

# Autonomous Organizing Training

## Materials:

1. New Tools Needed to read beforehand
  2. Presentation slides
  3. Worksheet: Corresponding questions in purple italics below
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## Workshop Notes:

### I. Kick-off

- A. Introductions
- B. Logistics
- C. What to expect in training
  1. Defining “organizing”
    - a) Existing definitions
    - b) Our definition
    - c) Traits of an organizer
  2. Organizing Scenarios
  3. Planning
    - a) Terrain of a struggle
    - b) Goals
    - c) Strategy
    - d) Tactics
    - e) Benchmarks
  4. Key organizing skill: Talking Politics
    - a) Get in the door
    - b) Get their story
    - c) Propose a vision
    - d) Address obstacles
    - e) Advocate & asses
  5. Organizing
    - a) Fostering relationships
    - b) New member integration
    - c) Skill development
    - d) Reflection
    - e) Celebration

### II. Defining Autonomous Organizing

#### A. **Group activity**

1. In your groups, define “organizing.” What does organizing mean to you? List desirable skills and traits of an organizer. *Question 1 and 2*

#### B. Existing definitions of organizing

1. We don't have it all figured out. Can't just import nor condemn old models. Need to think flexibly and experiment. Different time periods and situations require different approaches to building power.
  - a) New Tools Needed
  - b) Non-profit and US union models are hegemonic and invasive
  - c) Can't just copy Black Panthers either
2. **Report back**
  - a) What did you come up with in your definition of organizing? *Question 1*

#### C. Defining "autonomous organizing"

1. *"Getting everyday people to work together towards a shared goal in a way that builds their power."*
2. We don't mean working with the government or in the government or relying on non-profits or any forces outside of us. In other words, we're not putting forward a model for electoral work or mobilizing people to act as warm bodies to combat this or that state policy.
3. People realize their power through collective action, so building power necessitates confrontation with oppressive forces.
4. We say "everyday people" to emphasize that organizing is about working with people who don't already have a rigorous theory of what liberation entails and how to get there, or don't already think of themselves as organizers working toward that goal.
  - a) This is important, because organizing has to constantly be bringing new people into the experience of struggle and so on.
5. We say "autonomous" to emphasize building up networks of people and infrastructure for resistance that are independent of and seek to confront outside influences, such as the state, the police, the bosses, the landlords and sometimes non-profits.
6. **Question:** Do ya'll have examples of autonomous organizing that come to mind?

#### D. Defining "organizer"

1. There are lots of ways to think of organizers, from the heads of electoral campaigns to union staffers.
2. **Report back**
  - a) What did you all come up with for traits of an organizer? *Question 2*
3. *"Politics is a social activity. By listening to people's experiences, feelings and ideas, and dialoguing with them from a philosophical perspective, we don't only spread ideas. We also learn about society, and help people resolve their own internal conflicts and take action to change the world. This is what revolutionary politics is for."*
4. Organizers as facilitators: one key goal of an organizer is to build up others in their capacity for resistance. In other words, we hope to make ourselves replaceable.
5. We CAN and SHOULD develop our skills as organizers.
  - a) Individual strategic thinking skills: goals, strategy, tactics, reflection, etc.

- b) Social skills: talking politics, caring for each other, inspiring others, and most importantly helping others develop these skills
- c) Group skills: making decisions collectively, thinking strategically together, dealing with conflict and disagreement, reflecting together, etc.
- d) Theoretical development: learning from historical wins and losses, studying models of organizing and theories of how we transform our world. We won't deal with this aspect today.

### III. Organizing scenarios

#### A. **Group activity** *Question 3*

- 1. In your groups, brainstorm some organizing scenarios. Pick one that you'll use for the rest of the workshop today. It can be something you're interested in, something you've worked on, or something hypothetical.
- 2. Long-term projects, not one-off actions like a protest to kick fascists off campus.
- 3. **Report back**

### IV. Planning

#### A. Organizing begins from various places, such as...

- 1. Spontaneous activity around a workplace, neighborhood, community, etc.
- 2. We see deplorable conditions and feel like there's potential to get organized to resist.
- 3. Often, a mix. Some level of spontaneity, also some existing relationships and history of struggle.
  - a) Example

#### B. As we get started, we'll need to understand the terrain.

- 1. **Question:** What information is useful when we begin organizing? What do we need to know about the people and the place? Who are all the players to consider? What do we need to know about ourselves? *Question 4*
  - a) How do people relate to each other? What organic infrastructures or networks exist already?
  - b) How have people either adapted to or resisted their conditions?
  - c) What are the identities and social statuses of people affected?
  - d) Who are the enemies and potential allies in the struggle?
  - e) What kind of research will help us better understand the terrain?
  - f) What's the history of struggle in the area?
  - g) How do people understand their oppression?
  - h) What ideas do people have right now about how to fight back?
  - i) What kind of repression might we face?

