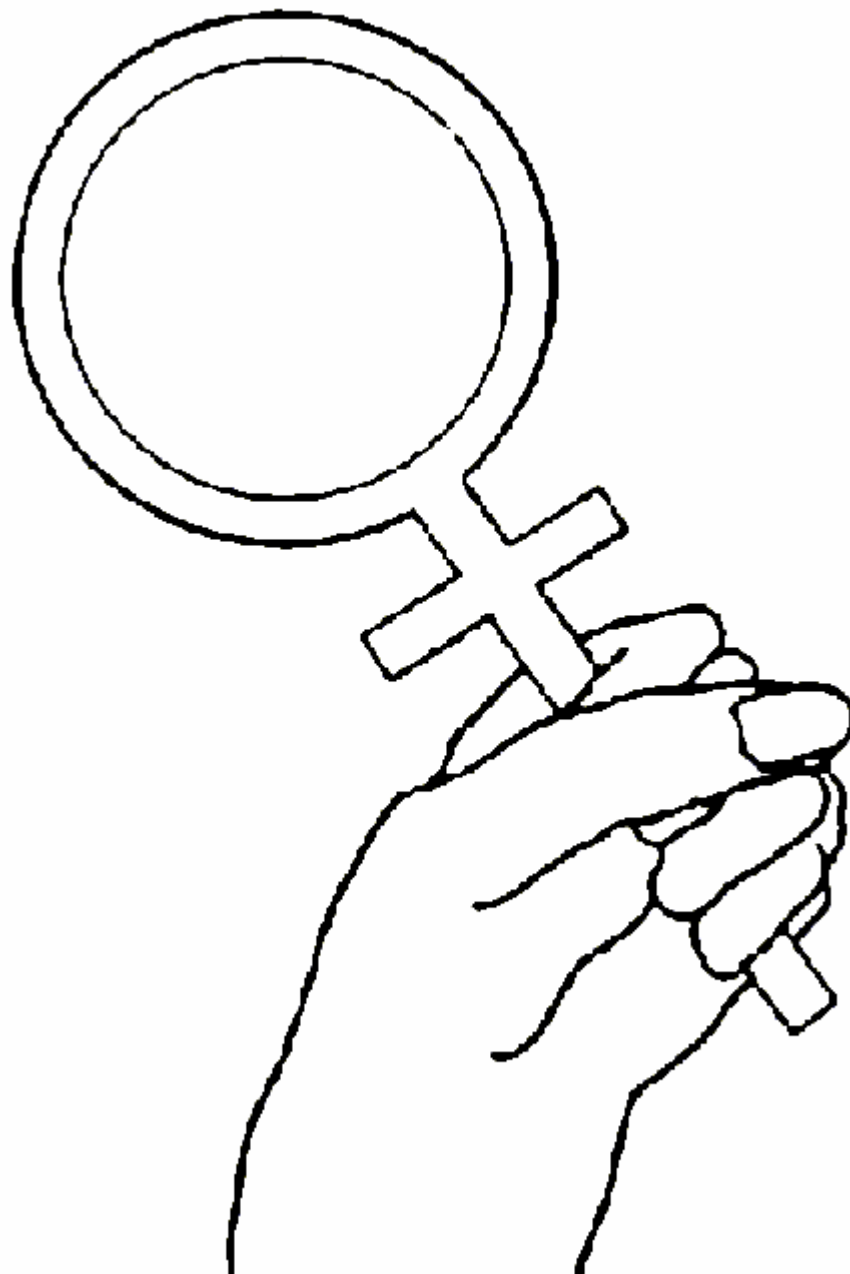


# WOMEN ON THE ADVANCE

Highlights of a National Conference  
on Women and Organizing



Stony Point Conference Center  
Stony Point, New York  
February 16-18, 1989

# Women on the Advance

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September 1990

## Introduction

In 1986, Barbara Joseph, Susan Lob, Peggy McLaughlin, Terry Mizrahi, Jan Peterson, Beth Rosenthal, and Fran Sugarman began meeting to re-examine their work as organizers through a feminist lens. They had been inspired by two surprisingly successful events in 1985 that explored issues related to women and organizing sponsored by the Education Center for Community Organizing (ECCO) at the Hunter College School of Social Work. They came to agree that feminist principles are not encouraged or employed by organizers, and that feminist practices are used only in isolated settings. This was the case even though many organizers, as well as the targets of organizing, are women. They felt strongly that there were conflicts between the collective, connected style being emphasized in consciousness-raising groups, and the traditional, aggressive Alinsky style of organizing that is taught in most curriculums.

Barbara, Susan, Peggy, Terry, Jan, Beth, and Fran decided to take on the challenge of developing a new model of organizing that would incorporate feminist principles and practices.

It was slow moving at first:

Jan: Women tend to get isolated for doing the upfront stuff. We are not trained to give support to other women leaders. Only men can delegate.

Fran: I don't think men can delegate.

Peggy: Men don't know how, women do it for them.

Terry: Will we turn off women who do not say they're feminists?

Barbara: I don't see men doing feminist work.

Fran: I disagree. I think there are a few men who do.

Barbara: I think the point is do men *identify* themselves as doing feminist organizing.

Terry: There's the issue of dress.

Susan: We should have a discussion of dress.

Jan: Bertha talks about her dress in the 60's and during Reaganism, and she says...

But little by little, their model of feminist organizing began to take shape. The group, now formally named the Women Organizers' Collective, combined lessons learned from their organizing, readings, and discussions to draft a preliminary list of Feminist Organizing Principles. However, the Women Organizers' Collective knew that to be truly feminist, the input of more women organizers was needed.

Two strategies were employed to achieve this end. First, in 1988, surveys were sent to over 7,000 women organizers across the United States to find out about their experiences and the materials they had written or used. This resulted in close to 300 responses, which formed the basis for an international Women Organizers' Bibliography<sup>1</sup>. Second, a meeting of the 47 Advisors<sup>2</sup> to the Women Organizers' Project was arranged. The meeting brought to the fore many

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<sup>1</sup> For more information contact the Women Organizers' Collective.

<sup>2</sup> Advisors include Mimi Abramovitz, Kathy Acey, Pat Alvarez, Diana Autin, Eleanor Bader, Safiya Bandele, Harriet Barlow, Norma Becker, Heather Booth, Gwen Braxton, Gale Brewer, Tess Browne, Mary Bricker-Jenkins, Charlotte Bunch, Michelle Cahill, Pat Callair, Alice Cardona, Fay Chiang, Charlotte Dickson, Marjorie Fine, Theresa Funiciello, Terry Haywoode, Emily J. Goodman, Cheryl Hyde, Rosemary Jackson, Susan Kinoy, Janice Kydd, Joellen Lambiotte, Wendy Luttrell, Rev. Virginia Mackey, Elizabeth Minnich, Nancy Naples, Karen Nussbaum, Sue

frustrations about the limited time available for discussing the needs of women organizers, and the complex issues they face.

From this, the idea for an Advance (and not a Retreat!) was born. The Women Organizers' Collective decided to bring together 50 women from diverse backgrounds and with diverse experiences. They sought a balance of grassroots and professional women, women of color and white women, and lesbians and straight women. Initially, their efforts were thwarted by a lack of funds, and outreach had to be limited to local areas only. However, with the help of locally based funding and solicitations made through ECCO<sup>3</sup>, the Women Organizers' Collective was soon able to do outreach across the country. Questionnaires were used to ensure that the Advance genuinely addressed the concerns and interests of the women organizers chosen to participate.

The Advance was held from February 16th through February 18th, 1989, at the Stony Point Conference Center in Stony Point, New York. What follows is a summary of the major themes, ideas, sentiments, and feelings expressed, with an attempt made to capture the spirit of the Advance as well.

