

ORGANIZING: PEOPLE, POWER, CHANGE



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Foreword

Hello and welcome!

The following guide aims to support you in developing your capacity for effective community organizing. Our goal is to provide you with an introduction to organizing and encourage you to explore answers to the following questions:

Why am I called to leadership in my community? How will I move others to join me? How will we develop strategy and structure our work together? And how will we achieve our goals?

To start, here's how we define **leadership**:

Leadership is accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve purpose in the face of uncertainty.

Here's how we define **organizing**:

Organizing is leadership that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want.

And we break down this definition further by describing the **five key practices of organizing**: telling stories, building relationships, structuring teams, strategizing, and acting. Taken together, these five practices form the basis of the organizing framework laid out in this guide. We'll refer to the above definitions throughout the guide, and unpack what they mean in depth as we work through the organizing framework. **But where does this 'framework' come from?**

Much of this framework was codified by a fellow called Marshall Ganz. Ganz developed the "Public Narrative" framework (see the Telling Stories section) based on years of organizing in and research on social movements. He cut his teeth as a young organizer in the Civil Rights movement, worked with the United Farm Workers in the 1960s and 70s, advised many unions, non-profits, and political organizations for decades, and was a key trainer and organizing strategist behind the U.S. presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012.

It was during these campaigns that Ganz and fellow organizers (note: *millions* of other organizers) built on community organizing best practices and techniques

from past movements and codified an approach to grassroots organizing and training that many credit with winning the 2008 election. Many organizations, including Leading Change Network and New Organizing Institute, spawned or grew out of these successful campaigns, and most of this guide is adapted from their resources.

Many people and organizations paid close attention to what these American organizers were doing, and some were inspired to shift their approach and adapt this framework. Over the last several years, several organizations in Canada (and British Columbia / Coast Salish Territories, in particular) have begun to shift their strategies to focus on community organizing (that is, putting people and relationships at the centre of the work), modelled after Ganz and American campaigns. That's not to say that local movements or efforts or organizations haven't been working in this relationship-based way for a long time; they just might not take inspiration from the work of Marshall Ganz or credit themselves as 'organizers' in the same way.

Some call this framework the "snowflake model," others "distributed leadership," and still others "the Ganz model." Whatever we choose to call it, we hope to emphasize here that this approach is based in years and years of community organizing - we're truly 'standing on the shoulders of giants' employing this organizing framework, today.

In reading this guide, we ask that you keep two things in mind:

1. Remember that organizing is **above all a practice**. We learn to organize by organizing, not (just) by reading about it. This guide is meant to get you started and serve as a resource, but the best way to learn this framework is to get out and do it!
2. This organizing framework is just that, **a framework, not a formula**. Our goal here is to present some concepts and tools that many organizers have found to be effective and, at times, have been instrumental in winning campaigns.

We hope you find it useful.

Sincerely,

Shea Sinnott and Peter Gibbs,
Vancouver & Victoria, BC / Coast Salish Territories
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Introduction to Organizing

Key Concepts

- Organizing is **leadership** that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want.
- Organizing is a practice, and there are **five key leadership practices** within this practice: telling stories, building relationships, structuring teams, strategizing, and acting.
- The first question an organizer asks is **“who are my people?”** not “what is my issue?”
- Strong **relationships** are the foundation of successful organizing efforts.
- The **snowflake model** is an organizational structure that embodies leadership as that which enables others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty.

What is Organizing?

Organizing is leadership that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want. As we'll learn throughout this guide, community organizing is all about people, power, and change - it starts with people and relationships, is focused on shifting power, and aims to create lasting change. Organizing people to build the power to make change is based on the mastery of five key leadership practices: telling stories, building relationships, structuring teams, strategizing, and acting. That is, to develop our capacity for effective community organizing, we must learn:

The Five Leadership Practices

1. How to articulate a **story** of why we are called to lead, a story of the community we hope to mobilize and why we're united, and a story of why we must act.
2. How to build intentional **relationships** as the foundation of purposeful collective actions.
3. How to create **structure** that distributes power and responsibility and prioritizes leadership development.
4. How to **strategize** turning your resources into the power to achieve clear goals.
5. How to translate strategy into measurable, motivational, and effective **action**.

Though organizing is not a linear process, organizers use the first three practices (stories, relationships, structure) to build power within a community, while the last two practices (strategy, action) are about wielding that power in order to create change.

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”

– Lao Tzu

People

The first question an organizer asks is “Who are my people?” not “What is my issue?” Effective organizers put people, not issues, at the heart of their efforts. Organizing is not about solving a community’s problems or advocating on its behalf. It is about enabling the people with the problem to mobilize their own resources to solve it (and keep it solved).

Identifying a community of people is just the first step. The job of a **community** organizer is transform a community – a group of people who share common values or interests – into a constituency – a community of people who are standing together to realize a common purpose. The difference between community and **constituency** lies in the **commitment** to take action to further common goals.

For example, a community could be residents of a town that are against a new dam project, while a constituency would be residents of the town against the dam who have signed a petition to take action to stop the dam from being built.