#### C. Goals

- 1. Goals, strategy and tactics are fluid, shifting and overlapping. Not linear.
- 2. Definition: What you hope to achieve.

3. Example: Bus drivers-- build up labor militancy in the south and contribute to the development of a new model for labor organizing in right-to-work states; help build an independent, self-sustaining organization of bus drivers able to fight for and win better labor conditions and better school conditions for students in a conservative right-to-work state
4. Guiding questions
  - a) How will this force a wedge between sections of the powerful?
  - b) How will this build power/autonomy/agency for us?
  - c) If we accomplish our goals, will the new situation be favorable or easily used against us?
5. **Group activity:** Goals. *Question 5*

#### D. Strategy

1. Definition: How you want to achieve it.
2. Example: Build up participation and leadership of drivers to confront the district; build infrastructure in the form of organization that can extend beyond the strike and foster continuity in the struggle; build up outside support; connect drivers' struggle to other struggles in the county.
3. Guiding questions
  - a) How does our strategy align with our goals?
  - b) Will our strategy help foster the self-activity of everyday people?
  - c) Does our strategy include confrontation?

#### E. Tactics

1. Definition: The nuts and bolts to get there.
2. Example: Meetings, events for drivers, attending school board and other district events, sit-downs with county community groups, a one-day action on the job, etc.
3. Guiding Questions
  - a) How do our tactics align with our goals and strategy?
  - b) Are we able to pull this off successfully with our current abilities?
  - c) Does this tactic foster greater participation or limit it?

#### F. Benchmarks

1. Definition: How we know if we're on our way.
2. Example: A driver-rep signs up 2 new drivers this month. A new driver facilitates a meeting. 50 drivers participate in a one-day action. Are people developing skills? Do the drivers view themselves as part of a collective? Do they identify as the union?
3. Guiding Questions
  - a) Is this measurable? / How do we measure it?
  - b) What steps are needed to make sure we hit our benchmark?
  - c) What will we do if we don't hit our benchmark?
  - d) Can be used to test our power.
4. **Group Activity:** Strategy, Tactics and Benchmarks. *Questions 6, 7 and 8*

----- SUGGESTED BREAK-----

## V. Key organizing skill: Talking politics

- A. Talking politics: We all have different ideas and ways to talk politics with others, but it's good to have basic guidance.
1. *"We don't only spread ideas."* Talking politics with people is nothing like passing on a newspaper or chanting slogans. It is a social activity. The most basic skill of organizing is your ability to listen to other people's grievances and understandings of a place and issue.
  2. It doesn't happen in one conversation and isn't limited just to one on ones. We will go over how to talk politics slowly, in one-on-one conversations, but a lot of the concepts apply in a crowd and can happen very quickly.
  3. Talking politics does not always happen as a verbal conversation. Sometimes we impact others by allowing them to see collective power, and sometimes we bring them into a situation of collective power to bring them along, such as taking part in protest together, etc.
  4. Organizing is 20% questions, 70% listening, and 10% talking. "If you think you're not talking enough, you're talking the right amount. If you think you're talking the right amount, you're talking too much."

**B. Skit: Demonstrate talking went badly, and ask the room what went wrong.**

1. Scenario: in a majority black neighborhood there has been an increased police presence; cops are harassing people; patrol cars are zooming up and down the street; and last month, cops shot and murdered someone. I am at a rally, flyering for the police abolition group I'm part of. I meet this woman, Kei, and wanna talk to her about organizing with my group to push police force out of the neighborhood.