At this point, a word needs to be said about the process that went into preparing this document. Considerable time had passed since the Advance was held when I began work on this project. During that time, tapes were misplaced or lost, much of what was said had already been forgotten, and some of the notes that were written in pencil had faded. Furthermore, I did not attend the Advance - I am a woman of color studying community organizing, and this project was part of my internship<sup>4</sup>. These excuses are offered in anticipation of the undoubtedly countless omissions and lost insights that will be found. But I want to make it clear that, excuses notwithstanding, I take full responsibility for this summary of the Advance.

However, in the event that you have any corrections, additions, deletions, suggestions, and/or criticisms regarding this document, please contact the Women Organizers' Committee. After all, internships and sisterhood have their limits!

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Reynolds, Beth Richie, Irma Rodriguez, Stephanie Roth, Yolanda Sanchez, Andrea Savage, Susan Schechter, Barbara Levy Simon, Sharon Smolnick, Miriam Thompson, Patrice Wagner, Marie Weil, and Guida West.

<sup>3</sup> Funding sources include The Funding Exchange, The Northstar Fund, the Women's Research and Development Fund of CUNY, The Faculty Delegate Assembly's Faculty Development Fund of Hunter College, Hands Across America, and The Aaron Diamond Foundation. In addition, The Ms. Foundation sponsored the attendance of one of the participants.

<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of this, throughout this document I will use "we" to refer to women and women organizers (as well as to women of color), and "they" when I am referring to the women who attended the Advance.

## The Women Organizers in Attendance<sup>5</sup>

### THE WOMEN ORGANIZERS' COLLECTIVE

**BARBARA R. JOSEPH:** Educator and Organizer. Director of the Hofstra University Institute of Applied Social Science at District 65, UAW. Interested in liberation movements; developing theories about human needs and education for empowerment (with special emphasis on women of color); and women workers and learners.

**SUSAN LOB:** Community Organizer in poor and working class neighborhoods for the past 15 years. Activist for women and housing issues. Advocacy Coordinator of the Park Slope Safe Homes Project. Teaches an undergraduate course in organizing at York College. Interested in ending violence against women and racial violence; multi-racial coalition building; and leadership development of women and older people.

**PEGGY MCLAUGHLIN:** Organizer and Attorney. Assistant Professor of Social Work and Law at Ramapo College. Founded battered women's shelter, tenant's councils, and homeless programs. Interested in women's psychological and social development.

**TERRY MIZRAHI:** Professor at Hunter College School of Social Work. Coordinator for the Education Center for Community Organizing (ECCO). Author of manuals on health organizing and book on physicians entitled, GETTING RID OF PATIENTS. Interested in building coalitions; and women as health consumers and workers.

**JAN PETERSON:** Community Organizer and Feminist Psychotherapist. National Director of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. Interested in adding women's perspectives to community development; leadership training for low income women; developing training to assist women to work across class, race and ethnic lines; and building a women's community development education exchange linking domestic efforts with international ones.

**BETH ROSENTHAL:** Consultant and Trainer in development and planning. Former Director of the Washington Heights-Inwood Coalition. Interested in building coalitions and empowerment; development of immigrant communities; and an interracial social justice movement.

**FRAN SUGARMAN:** Consultant and Organizer. Former Director of the Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association (Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition). Worked with the Women's Housing Coalition. Former Organizer with ACORN and the People's Firehouse. Interested in alternative methods for organizing women; linking the personal and political in organizing; and childcare and education issues.

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<sup>5</sup> All of the biographies are as of February 1989. Telephone numbers and addresses can be obtained by contacting the Women Organizers' Collective.

## THE WOMEN ORGANIZERS

**MIMI ABRAMOVITZ:** Professor at Hunter College School of Social Work. Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Family Policy at Hunter College. Researcher of women and social policy (especially low income women and women of color). Author of *REGULATING THE LIVES OF WOMEN: SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT*, South End Press, 1988. Editor: *CATALYST*, a socialist journal of the social services (soon to be *Journal of Progressive Human Services*). Past experience organizing with unions, and the women's, civil rights, and anti-war movements.

**KATHY ACEY:** Executive Director of the Astraea Fund.

**EBUN ADELONA:** Anthropologist and Practitioner of Nu Age nursing. Involved in community mobilizing at the local and international level in the area of health, and feminist organizing in the area of domestic violence, sterilization abuse, and adolescent rites of passage. Currently developing institutions that will sustain community transformation in a 30-block area of Harlem.

**KAREN ARTICHOKER:** Winnebago/Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Coordinator of the South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

**MADONNA BEARD:** Therapist, Educator, and Consultant.

**HEATHER BOOTH:** Organizer for social change for over 25 years, from the earliest days of the civil rights and women's movement, to directing the Midwest Academy, a leading national center for training organizers in social change. Now the President of Citizen Action.

**GALE BREWER:** Chair of the National Women's Political Caucus/NYS.

**CHARLOTTE BUNCH:** Author of *PASSIONATE POLITICS*. Editor (with Sandra Pollack) of *LEARNING OUR WAY*.

**ALICE CARDONA:** Education Advocate and Organizer. Program Associate for the NYS Division for Women.

**LUANN CHIOLA:** Community Organizing Student at Hunter College School of Social Work. Affiliated with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.

**SARAH CYTRON:** Lesbian Comedienne.

**KAPP DEL VILLAR:** Community Programmer and Organizer. Provide women's leadership training (women learning to impact and nurture community) with Colorado Women's Agenda. Member of Fort Collin's Coalition for Civil Rights. Interested in Gay and Lesbian Rights.

**CHARLOTTE DICKSON:** Organize tenants with the Committee for Boston Public Housing. Recently started a coalition to address teen pregnancy prevention in Boston. Interested in urban youth and multi-cultural work.

**LUCY FOTIS:** Social Work Student at Hunter College School of Social Work.

**JACKY GRIMSHAW:** Political Organizer with the campaigns for Harold Washington for State Senator, Senator, and Congressman in Illinois. Currently developing a center dedicated to the memory of Al Roby at Roosevelt University.

**BEA HANSEN:** Community Organizing Student at Hunter College School of Social Work. Affiliated with the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition.

**SUSAN HAMMOVITCH:** Video Filmmaker.

**TONI HARRIS:** Coordinator of the Knightsbridge Heights Child Care Network. Founding Member of the Women's Committee of K.H.D.I.A.

**TERRY HAYWOODE:** Sociologist and Researcher of women in community organizations.

**VIRGINIA HAZZARD:** From 1960 to 1968, worked in Morocco with the American Friends Service Committee Program for Algerian refugees. Joined UNICEF in 1969, and assisted with a UNICEF/FAOUN Social Development Division assessment of the education and training of girls and women. Served as an Advisor to the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association from 1970 to 1973. Formally joined UNICEF in 1974 as a Program Officer for Kenya and Regional Adviser on Programming for Women in Eastern Africa. From 1981 until her retirement in 1983, served as the Deputy Representative for UNICEF in the People's Republic of China.

**ANDREA E. HILL:** Associate Director of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Community Organizer in the areas of civil rights and housing. Provides training in organizational development, decision making, and problem solving.

**JEANINE HUBERT:** Transitional Services Project.

**PAULA JOHNSON:** Organizer for Matrix, a women's group addressing children's services. Organizer for Worcester Area Lesbian and Gay Alliance. Member of Mass Coalition for the Homeless; the Worcester AIDS Network Housing Committee; and the Homeless Children's Task Force.

**SUSAN KAIBONI:** Educator, Administrator, and Consumer Advocate. Interested in women's issues related to development and empowerment.

**SUSAN K. KINOY:** Social Worker and Union Organizer. Chief Grants Officer of the Villers Foundation. Active in welfare rights, civil rights, and peace movements.

**RHODA LINTON:** Independent Consultant in program evaluation, specializing in women's programs (U.S. and Caribbean). Community Organizer, mainly in welfare rights and the Seneca Women's Peace Camp. Currently working on a monograph documenting women's organizing efforts.

