AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZER TRAINING: SPEAKER NOTES

Training resources

1. Worksheet for training
2. Slides for training
3. Paired pre-reading for participants

Suggestions

1. A registration form
2. An email collection form for training

Orientations (15 minutes)

A. Facilitator introductions
B. Participant introductions (if size allows)
C. What to expect in training
    a. Part 1: Defining autonomous organizing (20 minutes)
    b. Break (5 minutes)
    c. Part 2: Planning (65 minutes)
    d. Break (30 minutes)
    e. Part 3: Talking Politics (45 minutes)
    f. Break (5 minutes)
    g. Part 4: The day-to-day of running an organizing project (30 minutes)
    h. Review and conclude (10 minutes)
D. Review logistics
    a. Interactive, small group, individual, whole group, worksheet is great for taking notes for yourself or just for brainstorming parts.
    b. This isn't school: I encourage you to be in your body and do what your body needs! If you need to stand up, dance, rock, sit on the floor, go for it. We will also take breaks between every section.
    c. You should take what you need from today. This workshop is always in progress, always changing. Nobody owns it, you can use it later if you want and change it if you want.
E. Are there any questions before we begin?

Part I: Defining Autonomous Organizing (20 minutes)

A. Question: Define "organizing."
B. Existing definitions of organizing
    a. Mention New Tools Needed
    b. There are lots of different models for organizing, each of which comes from its own theory of change.
        i. Some are dominant and their theories are left unexplored.
            1. Why ppl will call for petitions, or protests, etc, on default.

2. The left sometimes tends towards symbolic actions or moralistic arguments for why we should engage certain tactics.
    a. We want to move beyond this.

c. 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.
    i. A new model is needed for our time, which we are all developing together.

C. Defining "autonomous organizing"
    a. By collectively confronting those who exploit and oppress us, we build relationships and organizations that operate independent from ruling class institutions (police, bosses, landlords, the state, sometimes our own unions or non-profits). This lets us exercise power in our everyday lives, and ultimately, over society as a whole.
    b. This definition probably feels easy to agree with, but I think it actually differs from many models out there today.
    c. Let's break that down a little by honing in on some key words that we'll return to throughout this workshop, using the acronym FACE.
    d. Autonomous: We don't mean working with the government or in the government or relying on non-profits or any forces outside of us to drive change. 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.
    e. Confrontation: People realize their power through collective action, so building power necessitates confrontation with oppressive forces.
    f. Everyday lives: 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.
        i. This is important, because organizing has to constantly be bringing new people into the experience of struggle.
        ii. As opposed to advocating on behalf of people, we want to organize *with* people.
    g. The last word is Facilitation, which we'll get to in a minute…
    *h. Open Question**:** Do y'all have examples of autonomous organizing that come to mind?*

D. Defining "organizer"
    a. So what's an organizer? Lots of pictures in our heads, perhaps. Union staffer? Head of a non-profit?
    b. When I first started organizing, I would see certain people and think, "wow, this person is a natural leader. They were made for this. I can never be like that." I've come to learn that organizers are not born; they're made. We CAN and SHOULD develop our skills as organizers.
    c. Question: So what are some desirable roles and traits of an organizer?
        i. Strategic thinking skills: goals, strategy, tactics, reflection, etc.
        ii. Social skills: talking politics, caring for each other, inspiring others, and most importantly, helping others develop these skills
        iii. Group skills: making decisions collectively, thinking strategically together, dealing with conflict and disagreement, reflecting together, etc.

iv. Learning and teaching: learning from historical wins and losses, studying models of organizing and theories of how we transform our world.

d. Facilitator: one key goal of an organizer is to build up others in their capacity for resistance.
   i. Participate democratically in organizations or projects.
   ii. Help facilitate the development of others and the organization as a whole in order ***to make ourselves replaceable.***

e. Today, we'll pull back these four words (FACE) as we go throughout the training to remind us of our framework. As we go through the next section, we can all keep these four words in mind as we start to get into planning.

Break (5 minutes)

Part 2: Planning (65 minutes)

Covering Terrain, Strategy, Goals, Tactics, & Benchmarks

A. Terrain**:**

a. The first thing you have to do when a campaign starts is assess the "terrain." Your campaign takes place in a particular territory (a neighborhood, workplace, housing portfolio etc). It's trying to engage working class people to change that reality -- people with common patterns of work, school, home, and family, with shared histories of oppression and resistance.

b. 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? How can we find that out?

c. Open Question: Brainstorm on the board together. What do we know; what do we need to know?

d. Backpocket:
   i. MST's *Method of Work and Popular Organization* manual says we must study things like "the situation of exploitation and misery in which the masses live; problems they confront...history of developed struggles and their results; forces that dominate and control the masses (of the right and left); what is their... predominant culture, symbols and beliefs, sentiments; taboos; pastimes; degree of literacy; geographic concentration; and possibility of articulation and amplification through the movement."
   ii. How do people relate to each other? What organic infrastructures or networks exist already?
   iii. How have people either adapted to or resisted their conditions?
   iv. What are the identities and social statuses of people affected?
   v. Who are the enemies and potential allies in the struggle?
   vi. What's the history of struggle in the area?
   vii. How do people understand their oppression?
   viii. What ideas do people have right now about how to fight back?
   ix. What kind of repression might we face?

e. *Open Question: How can we find out the information needed?*

f. Backpocket:
    i. Surveys: door to door, in person
    ii. Research: News articles, demographic data, neighborhood or workplace historian?
    iii. The collective knowledge of a committee or core group: putting our heads together.
    iv. Meetings, town halls, visioning sessions, etc.