**A:** *Hi, do you have a minute to talk? (barely hears B's response) I am involved in a local group trying to kick the cops out of this neighborhood because we all hate them. I bet you're here for the same reason?*

**B:** *Oh...i don't HATE the cops...that's kind of extreme.*

**A:** *Do you know how many black people are killed by police this year? (keep talking) Our group is doing research and supporting families of victims. We have a lot of good stuff going on. You should be part of. Are you interested?*

**B:** *Sorry I don't think I have time, with two kids, two jobs...*

**A:** *Well I also live in this neighborhood and as a non-black person, I have a moral responsibility to fight for justice. Cops are killing people every day. You should probably hear stories of what it is like to be walking down the street while black and just getting killed for no reason.*

**B:** *My husband and children are black.*

**A:** *Well, actually, that doesn't mean anything (become aggressive) and everyone has internalized whiteness and racism within us, and you are actually being a racist.*

**B:** ???....

**A:** *It's got to stop today. (starts lecturing about something else no longer about inviting B to the police abolition group) Racism in the US has existed since the colonial era, white Americans were given legally or socially sanctioned privileges and rights while these same rights were denied to other races and minorities. White people have enjoyed exclusive privileges in education, immigration, voting rights, citizenship, land acquisition, and criminal procedure throughout American history. You can just google...*

C. **Question:** What went wrong? What would you have done otherwise?

D. Example steps (adopted from *Talking Politics* doc by Stan Weir)

1. Get in the door.
  - a) How do I start up a conversation with a stranger?
  - b) How will I create a situation where this person will be comfortable talking to me about politics?
  - c) Everyone has a different style of striking up conversation, and different kinds of tactics create different opportunities for conversations to take place. Tabling, rally, flyering, on a bus...
  - d) You may not wanna start by asking *if* you can speak with someone, or to *have* a moment of their time. It's better to start with a declarative statement about an issue at hand. For example: "Something needs to be done about so-and-so. If only such-and-such would happen." Another way is to pose a question: "What are we gonna do about these cops?" or "What do you think of this rally?"
2. Get their story.
  - a) What is this person angry about?
  - b) What are recent concerns in the neighborhood?
  - c) Any signs of national policy affect local conditions?
  - d) How do they understand the class conflicts happening in society? What do they think is right vs. wrong? Who do they think has power over who? How do they view their own position in society? Are they resigned, desperate, prayerful, determined, or something else?
  - e) Most importantly, consider how parts of their story conflict with each other. The person may hold an idea but act in a way that's contradictory. Internal contradictions like these aren't bad. In fact, they are a motor that allows people to overcome reservations and take action.
3. Propose a vision.
  - a) The hardest part of talking politics. It forces you to combine your listening skills, your experience in struggle, and your study of history, politics and theory—all on the fly.
  - b) **Restate their story in a larger political context.** "Our whole generation is going through this across the country, because..."

Often this involves showing the person they aren't alone. Show challenges we face are connected.

- c) Offer your perspective on the principles they support and how these might be realized in a free society. Example: "You already have xyz; if we worked together / all got on the same page, we could all run the neighborhood ourselves, and we don't have to rely on so-and-so." Find positive beliefs and actions people can take, not what we want them to do.
- d) This step is challenging; it involves connecting the person's story to your vision of free society. The more you practice, the easier it will be. Often, people will not object to the vision you propose, but actually feel sympathetic toward it.

#### 4. Address obstacles.

- a) It's important to humbly discuss the roadblocks to the vision we just offered.
- b) Otherwise they may think we are some idealists, or that we assume the struggle will be easy.
- c) Try to be in their shoes as much as possible. A good place to repeat & reflect their concerns so they feel heard, even if you disagree.
- d) People may say "people will never get together against xxx" or "government will kill us" but they are right when they say that. It's a responsible thing for us to address obstacles, e.g. we don't want to end up bringing people to a protest just to get everyone arrested. The fears are legitimate; it's about respecting the fear. Helping them pull out potential fears and obstacles because this is their own struggle.

#### 5. Advocate & assess.

- a) Now marshal the moral force of your argument to ask people for a commitment to ACT.
- b) Things to do immediately: to come to an event, meeting, join a campaign, or build something from scratch.
- c) Be encouraging, especially with young and feminized people who are conditioned to lack confidence in themselves. You can phrase your "ask" in a supportive way, like "Your ideas are great! Could you tell other people about it at this meeting?"
- d) Folks will say let me think about it, I know someone who would be interested (get contacts if you can), I'm very busy, I have to go to church, I have kids, etc.
- e) When the conversation is over, assess how much energy to put into a continuing relationship with the person. Are they a potential leader? Supporter? Undecided? Or a Pass?