**CARMEN LUNA:** Assistant Chief of Staff to Lt. Governor Leo McCarthy of California. Member of Comision Femenil Mexicana Nacional. Committed to the empowerment of Hispanic women.

**BETTY REID MANDELL:** Welfare Rights Organizer. Co-Editor of SURVIVAL NEWS.

**NANCY NAPLES:** Social Worker and Sociologist. Interested in participatory research for social change, coalition building, and feminist approach to organizational design and practice.

**SHIRLEY OBERG:** Organizer and Educator for Women's Action, a transitional housing group. Trainer for a women's curriculum called, "In Our Best Interest."

**SUSAN PERLSTEIN:** Cultural Worker and Founder of Eldershare the Arts.

**CAROLINE PEZZULLO:** Chair of International Task Force on Grassroots Networking. Consultant with International Women & Development. Board Member of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. Board Member and Vice President of Society for International Development, NY Chapter. Chair of UN NGO Committee on Shelter and Community.

**BETH RITCHIE:** Instructor of the Community Health Education Program at Hunter College. Organizer in the battered women's movement.

**STEPHANIE ROTH:** Activist for stopping violence against women, lesbian issues, and reproductive rights. Coordinator of the Long Island Technical Assistance Program.

**YOLANDA SANCHEZ:** President of the National Latinas Caucus. Social Worker with a specialization in community organizing and development. Worked mostly for Puerto Rican CBOs. Helped to develop almost 800 units of low income housing in el Barrio, and created and developed new programs like neighborhood health centers, etc.

**ANDREA SAVAGE:** Professor at Hunter College School of Social Work. Formerly involved in NWRO Organizing and the women's movement. Interested in women in organizations and child abuse projects.

**PAMELA SPARR:** Economist, Popular Educator, and Writer. Member of National Planning Committee of Women's Economic Summit. Write, consult, and facilitate workshops on economic issues for women.

**CRYSTAL LEE SUTTON:** "The REAL Norma Rae" - Southern born and bred. Lean and hungry, and looks like Sally Field – honest! Committed to caring for working class, poor, and oppressed people of the world. Wants to be part of a movement that will get free and decent health care and education for all Americans.

**LAURA UNGER:** Activist. Director of Community Action Programs, Local 259, UAW. President of Local 1150, CWA.

**JACKIE VAN ANDA:** Deputy Director of Local Development Corp. del Barrio, NYC. Graduate Student at Union Theological Seminary and the New School for Social Research. Community and Labor Organizing in Appalachian cornfields and North Carolina.

**GUIDA WEST:** Political Sociologist, Author, and Welfare Rights Advocate. Works with Rutgers University Institute for Research on Women, and co-Founder of Women's Agenda of New Jersey .

**ANN WITHORN:** Professor at the College of Public and Community Service of the University of Massachusetts. Writes about welfare and radical practices in the human services.

The following **TIME LINE** was displayed on a wall at the Advance to offer a visual depiction of the years of organizing represented by the women organizers in attendance.

1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
1943-1953 – Young Christian Community (NY & USA)	<p>1950s – YCW Intl (LA &amp; Asia)</p> <p><b>BARBARA R. JOSEPH</b></p> <p>1952 – Labor Youth League (Socialist); Jr. NAACP Youth Council; Parents Workshop for Integration; 1958 – SNCC.</p> <p><b>YOLANDA SANCHEZ</b></p> <p>1954 – Hispanic Young Adults</p> <p><b>ALICE CARDONA</b></p> <p>1954 – Hispanic Young Adults</p> <p><b>GUIDA WEST</b></p> <p>1956 – Civil Rights &amp; Racial Justice; Welfare Rights</p>	<p>1954 – 1960s – Civil Rights Movement &amp; War on Poverty; Worker Training Center</p> <p>1960s - Civil Rights; Welfare Rights; MFY; SWCR; Women's Strike for Peace; 1964 – SSWR; Health Care Org. of Harlem; Alternative Education; R &amp; D Social Service Workers</p> <p>1960s – Project Head Start</p> <p>1960s – Civil Rights &amp; Racial Justice; Welfare Rights (Book)</p> <p><b>TERRY HAYWOODE</b></p> <p>1960s – Civil Rights; Peace Movement; Women's Movement</p> <p><b>TERRY MIZRAHI</b></p> <p>1960s – Health Community</p> <p><b>PEGGY McLAUGHLIN</b></p> <p>1960s – Battered Women's Movement; Feminist Psych.</p> <p><b>JAN PETERSON</b></p> <p>1963 – March on Washington</p>	<p>1970s – Amer. Bus. Training &amp; Upgrading programs for low income workers; EEO &amp; Compliance Groups</p> <p>1970s – Women's Movement</p> <p>1970s – National Latinas Caucus</p> <p>1970s – ASPIRA of New York</p> <p>1970s – Peace Movement; Feminist Movement (Book)</p> <p>1970s– Professor; Health Policy Coalitions</p> <p>1970s – Battered Women's Movement; Feminist Psych.</p> <p>1970s – National Congress of Neighborhood Women; Grassroots Women</p> <p><b>SUSAN LOB</b></p> <p>1970s – Comm. Org. for Transportation &amp; Food</p> <p><b>SHIRLEY OBERG</b></p> <p>1970s – Women's Movement in MN; Crime &amp; Justice Reform</p>	<p>1980s –Development Training; Natl. Congress for Neighborhood Women; Grassroots Women Intl.</p> <p>1980s – Adult Workers-85% Women (Labor/Liberal Arts); Teaching &amp; Learning radical consciousness &amp; praxis for social transformation</p> <p>1980s – National Latinas Caucus</p> <p>1980s – Governor's Task Force on Women</p> <p>1980s – Federation of Protestant Women in Social Protest</p> <p>1980s – Professor; Director of ECCO</p> <p>1980s – Battered Women's Movement; Feminist Psych.</p> <p>1980s – National Congress of Neighborhood Women; Grassroots Women</p> <p>1980s – Battered Women's Movement; Housing Devel.</p> <p>1980s – Women's Movement in MN; Crime &amp; Justice Reform</p> <p><b>JEANINE HUBERT</b> Displaced Homemaker</p>

## Women Organizers' Advance Program (Unrevised)

Stony Point Conference Center, Stony Point, New York  
February 16-18, 1989

**WHEN**

**WHAT / WHO**

**Thursday Evening, 2/16/89**

5:00 PM On	Check-In
6:30 - 7:30 PM	Dinner
7:30 - 8:30 PM	Opening: Building the Bond of Gender. Welcoming comments and overview by members of the Women Organizer's Collective. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Vision - Barbara Joseph</li> <li>• Our History - Terry Mizrahi</li> <li>• Our Advance - Beth Rosenthal</li> </ul>
8:30 - 9:00 PM	Opening Circle: Introductions with Fran Sugarman.
9:00 - 10:00 PM	Opening - small group introductions. Who we are: sharing ourselves.
10:00 - 10:30 PM	Selected story tellers from small groups meet with Susan Lob to plan Friday AM panel.
10:00 PM On	Mingle and imbibe (if you wish).

**Friday Morning, 2/17/89**

7:00 - 8:00 AM	Early bird activities. Stroll and stride with Peggy; Stretch and strive with Terry and Beth.
8:00 - 9:00 AM	Breakfast. Orientation for newcomers with Jan Peterson.
9:00 - 9:45 AM	Panel: sharing our stories. Susan Lob and selected story tellers share their experiences as women organizers.
9:45 - 11:15 AM	Small groups: Women organizers' experiences. Enhancing our capacities; minimizing our limitations.

Group A: "Power"

Group B: Women's Experiences

Group C: Feminist Organizing

Group D: Power Differences between Men and Women

Group E: Beyond a Crisis Issue

WHEN	WHAT / WHO
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11:15 - 12:15 PM	Reporting back to everyone.
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- Common problems
- Creative solutions

**Friday Afternoon, 2/17/89**

12:30 - 1:30 PM	Lunch
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1:30 - 2:15 PM	Organizing across class and color differences; dealing with diversity. Presentation by Beth Ritchie and Stephanie Roth.
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2:15 - 3:45 PM	Small groups: Dealing with diversity.
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3:45 - 4:15 PM	Report back: Effective approaches and ongoing issues in dealing with diversity.
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Also open forum/time for feedback on the Advance. Facilitated by Jan Peterson.

