

Education Center for Community Organizing (ECCO)

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A FRAMEWORK FOR FEMINIST ORGANIZING: *VALUES, GOALS, METHODS, STRATEGIES, AND ROLES*

WOMEN ORGANIZERS' PROJECT

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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 women'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 [in no order of importance]*

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. Personal is political: The interconnectedness of problems and solutions.
 - a. Personal problems have political (cultural, historical), causes and solutions.
 - b. Personal choice and action is political and affects 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 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. Creating a more democratic and egalitarian society; transforming society through the reduction of class, status and power differentials.
2. Meeting human needs through resource recovery and development that support the ecological balance of earth and universe.
3. Eliminating sexism.
4. Eliminating racism, ageism, homophobia and discrimination against the disabled.
5. Building community [cooperative economic, social and political arrangements].
6. Enhancing recognition and respect for diversity and differences [by color, class, sexual orientation, religion, age, ethnicity and healing system].

* Revised 6/12/89

C. METHODS, APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

1. Community involvement
 - a. Validating people's [resident's/consumers'/constituencies'] reality, knowledge of "community," and women's abilities to plan for themselves.
 - b. Involving women in the planning, implementation and evaluation processes.
 - c. Identifying risks as well as benefits of participation: recognizing service recipient/resident/ member vulnerability and facilitate informed choice.
 - d. Recognizing differential ability and willingness to commit time; facilitate varying degrees of involvement
2. Emphasis on collective problem-solving.
 - a. Assessing and building upon strengths.
 - b. Assessing and building upon personal, natural, informal networks and relationships.
 - c. Demystification of planning and organizing processes.
 - d. Respecting and utilizing different kinds of expertise.
3. Emphasis on process as part of the product/goal.
 - a. Building in social and emotional support.
 - b. Recognizing different types, levels and styles of leadership.
 - c. Creating opportunities for leadership and skills development.
 - d. Struggling between vision of the organizer and the group's vision(s).
 - e. Struggling against group's potential dependency on the organizer, and at different points in time, the possibility of rejection or hostility toward the organizer.
 - f. Acting with people, not doing to or for.
 - g. Building in the time and making it a priority to work issues/differences through.
 - h. Creating a safe environment.
 - i. Recognizing complex needs, functions and responsibilities of many women; e.g., women's connections to family and neighborhood (planning meeting space, time and agendas accordingly).
4. Utilizing consciousness-raising.
 - a. Naming feelings of self and others.
 - b. Building confidence and self-respect.
 - c. Identifying how women have been kept out; isolated from others, separated 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 to and skill in bargaining, negotiating and compromising.
 - c. Assume common cause and a common social reality on the part of the participants and 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. Emphasis on effectiveness as well as efficiency.
 - f. Recognize tension between meeting survival/immediate individual and group needs and organizing for structural, basic comprehensive social change.

8. The use of praxis:
 - a. Building in mechanisms for developmental feedback, evaluation, criticism/self-criticism.
 - b. Building 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; 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 competency of women organizers is derived from both the strengths and limitations of their socially ascribed functions. The following are some of the desired functions and roles with their possible positive and negative components that should be acknowledged, confronted, balanced and/or worked through.

Role/Function	Positive	Negative
Catalyst/Activist	Initiates and supports process of empowerment of others; provides leadership.	Seen as aggressive and controlling; reinforces ideas and insecurities that people cannot lead themselves.
Nurturer	Supports others; sensitive; empathic; sharing.	Denies self
Educator	Identifies sources for information; encourages self-directed learning for action.	Allows group to rely on organizer as the source, or group treats organizer as fount of information.
Advocate	Doing with	Doing for [with some exceptions e.g., young children; frail elderly].
Connector [Boundary Spanner]	Links personal with political; Limits victim blaming	Inability to separate value/worth of people from their ideas.
Juggler	Flexibility; Work not all consuming; Recognizes multiple roles in others lives	Lack of efficiency, and 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 of chauvinism as strategy; [e.g., when viewed as the "brilliant exception" it creates access]; validated for work on "women's" issues [not as threatening].	Ignored, patronized, disparaged, abused
Relationship with Women	Building solidarity and common cause, gender specific relationships; sisterhood	Traditional hurts of women acted out/tested with the woman organizer.
[Add your own]		

This Framework has been adapted from the writings or ideas of the following women [in no order of importance];

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