begin to know allies and enemies</p> | <p>1. Power base</p> <p>2. Numbers game</p> <p>3. Focus attention of community and power structure</p> <p>4. Broaden local leadership</p> | <p><u>Definition</u></p> <p>1. Regular meetings</p> <p>2. Community power base and instrument of community action and change</p> |
| <p>Arouse Interest</p> <hr/> | <p>5. People leave as members</p> <p>6. Temporary officers</p> <p>7. Permanent committees</p> | <p>3. Membership</p> <p>4. Permanent officers</p> |
| <p>1. House meetings</p> <p>2. Develop issues</p> | | |

Action

1. House meetings
2. Broaden strength
and sense of belong
3. Move one problems
4. Continue to develop
local leaders