4:15 - 5:45 PM	Focus groups: Exploring issues that women organizers face and identifying themes, problem-solving methods and strategies.
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Group A: Leadership & Power

Group C: Psychology of Women & Organizing

Group D: Combining Organization & Service

Group E: Lesbian Solidarity

Group F: Women & Community Development

NOTE: Group B – Working with Men – was cancelled.

**Friday Evening, 2/17/89**

6:30 - 7:30 PM	Dinner
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9:00 PM On	Fun Time/Organizer Antics
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9:00 - 10:00 PM	Sarah Cytron - Comedienne
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10:00 PM	Fear-Wish-Fantasy Drama led by Susan Perlstein.
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**W H E N                      W H A T / W H O**

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**Saturday Morning, 2/18/89**

7:00 - 8:00 AM                      Early bird activities. Stroll and stride with Peggy; Stretch and strive with Terry and Beth.

8:00 - 9:00 AM                      Breakfast

9:00 - 12:00 Noon                  Advancing ourselves and our work.

9:00 - 10:30 AM                  Open panel: Lessons we have learned from each other/moving on. Barbara Joseph and panel of visionaries.

10:30 - 12:00 Noon                  Work groups.

Group A: Women Organizers' 1990 Agenda

Group B: Feminist Organizing Principles

Group C: A Women Organizers' Center

Group D: Writing About Our Organizing

**Saturday Afternoon, 2/18/89**

12:30 - 1:30 PM                  Lunch

1:30 - 3:00 PM                  The personal is political: Sustaining ourselves for a lifetime of activism.

- Discussion of how to continue connections and sustain support.
- Good-bye/Hello with Susan Perlstein.
- Native American rituals and prayer with Karen Artichoker and Madonna Beard.
- Closing circle with Jan Peterson and Beth Rosenthal.

## Women Organizers and the New Psychology of Women

*“Most of the human beings described in the works of Freud and Eriksson and their successors were not really human beings at all, but were males” - Peggy McLaughlin.*

Some of the inspiration for developing an organizing model that values the distinct roles and styles of women comes from the writings of women psychologists. Since the 1970s, ground breaking works by Jean Baker Miller, Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky and others began to genuinely reflect the development and life experiences of women. These women psychologists challenged the male theorists who described women as "incomplete," "undeveloped," and "masochistic." Differences in the psychology of women traditionally attributed to various deficiencies and/or defects (i.e., the lack of a penis) were now being attributed to our subordinate status and to social conditions that relegate responsibility for childrearing and tending to human needs almost exclusively to women.

In addition, these women psychologists showed us that out of these circumstances emerge not only weaknesses, but STRENGTHS: We emphasize caring, connectedness, unity, and working collaboratively. These are characteristics that would certainly benefit the human race as a whole if adopted by us all. They are weaknesses only when they prevent us from assuming roles associated with power, initiative, and change because of fears of isolation or ostracism.

Peggy McLaughlin has written an article on the influence of feminist psychology on organizing, and she distributed it at the Advance to begin a dialogue on the topic. One woman organizer described how she started out studying casework and then later switched to community organizing. She felt that the separation made between the two methods is unnatural. She found herself at one point in her career trying to organize a very diverse group of women, and nothing seemed to work. She reviewed some of the literature written by feminist psychologists and realized that the emphasis in her community organizing training on "the issue" – to get to it and keep focused - was undermining the process of building relationships, which is so important to women. She began taking more time to nurture, talk, listen and utilize her casework skills, and gradually progress began to be made.

These women organizers then discussed how emphasizing the personal breaks down the distance between themselves and the members of communities they are organizing. Is that "unprofessional?" They came to agree that being professional does not mean that organizers must remain separate and objective. Taking time to talk and build relationships helps to break people out of their isolation, and making connections is critical to the process of empowerment. This is what we have learned from consciousness-raising groups, and it should be incorporated into community organizing principles and practice.

## Women Organizers and Organizing

*"I was told to organize poor whites like my relatives, so I headed up north. You have to like people to organize them - and I hated my relatives" - Ann Withorn.*

We are trained to be organizers in what is largely taken to be a gender-neutral model. But, as is usually the case, this "neutral" model is not neutral at all, because by claiming gender blindness it ignores issues and concerns specific to women. It was these issues and concerns that were finally given a voice at the Advance. These women organizers wondered how we can continue to employ feminist processes which are slow, unaggressive, and cooperative, while still being able to get the money, power, and attention we need to challenge the status quo. They wondered if organizing has to be lonely or if it is possible instead to stay connected. They debated whether there is any room for younger women to organize around women's issues when so many veteran women organizers continue to hold the reigns. And then there are the problems and concerns associated with conflicts between our roles as mothers, wives, and lovers, and our work as organizers. Is it possible to "do it all" and still be effective?

The "feminization of poverty" has now extended these concerns to organizing on the national level around such issues as housing, childcare, human rights, education, work, and health care. And with this shift, these women organizers are now also faced with the problems that concern all organizers today. In these conservative times, organizing has lost much of its steam, and many of our struggles are around just maintaining the gains already made. We are trying to mobilize people who were virtually paralyzed by the Reagan Administration. Currently, polls show that the tide is beginning to turn. Many people are saying that more should be spent on social services and less on military spending, the reverse of what they were saying five years ago. We need to ask how we can capitalize on this. We need to start strategizing on ways to offer real alternatives that will truly bring about a "kinder and gentler nation."

The obstacles seem monumental, but these women organizers are optimistic. They discussed the importance of cultivating a new generation of women organizers, and the importance of passing on their work to others by serving as mentors. We must continue to emphasize feminist process and recognize that it is critical in spite of the frustrations we experience with its slowness. And we need to find new ways of working: we need to take breaks and vacations more, we need to find the strength to take risks and be more innovative, and we need to learn how to make organizing fun!

In addition, these women organizers agreed that being told we organize like "one of the guys" or that we are "exceptional women" is not progressive. The WOMAN in woman organizer is important, and it doesn't stand for "amateur man." It stands for a growing awareness of different tactics and techniques, and maybe even a growing awareness of unique goals.

## Women Organizers and Leadership

*"Collective leadership is not leaderlessness" - Terry Mizrahi.*

In general, leadership has presented problems for women. We are afraid of leaders because we've learned to associate them with our oppression. We are afraid of being leaders because we don't want to feel separate from the group. And when we do assume leadership roles, we are often not taken seriously or respected; often we are criticized or even attacked. This has led some women to reject the idea of leadership altogether, and place an emphasis on collectivities. However, many so-called leaderless organizations are actually not leaderless at all. There are women who continue to perform the functions of leaders, but they are not given the credit they've earned and deserve. Nor can they be held accountable if something goes wrong.

This dilemma has led some women to begin to develop a new model of leadership (rather than a model of no leadership), and these women organizers made their contributions toward that end. They envisioned a leadership model based on nurturing and enhancing. They felt leaders should be observant and facilitate change in others, Leaders should both have a following and have been followers, and should "embody the people they are leading." Leaders should act as initiators and elicit the best from everyone. And leaders should sustain the group by remembering the group's past and have a vision for the group's future. One woman organizer felt that we should view leadership as representing functions and not a role. Viewed in this way, the concept of leadership embraces the participation of many as opposed to creating competition over the elevation of only a few.

These women organizers felt that women are particularly suited for this more egalitarian form of leadership because women have a more "collegial style" and are more "sisterly." We are generally more flexible and open to new ideas. We can admit our imperfections, which takes the pressure off, and we can tolerate criticism. Women tend to fluctuate more and are more dynamic – we don't aspire to obtain leadership positions and then to stay in them until we are thrown out or until we die. We need to watch other women who are already leaders and experiment with their roles to see what works for us and what doesn't. And we need to improve and encourage those leaders who we already have.

