

## **The Role of the Community Organizer**

The role of the Community Organizer is to find and train leaders and to assist the people with whom s/he is working to build or strengthen a community/organization that will have the power to enable them to effectively act on their vision, values, and self-interests.

In order to do this, the organizer engages in four central activities:

- 1.) **Active listening.** By asking questions, the organizer draws out of leaders their hopes, aspirations, fears, problems, visions, dreams, etc... S/he also finds out likes, dislikes, past experiences, what's been tried, what's worked, and what hasn't.
- 2.) **Stimulating to the point of action.** The organizer challenges people to act on their values and interests. S/he cuts through such rationalizations as "it won't work here" or "we can't do that." The purpose of this is to face people with concrete choices: are they going to act on the very things that they have indicated as being important to them that emerged from an active listening process.
- 3.) **Thinking through.** People may want to act but not know what to do or even know that something is possible. The fundamental task of the organizer here is to think through with the people what has to be done to allow them to address their own problems effectively and to allow them to act. The process of thinking something through is one which leads people to see that there are possibilities for action. This is also the phase where all available local resources should be considered before turning to outside assistance.
- 4.) **Training in skills.** Communities and community organizations are themselves schools for personal growth. In them, individuals have the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for effective participation and leadership. These skills can include planning, recruiting, negotiating, fundraising, mobilizing action, integrating deeply held values into daily practice, evaluation, and a myriad of other skills that are necessary for any kind of organization.

The good organizer is an educator who sees the essence of his/her work as developing in local leaders the talents and gifts that they have. Instead of apathy, people learn to think about how to organize to change things. Instead of resignation, people take the first tentative then firm steps towards action. Instead of self-blame, people begin to identify specific decision-makers with the power to do something to change conditions. Instead of wishing for someone else to do it for them, people begin to take the first steps to do things for themselves.

**Key principle #1: NEVER DO SOMETHING FOR PEOPLE THAT THEY CAN DO FOR THEMSELVES.**

**Key principle #2: THE FUNDAMENTAL CONFIDENCE OF THE ORGANIZER IS IN THE CAPACITY OF THE PEOPLE TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN DESTINY.**

There is a Buddhist saying that goes:

**The master doesn't talk, he/she acts.  
When his/her work is done,  
the people say, "Amazing:  
We did it all by ourselves."**