



Andress & Associates, LLC
"Bridging the Health Gap"

What is Community Organizing?

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Overview

A method to bring individuals together for the purpose of focusing upon system change via enhancement of communities and their capability to engage in civic practices based upon the principles of democracy and the policy process.

Sometimes referred to as social action organizing, community organizing is thought to have begun in the United States in the 1930's. The method builds social power capable of leveraging resources and negotiating improvements for its members and their communities.

Organized communities are considered "power-based" communities built around relational power. They seek to expand power by enhancing community functioning. A relational phenomena connecting communities both horizontally and vertically, community organizing is developed by building relationships among individuals, organizations, and institutions (social capital).

Steps in the process

Assessment: Critical issues affecting a community are identified and defined by the community beginning with a small group of two to ten persons who meet to share stories, opinions and solutions. Additional meetings are held to sharpen the focus of the group, expand

participation, and reach consensus about a specific issue on which everyone will focus their collective interests.

Research: Communities study the causes and correlates of issues affecting the community. Information on potential influencers and solutions are gathered through interviews with key organizations and a review of relevant studies and related research. Key to this process is an assessment of how assets are distributed among groups and communities.

Mobilization/Action: This is the process of strategy development and gathering the organization's members for collective action. External agencies, systems, and institutions capable of addressing the distribution of resources under consideration or of addressing the issue are identified and invited to participate in a public effort to discuss the issue and possible solutions.

Reflection: The process of reviewing the strategy and actions taken by the community to address an issue.

On the Ground

From a practical point of view community organizing involves working with groups of residents to build and sustain organizations. This means identifying those in a community that want to work for change. The goal is to be engaged with residents as they identify, research, and analyze community issues of interest. We work side-by-side with residents as they learn about the issue in order to fully understand the problem and solutions.

We work with citizens to help them engage in action. In this case "action" involves working with institutions, systems, and public officials

to implement changes in public policy resources, rules, and regulations that impact, benefit or fail to benefit their communities.

The action step is what is currently missing in much of the work that is going on in communities now. In most efforts taking place today residents are generally taught: 1) to talk among themselves; 2) be engaged with each other; 3) interact with an existing system; and 4) participate as civic volunteers. There is very little effort to engage in critical thinking and analysis about how practices, systems, and/or institutions may need to change to fit community needs. There is little or no effort to seek changes in practices, systems, and/or institutions.

January 10, 2007
Discussion: Community Organizing
 Approximately 2 hours

At the close of the meeting we should be able to:

- 1. Agree on the definition and role of community organizing;***
- 2. Determine your current practices in the community;***
- 3. Draw conclusions about the differences community organizing can make in your practices; and***
- 4. Identify who should take the longer training.***

A. Take a minute to re-read the community organizing brief

- i. Minor changes were made to page two***

B. Introduce yourself- name, title, and departmental unit

- i. State one question or list a fact from the community organizing brief that stuck out in your mind.***
- ii. Describe what your unit does- the activities and/or purpose.***
- iii. Describe the activities of those in your unit that go "out" into the community.***
- iv. Everyone should write down the question or the fact that is presented.***

- C. Discuss each question and fact as presented**
- D. Statements on whether community organizing can or cannot be used in your unit**
- i. Quick round-robin statements on whether community organizing may be used and how you see it making a difference.**
 - ii. Can you submit names today for the training? If not when?**
- E. Possible training dates**
- i. Time needed- three days**
 - ii. Is the end of March okay?**