Some of these women organizers feel "organizer" is a better term for what women do than "leader." Organizers make things happen - leaders get or take the credit for it.

## Women Organizers and Power

*"For me as a woman TO GET HEARD IN MIXED GATHERINGS I HAD TO SPEAK LOUDER AND FASTER or they wouldn't let my ideas get in" - Jan Peterson.*

Power seems to have been a difficult topic for many of these women organizers. Discussions about power were often fragmented and disjointed, and there were many digressions as well as anxious laughter whenever the topic came up. When asked to define what power is, they spoke of the threat of violence, media abuses, political corruption, judicial injustices, and economic dependence. It was troubling to discover that, in an effort to define power, these women organizers more readily defined powerlessness.

Unfortunately, associating power with what the "bad guys" have makes it difficult for us as women to mobilize and fight back. The first (and least offensive) definition of power given in the dictionary is the "ability to do; the capacity to act." Is it possible for everyone to be equally able to do and capable of acting? Does this necessarily imply winners and losers? Can we accept a strategy that enhances the power of the many at the expense of the few?

Generally, these women organizers feel that much of the power gained in the women's movement was on a personal level, gained mostly in consciousness-raising groups. We now need to ask ourselves how we can translate that personal power into social power. And, as was the case with leadership, we need to try and redefine what "power" is. We need to find a way of understanding power that is more defensive than offensive in nature. We need to be able to view power as a way of regaining and maintaining rather than obtaining or restraining.

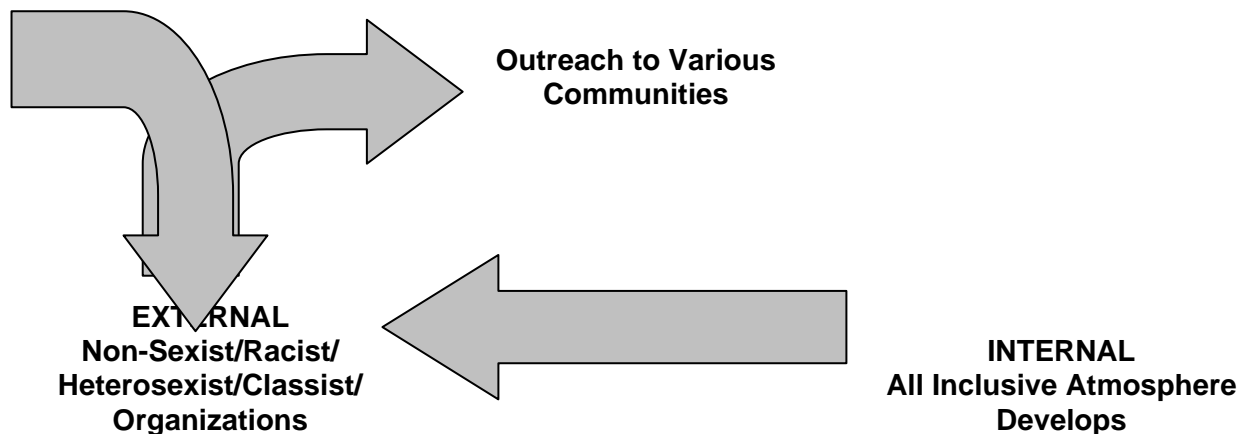
When we recognize that "all of life is politics," we begin to consciously strategize about ways to improve our lives using the political arena. Empowerment is the first step. We must begin by seeing that collective action is the most advantageous strategy for us, and we need to believe that we can really change things. But we must move from empowerment to political action in order to really gain control over our own destinies. We need to start reaching out to all levels of government, not just to the president. Without doing this we will remain powerless.

## Women Organizers and Creating Feminist Organizations

*"Organizations need to be a place where women feel at home" - Beth Ritchie.*

It was generally agreed by these women organizers that typically male dominated organizations, which are characterized by hierarchies and dominant/subordinate relationships, do not make women feel at home. We feel at home when everyone is encouraged to participate, and special attention is given to those who are reluctant to speak out. We feel at home when there is a cooperative style that emphasizes involvement from the "bottom up" rather than the "top down." And we feel at home in organizations committed to a society that respects diversity, and in organizations that reflect that diversity.

Beth Ritchie offered the following formula for developing non-sexist, non-racist, non-heterosexist, and non-classist organizations:



Organizations begin this process by actively pursuing members from various communities. After a while, the organization begins to have an all-inclusive atmosphere, where members of the various communities become "part of the fabric" of the organization. This is largely an internal process. But this leads to changes in beliefs and attitudes, which then motivates the organization to take action against sexism, racism, heterosexism, and classism in the external surroundings.

These women organizers confronted problems they have encountered in trying to develop organizations in which women feel at home. The feminist process is a slow one, and for organizations required to meet certain ends in times of severe cut-backs, this can be more than frustrating - it can mean the end of the organization. Some women spoke of organizations that they worked hard to build with progressive ideals only to see them later turned into service-providing agencies that had no feminist consciousness or process perspective.

As stated, these are hard times for organizing. But these women organizers reminded themselves that we are not working in a circular-rather-than-linear fashion, but in a spiral-rather-than-linear fashion. We are moving forward! And though all recognized the difficulty of keeping our actions in total harmony with our goals, most of these women organizers agreed that we feel most at home in organizations whose means reflect our visions, and not in organizations whose visions justify any means.

## Women Organizers and Diversity and the "Isms"

*"My parents would say, 'Don't forget you're an Indian, but don't be THAT Indian'" - Madonna Beard.*

Discussions related to diversity and the "isms" came up often at the Advance. These discussions were filled with a wide range of emotions and sentiments, self-reflection and intellectual debate. Does cultural diversity "enrich our lives," or does it "separate us?" Are we perpetuating a myth by continuing to refer to "race?" Can we recognize "race" as a myth while still recognizing racism as a reality? Is it selfish to be concerned with issues of oppression regarding gender when other people are starving? For those of us who are "multi-cultural," are we "what we are perceived to be?" Are we "what we are?" Are we "Americans" first and everything else second?

The women's movement has been consumed by these issues for many years. Some of the staunchest critics of the women's movement have been women of color. Challenges became so severe that the women's movement came to be regarded by some as a movement that really only represents the interests of white American middle-class women. This motivated many women concerned with making the women's movement truly representative of the interests of all women to begin reassessing their feelings and thoughts related to diversity and the "isms." One woman organizer said that the inability to reach resolutions to these issues led many women's organizations to "self-destruct."

One woman organizer said that she genuinely feels deprived when issues of diversity and the "isms" are not openly and honestly dealt with. She sincerely believes that dealing with these issues has enhanced her sense of well-being. But another woman organizer said that she occasionally resented the amount of time spent discussing issues of diversity, and complained that such discussions sometimes prevented progressive actions from being taken. Although all of the women organizers at the Advance were committed to a social vision in which no one is devalued on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, or sexual orientation, there was disagreement about how much of that vision needs to be incorporated into the process.

There was also disagreement about what are and are not acceptable things to say when discussing issues of diversity and the "isms." Several times many of the white women organizers in attendance said they were "afraid of saying something wrong." One woman organizer had been accused once of being a racist for reporting what someone else had said. She was forced to give a formal apology although she did not fully understand what she had done wrong. She was still noticeably shaken up by the incident almost 30 years later.

If we are to really deal with these issues, do we need to be able to speak freely and openly? Does "stopping the process" really work to change attitudes? Or does preventing someone from expressing themselves just tell them that they should keep certain thoughts hidden? Looming conflicts and dilemmas related to diversity and the "isms" came up again and again and again at the Advance - scheduled for discussion or not - and at times tensions grew unbearably high.