#### Following up:

- f) Keep inoculating or asking them out, happens in the course of long relationship building. Invite them for coffee etc.
- g) Larger political events might compel them to change their ideas - invite folks to street protests, it might allow them to be exposed to new concepts.

- h) You might have a chance to have a conversation with an undecided person. Things in the world are changing, our consciousness is always going to shift.

E. **Whole room activity:** “One Big Organizer”

- 1. Model a good conversation, where the whole room organizes the trainer, following the 1-2-3-4-5 steps. Use the same scenario from the “bad example”

F. **Group activity:** Pair up group of 2 (set timer) and practice conversations. Stick to the same scenario.

## VI. Organizing: The day-to-day

A. Fostering relationships

- 1. Mobilizing people versus building real relationships of mutual respect and care.
- 2. **Question:** How do we build relationships with people? *Question 9*
- 3. Every meeting, action, tabling opportunity, etc is an opportunity to meet as many ppl as you can.
  - a) You should set personal goals and group goals for how many people you will each meet.
  - b) Each new person leaving a meeting should have at least 1 persons personal phone number.
  - c) If you can schedule a follow-up right then, that’s best.
    - (1) Example: Invite to coffee, meeting, etc.
- 4. Follow up always.
  - a) **Question:** How can we follow up after an initial meeting? *Question 10*
  - b) Take notes after convos.
  - c) Set calendar reminders for follow-ups when you’re juggling a lot.
  - d) Discuss and schedule follow-ups in meetings.
  - e) An in-person meeting is almost always better.
- 5. The more people with contacts, the stronger your project. One person can not hold all the contacts.
- 6. Quality over quantity.
  - a) Anyone can make a listserv or spreadsheet of 100 contacts.
  - b) Personal relationships are more effective for the long-term.
    - (1) Trust is key.
    - (2) Don’t promise what you can’t deliver.
    - (3) Our jobs are not to save people, and we can’t save everyone, but we can wear burn out trying.
- 7. Every campaign or grouping ends-- all things eventually die-- what will we have to show for it? If we’re successful, we’ll have built up networks of people with experiences of struggle. We’ll need to continue to foster those networks.

B. New member integration

- 1. **Question:** How can we integrate new members? *Question 11*



2. After any event or activity, you may have new people trying to join your project. How will you integrate them into the work?
  - a) This is something to plan before an action or event so you have a plan for integration.
  - b) Ask people to complete discrete tasks, not huge projects.
  - c) Scaffolding: pairing people up, helping them along the way.
  - d) Consider their needs, desires, strengths, limitations.

#### C. Skill development

1. If one goal of organizing is to build up others, we should strive to constantly develop our skills as organizers so that we can organize effectively and share those skills with others.
2. How can we work this into our week-to-week or month-to-month? How can we measure and celebrate skill development?
  - a) Example: If door-knocking or tabling is one tactic you use, then your group will need to get good at talking to people. Spend meeting time reflecting on and practicing conversations. If you host large public events, you'll need strong facilitators. Spend meeting time discussing ideal facilitation styles, conflict resolution in large meetings, etc.
3. **Question:** What skills do you need to develop to be a more effective organizer?  
*Question 12*

#### D. Reflection

1. Visit benchmarks
2. Revisit goals, strategy, tactics. Has anything changed that might cause us to alter our strategy? Was that last tactic effective? Why or why not?

#### E. Celebration

1. Often forgotten, but important.
2. Antidote to hopelessness and cynicism
3. Celebrate benchmarks, successful public events, successful actions, skill growth, membership growth, etc.

## VII. Conclude

#### A. What we covered today

1. Defining "organizing"
  - a) Existing definitions
  - b) Defining "autonomous organizing"
  - c) Traits of an organizer
2. Organizing Scenarios
3. Planning
  - a) Understanding the terrain of a struggle
  - b) Goals
  - c) Strategy

- d) Tactics
- e) Benchmarks
- 4. Key organizing skill: Talking Politics
  - a) Get in the door
  - b) Get their story
  - c) Propose a vision
  - d) Address obstacles
  - e) Advocate & Assess
  - f) Get commitment
- 5. Organizing
  - a) Fostering relationships
  - b) New member integration
  - c) Skill development
  - d) Reflection
  - e) Celebration
- B. Training found at [\[link\]](#)
- C. We want your feedback; come talk to us!