B. Introduce example

We provide the following example to show how we run this section. We encourage you to delete and write in your own example from your organizing.

a. We're going to go through goals, strategy and tactics next. It's important to note that these things are fluid, often overlapping, and not linear. To help concretize the conversation, I want to introduce an example. Afterwards, we'll break into smaller groups where you'll all identify goals, strategy and tactics for your organizing.
b. A few years ago, I ended up organizing with school bus drivers in my county who came together to fight for higher wages and better benefits and treatment at work. In an inspiring move, these workers had organized themselves to stage a three-day strike without any support from a union, a non-profit, politicians, or anyone with any kind of official power. On the first day of the strike, over half of the county bus drivers called in sick. On the third day, the bosses fired 8 of the organizers.
c. Through preexisting organizing relationships, myself and a few comrades ended up invited into the organizing by the fired workers. Over the course of a few months, the drivers and this small group of outside supporters were able to get all 8 drivers reinstated and help the workers win some small concessions from the county.
d. I will use this example today in part because it will allow me to break down goals, strategy, and tactics in a clearer way.

C. Goals
    a. Definition: WHAT you hope to achieve
    b. Guiding questions
        i. Can this force a wedge between sections of the powerful?
        ii. How will this build power/autonomy/agency for people?
        iii. If we accomplish our goals, will the new situation be favorable or easily used against us?

D. Strategy
    a. Definition: HOW you plan to achieve your goals.
    b. Guiding questions
        i. How does our strategy align with our goals?
        ii. Will our strategy help foster the self-activity of everyday people?
        iii. Does our strategy include confrontation?

E. Tactics
    a. Definition: The nuts and bolts to get there.
    b. Examples: a petition, a protest, a lockdown, a strike, a press conference, canvassing, social media, a newspaper article, a meeting, a barbeque, etc.

c. Guiding questions
    i. How do our tactics align with our goals and strategy?
    ii. Does this tactic foster greater participation or limit it?
    iii. Are we able to pull this off successfully with our current abilities?

F. Benchmarks
    a. Definition: How we know if we're on our way.
    b. Examples:
        i. Quantitative: A new person facilitates a meeting. 50 people participate in a one-day action. 3 new people come to a meeting.
        ii. Qualitative: Are people developing skills? Do people view themselves as part of a collective? Are people talking outside of meetings and bringing ideas to the group? Does the boss/enemy seem scared?
    c. Guiding Questions
        i. Is this measurable? / How do we measure it?
        ii. What steps are needed to make sure we hit our benchmark?
        iii. What will we do if we don't hit our benchmark?
        iv. Can be used to test our power.

G. Example on slides
    a. Goal: The most immediate goal the drivers named was to get the fired driver's reinstated in order to propel the struggle forward and prevent people from being intimidated.
    b. Strategy: One strategy was to convince the bosses to do the right thing.
    c. Tactic: That led to a requested closed door meeting with the drivers' bosses and an outside supporter, with no drivers' present.
    d. Question: What might not work about this strategy and tactic? Think about FACE.
    e. So we named some others goals: build an independent self-sustaining organiziaton and build up labor militancy in the South. That allowed us to reject the initial strategy and develop a new one.
    f. And that changed the strategy and tactics for the first goal.

H. Reminder: Goals, strategy and tactics are fluid, shifting and overlapping. Not linear. You want to go back and forth to make adjustments based on what you learn along the way

Group activity (30 mins)

Each group will pick a goal, develop a strategy, pick a few tactics, and set benchmarks.

A. Page 4 on worksheet corresponds
B. Pick 1 person to report back
C. Give groups concrete organizing scenarios or let them workshop their own organizing projects/campaigns.

We encourage you to break people up into groups that make sense for the participants, whether that's project-based or everyone breaking up but workshopping the same project/campaign/issue.

Report back (15 mins)

Break (30 minutes)

Part 3: Talking Politics (45 minutes)

Skit: Facilitators model a bad organizing conversation.
We provide Stop Cop City as an example on the slides, but encourage you to come up with your own example specific to local organizing.

Popcorn: What went wrong? What would you have done?

Talking politics

A. "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."
B. We're going to be working off of the AEIOU model from the IWW. The point is learning how to move people, and ourselves, from apathy, fear and division, towards determination and unity. We'll explain each part, then have a chance to practice.
    a. Keeping in mind…
        i. AEIOU can work very differently depending on context. Many times, it goes very slowly and we are always going back to the beginning (and we usually don't try to get through this all in one conversation). Sometimes, it can go very quickly. Often, it's done 1-on-1, but sometimes it can happen with entire groups.
        ii. AEIOU 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.
        iii. Remember to listen. 80-20. 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.