But these women organizers persisted, and they concluded that the willingness of women to grapple with these issues is a plus rather than a minus. They are committed to examining their own biases, and accepting challenges to their beliefs. They are committed to recognizing and tackling classism along with other isms, and trying to bridge the gaps that exist between themselves and the communities they work with. They will also be more sensitive to ageism, and encourage more older women to join us in our struggles so we can grow together. And ultimately, these women organizers are committed to fighting for social change that brings us closer to an egalitarian world.

## Women Organizers and Lesbian Issues

*"As a lesbian I don't turn myself upside down when I go home from work. I can be the same person everywhere - I don't go home and cook for a man" - Kapp del Villar.*

The Women Organizers' Collective made a conscious effort to invite women from the lesbian community to join in the Advance, and lesbians constituted the largest subgroup. However, despite this, lesbian organizers at the Advance felt disrespected at times. For example, after the various small groups had been assigned to different rooms, these women organizers found themselves relegated to an unenclosed area. They felt that this unfortunate act of insensitivity discouraged women less open about their sexuality from joining them. It was also an oversight that made these women organizers feel less than welcome. And if an event designed by women for women could be guilty of such insensitivity, is there really any place where they as lesbians could feel safe?

Many emotions and thoughts were stirred. They discussed their work organizing the lesbian and gay community. How can they encourage women and men to "come out" and identify themselves as lesbians and gay men when it really isn't safe to do so? They risk not only social ostracism, but the loss of their jobs, possible violent attacks, and even death. In rural areas it is customary to receive anonymous donations at lesbian and gay fund raisers; at garage sales people bring their stuff and disappear. Is it possible to organize an anonymous group or act to promote change anonymously? Building solidarity can someday make lesbians and gay men safe, but they are not safe now.

They discussed difficulties uniting lesbians and gay men. Resistance is greater in urban areas, where each community is large enough so as not to feel any real urgency to unite, and less in rural areas, where there is typically only one "gay" bar. Younger and older lesbians felt they needed to work together one-on-one to see how they differ and how they are the same so that they can learn from each other.

They also discussed the need to identify what really constitutes lesbian issues. They work on women's issues such as reproductive rights, they work on gay male issues related to AIDS, but what about custody rights or lesbian bashing? Issues like these are largely ignored. These women organizers are committed to re-examining this, as well as promoting lesbian visibility.

As stated earlier, the Women Organizers' Collective and the women organizers in attendance at this Advance are committed to dealing with issues of diversity and the "isms." Once the frustration experienced by these lesbian organizers was made clear, it was recognized that the best of intentions may not be enough. When we are not ourselves members of groups that we are working with, we need to ask questions regarding how we can better serve and meet the needs of group members, and we need to listen and respect their unique experiences and perspectives. It is a lesson well learned and taken to heart.

## Women Organizers Discuss Women

*"Women were afraid if they got involved in union organizing they would lose their husbands - and it turned out their fears were justified..." - Susan Perlstein reporting back what was said by Crystal Lee Sutton.*

Mobilizing women can be difficult as well as rewarding. These women organizers agreed that the most difficult thing is getting women to act on their own behalf. Women are afraid to be viewed as "selfish." But in this weakness lies also one of our greatest strengths - we care for and about others, and we are sensitive to the needs of others. The challenge is getting women to see that we can be concerned with others as well as with our own needs. It was suggested that self-interest should be redefined to mean meeting our needs in ways that meet the needs of others, and it was added that being concerned with others may be a way of meeting our own needs. We should also recognize that in our reluctance to appear "selfish," we often do not demand the credit we deserve for the work we do. Ultimately, this only serves to reinforce a world-view that essentially characterizes women as contributing little or nothing.

For these women organizers, the biggest reward in organizing women lies in feeling "more connected" and "more committed." The main drawback is "over-identification." Some of these women organizers found it difficult to separate their needs from the women they work with. Other problems stem from the negative aspects of our shared circumstances and socialization. As one woman organizer put it, "A lot of trips have been put upon us." Some of these women organizers spoke of the suspicion that sometimes exists between women. We often see each other as competitors and not as friends. We need to be sensitive to this, and we need to bring those kinds of misgivings out into the open. We can't join together if we don't trust one another.

## Women Organizers Discuss Men

*"I don't think we always have to compare what we do with men" - Mimi Abramovitz.*

As this statement suggests, the Advance was not a man-bashing fiesta, as many women's gatherings are characterized. In fact, a group designed to explore problems working with men generated so little interest it had to be cancelled. The Advance was not a denunciation of manhood, but a celebration of womanhood!

But men did come up occasionally:

"Some of the most brilliant men I know act like people who have been raised by wolves!"

"We work as women in this egalitarian style, and then one man shows up and takes over!"

"Even in gay groups men tend to take over - including in situations where there are few men!"

"Women are taught to give - men are taught to take!"

"Women's hierarchy of motivation is the opposite of men's. Men typically place themselves first. Women usually try to please their husband or children or family before themselves."

"Men don't even have to ask for help - women will take care of everything they need without their ever asking!"

"The men pit the poor women against the better off women in Zimbabwe!"

"But men are out in the street - women are not!"

"...like people who have been raised by wolves!"

Hmmmm. I wonder if this is what they mean by, "You were always on my mind?"

## Women Organizers Discuss Their Own Issues and Concerns

*"How are you going to make a revolution happen if you have a social life?" - Fran Sugarman.*

The Advance was a time for learning, developing ideas about new models of organizing, building commitments, and establishing agendas. But it was also a time for sharing and learning about each other. Four women were selected by their respective groups to tell their stories because they exemplified what these women organizers felt this Advance was all about. Their stories deserve re-sharing.

**PAULA JOHNSON'S STORY:** Paula was an abused child, and she was brought up at a time when girls didn't have many options. Women were expected to get married and have children. So at age 18, Paula got married, only to find herself again being abused, this time by her husband. At 28 she gave birth to her fourth child and she had a near death experience. As Paula was lying there dying, they brought in her husband, and she thought, "Great, I'm dying. This is it."

And then Paula remembered her children. There was no one she could trust to take care of them, least of all her husband. So Paula survived, and she decided to start living. Paula got a divorce. Then she joined the Battered Women's Movement because of the closeness of the issue to her. Today, Paula is involved in many issues and is feeling overwhelmed - there are just so many issues that need to be addressed. She's had to learn to say 'no.'

And now, looking back, Paula wonders, "Does it have to come to life or death before we as women get involved?"

**YOLANDA SANCHEZ'S STORY:** Yolanda was brought up in New York City and educated quite well, to a Master's Degree. She went through school almost always the only Latina. When she was asked to join a Puerto Rican group, she jumped at the chance. She became thoroughly Latina.

The Puerto Rican community works very hard to cover up its problems related to gender, race and class. Puerto Ricans are not supposed to air their dirty laundry. But when Yolanda ran for City Council in 1977 and was photographed with her afro, it became quite clear to her that gender, race, and class are definitely issues in the Puerto Rican community. And where were the Latinos and blacks at this Advance - why were we not there in representative numbers? They are issues for everybody.

Said Yolanda, "I was raised as a very nice Puerto Rican girl, and what I hope I have become is a very nice Puerto Rican woman!"

**SHIRLEY OBERG'S STORY:** Shirley is from Minnesota. She has worked in the domestic violence field for 12 years. At the time of her awakening, she was what is commonly referred to as "co-dependent." Shirley calls it "a well socialized woman." She had been physically and sexually abused. But when she came into a community with other women who experienced the same thing, she realized that "the personal is political."

Their first organizing efforts emphasized breaking the silence. They then learned that "the oppressed house the oppressor," and that the women they worked with and they themselves had internalized the oppressor's views. They then saw their organization become white, middle class, and heterosexual, and go from one based on social change to one based on providing services. So they realized then that "the oppressed become the oppressors." But then they found that "transformation proceeds social change," and that by reflecting on the process they had gone through they had become aware of the effects of their own oppression. They are now in the business of, not empowering victims, but liberating the oppressed - and they are in the business of encouraging personal transformation.