Power

Organizing focuses on power: who has it, who doesn’t, and how to build enough of it to shift the power relationship and bring about change. Reverend Martin Luther King described power as “the ability to achieve purpose” and “the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change.”¹

In organizing, power is not a thing or trait. Organizers understand power as the influence that’s created by the relationship between interests and resources. Here, **interests** are what people need or want (e.g. to protect a river, to stay in public office, to make money), while **resources** are assets (e.g. people, energy, knowledge, relationships, and money) that can be readily used to, in the case of organizing, achieve the change you need or want. Understanding the nature of power – that it stems from the interplay between interests and resources – and that we must shift power relationships in order to bring about change, is essential for the success of our organizing efforts.

From the example above, the constituency against the dam may ask questions aimed at ‘tracking down the power’ – that is, inquiring into the relationship between actors, and particularly the interests and resources of these actors in their struggle. For instance, they might ask questions like: *what are our interests, or, what do we want? Who holds the resources needed to address these interests? What are their interests, or, what do they want?*

In doing so, the town residents may realize that their local town council is a key actor, that local councillors want to stay in office and need votes to do so, and in turn, the constituency holds the resources of people, relationships, and votes that could shift this power relationship and bring about change.

1 King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1967). “Where Do We Go From Here?” Annual Report Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from http://www-personal.umich.edu/~gmarkus/MLK_WhereDoWeGo.pdf

Change

In organizing, change must be specific, concrete, and significant. Organizing is not about 'raising awareness' or speech-making (though these may contribute to an organizing effort). It is about specifying a **clear goal** and mobilizing your resources to achieve it.

Indeed, if organizing is about enabling others to bring about change, and specifically, securing commitment from a group of people with shared interests to take action to further common goals, then it's critical to define exactly what those goals are.

In the case of the proposed dam project from above, the constituency against the dam must create clear, measurable goals. Note the difference between "our goal is to stop the dam" versus "our goal is to put pressure on town council in the next 3.5 months - through door-knocking, events, and local newspaper op-eds aimed at getting 1/3 of town residents to sign our petition - to pass a motion to stop the dam project."

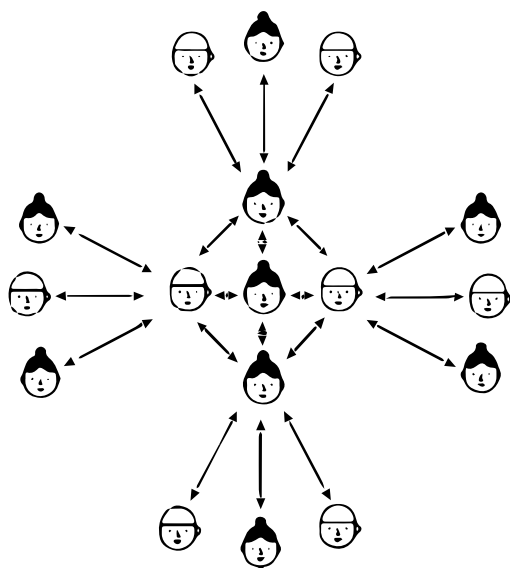
You'll learn how to come up with goals in the Strategizing section and how to achieve them in the Acting section.

The Snowflake Model: A distributed approach to leadership

We define leadership as accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve purpose in the face of uncertainty, and the organizational model that best embodies this understanding of leadership is what we call the "**snowflake model**."

First, in the snowflake model, **leadership is distributed**. No one person or group of people holds all the power; responsibility is shared in a sustainable way, and structure aims to create mutual accountability. The snowflake is made up of interconnected teams working together to further common goals.

Second, the snowflake model is based above all on enabling others. A movement's strength stems from its capacity and **commitment to develop leadership** and in the snowflake model, everyone is responsible for identifying, recruiting, and developing leaders. Leaders develop other leaders who, in turn, develop other leaders, and so on.



The practise of coaching is the key means by which organizers in the snowflake develop leadership. See the Coaching section for more details on what coaching in organizing is and how to practise your coaching skills.

You'll learn about the snowflake model in greater detail in the Structuring Teams section, but for now, reflect on the organizational structures that you've been a part of in your work, school, or other areas of your life. How might you draw out those structures? Where did you fit into those structures, and how did you feel in your role?

Now, take a look at diagram 1. Note the faces, the clusters of faces, and the links between them. How might the snowflake model compare to the structures you've been a part of in the past? As you'll see in the Structuring Teams section, the snowflake model is unique from typical organizing or leadership structures in that responsibility is distributed and it prioritizes leadership development above all.

In closing, keep the snowflake model structure and the core tenets of people, power, and change in mind as we dive deeper into the the five practices of organizing: telling stories, building relationships, structuring teams, strategizing, and acting.

Further Reading

Ganz, M. (2010). "Leading Change: Leadership, Organization, Social Movements." In N. Nohria & R. Khurana (Eds.), *the Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice* (pp. 509-550). Danvers: Harvard Business School Press.

For a full list of writings by Marshall Ganz, visit <http://marshallganz.com/publications>

For readings and training resources from the New Organizing Institute, visit <http://neworganizing.com/toolbox>