**SUSAN KAIBONI'S STORY:** Susan started organizing by accident in a way. She came to the United States because women could not study on an advanced level in Zimbabwe. Her parents pushed her to go because they thought they would benefit from it. "Of course, they never actually did benefit from it...."

She worked with a group in New York to aid in the liberation of Zimbabwe, which achieved independence in 1980. Women were at the forefront of the organizing. They raised funds for clothing and food to send over there. In New York, they all felt they had to contribute to the struggle because they would also benefit from liberation. Those who came to meetings more and organized more were women. Susan didn't actually notice that at the time, but after liberation came and the women did not get any positions, they began to talk about their oppression. "So we are now fighting for our rights socially and politically!"

These women truly exemplify all of the women organizers present at the Advance in terms of their strengths. But these women organizers also shared their weaknesses. Many were exhausted - the phrase "over-extended" came up time and time again, and some said they felt "fragmented." Some were actually frightened by how burned out they were feeling. They agreed that we need to understand that if we can't do it, someone else can. We need to ask ourselves what is doable and focus our efforts on smaller pieces. And we need to recognize that issues are interconnected. We need to let go of some issues, and trust that others will take them on, and together we will get things done.

## Women Organizers and the Future

*"I don't want to change the system - I want a new one" - Karen Artichoker.*

These women organizers shared their vision for the future and discussed an agenda for the 1990s. Karen Artichoker's words pretty much sum up their vision for the future. What follows is their agenda for the 1990s, developed by LuAnn Chiola and Solveig Wilder from a session led by Beth Rosenthal.

### WOMEN ORGANIZERS AGENDA FOR THE 1990S

#### I WOMEN ORGANIZING ISSUES

We need to:

1. Build solidarity between women and unions;
2. Recognize the connections between domestic violence and child abuse;
3. Share in the struggles of women with AIDS;
4. Link grassroots organizing to the political process;
5. Join the fight for housing and against homelessness, and for economic development;
6. Work for welfare reforms;
7. Continue to struggle for reproductive rights;
8. Identify health care as a major issue;
9. Make recovery from substance abuse a strategy for community rescue and development;
10. Stop women from silencing their discontentedness with drugs and alcohol.

#### II SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

We need to:

1. Network with other groups and build coalitions ("We have more power than we know!");
2. Work on a multi-issue basis;
3. Take on new issues that directly affect women;
4. Empower women internationally;
5. Recognize education as a critical means to empowerment;
6. Utilize social services as a means to empowerment;
7. Make the transferring of skills, strategies, and information integral to our role as organizers;
8. Develop a theory for action;
9. Use humor as a tool in organizing.

### III WOMEN, POWER, AND LEADERSHIP ROLES

We need to:

1. Recognize that inclusion and solidarity are the hallmarks of women organizers;
2. Get more women in positions of decision making who can put women's agendas into practice;
3. Increase political involvement through voting and registration drives;
4. Use the political arena to maintain gains already made;
5. Build coalitions of progressive women and men.

### IV THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS

We need to:

1. Recognize that how we achieve our goals is just as important as what we accomplish;
2. See the process as lifelong with no beginning or end - therefore there are no failures;
3. Have a key vision of the whole while we chip away at it a piece at a time;
4. Recognize that issues and values are one - values must be turned into issues;
5. Recognize that theory and values infuse practice, and practice shapes theory and values.

### V "ISMS" AND DIVERSITY

We need to:

1. Recognize "ageism" along with other isms;
2. Find ways to reach out to ALL women;
3. Develop multi-cultural, anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, and anti-classist organizations.

### VI THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

We need to:

1. Work together for maternity leave;
2. Work for the expansions of day care;
3. Secure child welfare;
4. Support the development of meaningful jobs;
5. Seek job alternatives that are fulfilling to us as women;
6. Fight to increase the minimum wage;
7. Recognize organizing as holistic – it must consider and include one's personal life;
8. Recognize organizing as a lifelong commitment.

The Women Organizers' Collective drafted A Foundation for Feminist Organizing Principles, which was partially modified by women organizers at the Advance. They are included next to offer us a frame of reference for achieving the many ends outlined above.

## **A FOUNDATION FOR FEMINIST ORGANIZING: PRINCIPLES, GOALS, METHODS, ROLES AND DILEMMAS**

### **(FORMERLY TITLED, "FEMINIST ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES")**

Premises: Feminist organizing is based on values and actions carried out in a democratic, humanistic framework. Its central imperative defines its unique character. Feminist organizing must affect the conditions of women while empowering them. It is based on women's contributions, functions, roles, and experiences and is derived from their strengths, while recognizing the limitations of their socially ascribed roles and the nature of their oppression. A woman's perspective affects: Which issues are selected and worked on; how a problem is defined; what needs will be met; what tactics and strategies are used; and how success or victory is defined.

#### **A. VALUE BASE\***

1. Belief in the dignity and strength of the individual; respect for life.
2. Belief in the individual and collective human capacity to grow and change.
3. Belief in the power and ability of individuals and groups to make changes in the world.
4. The personal is political: The interconnectedness of problems and solutions.
  - a. Personal problems have political (cultural, historical) causes and solutions.
  - b. Personal choices and actions are political and affect solutions or lack of same.
5. Women have distinct perspectives, experiences and histories based on their functions and socially defined roles and have the right to operate from those distinctions.
6. Cooperation rather than competition is the rational way to relate. (Rationality = life over death, quality over quantity, people over property, protection over exploitation of the earth.)
7. Belief that life/living things are interdependent and that people need and seek mutuality and community.
8. Acceptance of different ways of being, thinking, knowing and acting.
9. People have the right to develop and control the institutions that affect their lives.

#### **B. GOALS\***

1. Create a more democratic and egalitarian society; transform society through the reduction of class, status, and power differentials.
2. Meet human needs through resource recovery and development, and in ways that support the ecological balance of earth and universe.
3. Eliminate sexism.
4. Eliminate racism, ageism, homophobia, and discrimination against the disabled.
5. Build community (cooperative, economic, social, and political arrangements).

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\* Revised at the Women Organizers' Advance.

6. Enhance recognition and respect for diversity and differences (of color, class, sexual preference, religion, age, ethnicity, and healing systems).

### C. METHODS, APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

1. Community involvement:
  - a. Validate residents'/consumers'/constituencies' reality, gain knowledge of each "community," and recognize women's abilities to plan for ourselves.
  - b. Involve women in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.
  - c. Identify risks as well as benefits of participation. Recognize service recipient/resident/member vulnerability, and facilitate informed choices.
  - d. Recognize differential ability and willingness to commit time, and facilitate varying degrees of involvement.
2. Emphasis on collective problem-solving:
  - a. Assess and build upon strengths.
  - b. Assess and build upon personal, natural, informal networks and relationships.
  - c. Demystify planning and organizing processes.
  - d. Respect and utilize different kinds of expertise.
3. Emphasis on process as part of the product/goal:
  - a. Build social and emotional support.
  - b. Recognize different types, levels, and styles of leadership.
  - c. Create opportunities for leadership and skills development.
  - d. Grapple with differences between vision of the organizer and the group's vision(s).
  - e. Struggle against group's potential dependency on the organizer, and, at different points in time, the possibility of rejection or hostility toward the organizer.
  - f. Act with people, don't do to or for.
  - g. Build in the time and make it a priority to work issues/differences through.
  - h. Create a safe environment.
  - i. Recognize complex needs, functions, and responsibilities of many women; i.e., women's connections to family and neighborhood (plan meeting space, time and agendas accordingly).
4. Utilize consciousness-raising:
  - a. Name feelings of self and others.
  - b. Build confidence and self-respect.
  - c. Identify how women have been kept out, isolated from others, and separate from their inner voice.
5. Emphasis on consensus, cooperation, collaboration and coalition building:
  - a. Assume principle of least contest.

- b. Anticipate conflict and work toward a conflict-resolution model - a willingness and skill to bargain, negotiate, and compromise.
  - c. Assume common cause and a common social reality on the part of the participants/workers in a system.
  - d. Assume power is not a limited/fixed quantity, but mutable through collective action.
6. Emphasis on unity and wholeness:
- a. Minimize compartmentalization/segmentation of functions and roles.
  - b. Recognize difficulties in splitting the public/private self and arenas.
  - c. Minimize dichotomization or polarization - seek continuity and make connections.
7. Emphasis on a collective/shared problem-solving approach:
- a. There are multiple definitions of the problem.
  - b. The definition of the problem shapes the solution.
  - c. There is no such thing as objective, value-free planning, yet there is a need to be logical, systematic, and consistent.
  - d. Recognize the value of qualitative as well as quantitative data.
  - e. Emphasize effectiveness as well as efficiency.
  - f. Recognize tension between meeting survival/immediate individual and group needs and organizing for structural and comprehensive social change.
8. The use of praxis:
- a. Build in mechanisms for developmental feedback, evaluation, and criticism/self-criticism.
  - b. Build in mechanisms for evaluation of theories, approaches, strategies and tactics.

#### D. FUNCTIONS/ROLES/STYLES OF THE ORGANIZER

1. The organizer's role is multi-faceted and flexible.
2. The function of enabler/facilitator is neither passive nor neutral.
3. The relationship between the organizer and the constituency/ group is transactive: each brings to the effort different/complementary competencies, ideas, experiences and visions.
4. The organizer may be outside the experience, but not the process: the organizer searches for elements of common cause.
5. The organizer guards against elitism, omnipotence (self or other imposed).
6. There is a distinction between professional/work functions and personal relationships.
7. The organizer's style is grounded in authenticity rather than affectation.
8. The organizer inevitably is viewed as leader and role model. The goal is to transfer skills and minimize group's dependency on the organizer.
9. Recognize the inevitability of sexual dynamics and the aura of patriarchal privilege in working with men organizers or constituencies.

**E. TENSIONS AND DILEMMAS FOR WOMEN ORGANIZERS (Partial List)**

The social conditions that shape the lives of women organizers result in both strengths and weaknesses. The following table describes the positive and negatives ways that roles and functions can be performed by women organizers.

<b>Role/Function</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Catalyst/Activist	Initiates and supports the process of empowering others; provides leadership.	Seen as aggressive and controlling; reinforces ideas and insecurities that people cannot lead themselves.
Nurturer	Supports others; sensitive; empathetic; sharing.	Denies self.
Educator	Identifies sources for information; encourages self-directed learning for action.	Allows group to rely on organizer as THE source, or treats group as a fount.
Advocate	Doing with.	Doing for (with some exceptions, i.e., young children, frail elderly, etc.).
Connector (Boundary Spanner)	Links personal with political; limits victim blaming.	Inability to separate value/worth of people from their ideas.
Juggler	Flexibility – work is not all-consuming; recognizes multiple roles in others lives.	Lack of efficiency; single-mindedness.
Facilitator	Fosters cooperation, sharing; tuned in; not invested in her own solutions. Able to let group decide and let others get credit.	Denies differences in natural or acquired abilities; group may not focus; interest in product and goal may wane. Too accommodating; self-effacing.
Mediator	Respects diversity, while identifying common human needs and attributes.	In the face of conflict, gives up responsibility, direction and control.
Relationship with Men	Uses chauvinism as a strategy (i.e., creates access when viewed as a brilliant exception). Validated for work on women's issues (not as threatening).	Ignored, patronized, disparaged, abused.
Relationship with Women	Builds solidarity, common cause, and gender specific relationships; sisterhood.	Traditional hurts of women acted out/tested with the woman organizer.
Add your own...		

Adapted from the writings or ideas of Martha Ackelsburg, Eburn Adelona, Ruth Brandwine, Mary Bricker-Jenkins, Charlotte Bunch, Susan Ellsworth, Nancy Hooyman, Jeanine Hubert, Cheryl Hyde, Barbara Joseph, Susan Lob, Peggy Mathews, Peggy McLaughlin, Terry Mizrahi, Jan Peterson, Beth Rosenthal, Fran Sugarman, Marie Weil, and Guida West.

## Conclusion

As I neared the end of this project, I found that I was stuck on the conclusion. I wanted to write something humorous and "fun," but I couldn't really think of anything from the extensive materials I had reviewed so far. I decided to look over the evaluation forms from the Advance turned in by all of the women organizers who attended.

In response to a question asking for one word to describe the Advance, these women organizers answered AWE-INSPIRING! A BEGINNING! DISAPPOINTING! ENCOURAGING! ENERGIZING! EXCELLENT! GREAT! HEARTENING! INFORMATIVE! INSPIRING! NEEDED! ONENESS! OVERWHELMING! POSITIVE! REAFFIRMING! SLOW! STIMULATING! STUPENDOUS! SUPPORTIVE! THANKYOU! and WELCOME! They felt they benefited the most from discussions related to diversity, from discussions that linked the "personal" with the "political," and from discussions that linked organizing to the larger political arena. They also greatly appreciated the opportunity to once and for all affirm their distinct experiences organizing as women. They thought the Advance would have been better if there had been more diversity among the women organizers in attendance, more emphasis placed on a historical perspective, more structure in the small group discussions, less seriousness, and more "play time."

Overall, I found the evaluations very informative and instructive. I did not, however, find them particularly humorous or "fun."

So I then decided to watch the videotapes from the Advance - I heard they contained footage of the play, the comedienne, and the "good-bye/hello" go around, among other things. I was sure they would be fun to watch, and that something humorous would jump out at me. While viewing the first video I started chuckling. No one looked the way I had imagined. Some were older, some were younger, some were thinner, some were taller. But none of the women organizers looked the way I thought they would. Maybe I would write something about that.

And then I started listening. These women organizers were talking about organizing that spanned 10, 20, 30, and even 40 years! They worked not only with the women's movement, but with unions, the socialist movement, Hispanic organizations, Native American coalitions, the peace movement, and the civil rights movement. Some had run for office, some worked with Ella Baker, some spread the word with "living theatre," and some worked with the SNCC.

And then they stood together hand-in-hand and sang.

*We are gentle, angry people*

*We are singing, singing for our lives*

*We are gentle, angry people*

*And we are singing, singing for our lives.*

-- Holly Near

And I realized these were the faces of women who fought so we could someday take for granted that black, brown, yellow, red, and white are all equally as good. These were the faces of women who fought so we would never again tolerate being abused by any man. These were the faces of women who continue to fight so we may all love and flourish as we see fit. And I realized these were the faces of women who are not only singing for their lives, but for my life - for OUR lives - as well.

While working on this project I have learned about "shared leadership functions," "bottom up" decision making, "horizontal" rather than "vertical" organizational structures, "cultural richness" rather than "cultural diversity," "heterosexism" as well as "homophobia," and I've

learned that we can each take a piece and still change the whole.

But above all, I've learned how important it is to encourage the contributions of all, and to work collectively to reach our ends. It is only by checking out and sharing our principals and practices with each other that truly egalitarian visions can emerge.

As I mentioned earlier, internships have their limits. But I've learned that sisterhood is forever.

I suggest that we make this work a living document, open to all forty-nine women who participated in the Advance for corrections, additions, deletions, suggestions, and/or criticisms. Then I think we should open this up to women across America; no, the world. And men too - I think we should involve men too. Think about it! All 5 billion people on the planet working together to make this document a testament to our convictions!

Just make sure that you direct all of your feedback to Barbara Joseph, Susan Lob, Peggy McLaughlin, Terry Mizrahi, Jan Peterson, Beth Rosenthal, and Fran Sugarman of the Women Organizers' Collective.



# **WOMEN ON THE ADVANCE**

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