AEIOU

A. AGITATE

    b. What does it mean to agitate?
        i. Discovering the issues that can motivate people and bring them to the forefront of a person's consciousness.
        ii. To get through our daily lives at work and home, we have to pave over the things that piss us off and bury our anger.
        iii. We want to help ppl feel justified in their anger and help them see their experience is not an accident.
    c. Agitation has two parts:
        i. By asking questions, you find someone's issues.

ii. By asking more questions, you get the person to tell you stories about their issues, stories with emotional content. You get their desires, their motivations, their stake in a particular issue.

d. Avoid leading questions; use open-ended questions that validate anger: Wow, how long has that been going on? Is that okay with you? How is that affecting your family? How does that make you feel? How are you coping?
e. Don't be a robot-- connect to your own anger. Remember why you're doing this work in the first place.
f. Here you'll also have to think on your feet and use your knowledge of history and current events in order to help someone understand that their problems are connected to broader systems of exploitation.
    i. Someone mentions that living on $12/hr wage makes it near impossible to support children or save? You know that the minimum wage hasn't increased for decades, while the .01% hoards the vast majority of wealth in the world. Someone mentions that they're now afraid to drive because a traffic stop might cost them their residency in the States? You know that under Obama and Trump federal and state legislation has made collaboration between local cops and ICE much easier.
g. You're not lecturing someone here. You're making it easier for them to place their individual story within a larger story.

B. EDUCATE

a. In a nutshell, agitation poses a problem. Education explains how collective action is the answer to that problem.
b. These two must happen together!
    i. Because if we just get people angry we're not doing them any favors. We might even make them feel disempowered by thinking about the enormity of the problem at hand. We all know we face big problems, and we're told every day that there's nothing we can do about them. (Climate Change is a good example here.)
c. This is where it is important to be educated ourselves. If we know about examples of successful organizing elsewhere, we can share them.
d. Prioritize open-ended questions. "What if everyone in the neighborhood refused to talk to the cops? What if we all went into the administration building right now and refused to leave? What if we stopped paying rent together? What if we refused to work overtime together?"
e. Listen to their ideas for solutions.
f. The important thing is to help give others hope and a sense of urgency.
    i. Present a viable plan to win, or pointing to examples of successful wins in other places or times, and making clear why they have to act NOW to realize this potential.
    ii. We are told every day that things are hopeless, and that we can't do anything about it. This is where we can help each other realize the power that we do have.

C. INOCULATE

a. Inoculation means preparing for possible outcomes.
b. Concerns are good.
    i. It means that people are thinking critically about taking action and already thinking through what it might look like if they did. It would be more concerning if someone was ready to take action without evaluating the risk to themselves and others. Political action comes with risks and the more prepared we are for them together, the closer we'll get to achieving our goals.
c. THIS IS NOT AN OPTION
    i. This may be the most important part of organizing, and where a lot of organizing falls apart. Even if you are having a very basic interaction, include at least a little bit of inoculation. Example: If meeting with a co-worker, at the end, ask them "What do you think the boss would do if they knew we were talking about this stuff?"
d. What are they expecting?
    i. Begin by asking them what kind of opposition we might face. Let them go through small and big things, ranging from harassment or being mean all the way to firing/eviction/arrest etc.
e. What aren't they expecting?
    i. Once you've let them think through what to expect, prepare them for things they might not expect. In a workplace, this might look like the boss "playing nice" to emotionally manipulate, or hiring expensive union-busting lawyers.
f. How do we deal with fear?
    i. Return to agitation. We use fear to keep from confronting our problems, and the way to break through it is to remind each other of what it is that is motivating us to move in the first place - where our anger stems from.
g. The more you can prepare people for the worst case scenarios (or even the less bad ones), the more confident people will feel in taking risks they know the consequences

D. ORGANIZE

a. By this point we've helped people get in touch with their desires for action, thought through how collective action might address their grievances, and helped people think through the risks of taking action. It's not a linear equation here, but at some point it will be time to get a commitment. This means asking people to take up and follow through with particular tasks.
b. Tasks are anything that will take you from A to B - making a flyer for an event, booking a space, getting other organizations to sign on to your event, organizing food and transportation, coordinating the route of a march.
c. This is the most direct work of organizing, and can often be the most revealing. Asking someone to take on a task demonstrates their level of commitment to the work, which is important information for an organizer to know. You'll need to be able to know who you can rely upon to get a thing done, especially when your organizing work heats up.

d. It also can serve as an open invitation for someone to get involved with the work who might initially be reluctant. This can look like a lot of things. For example, a task can be tailored to that person's interest or skills (flyer design if they are crafty, or tabling if they're chatty). It can also be more or less complex, depending on the person's involvement.
e. Ultimately the idea is to build up other people's confidence in taking up, carrying out and eventually devising tasks of their own that further your organizing work. Remember, the goal is to make yourself replaceable and everyone is better off by having more confident and capable people who can operate autonomously.
f. Present the ask then…
g. WAIT!
h. Follow up and scaffolding

E. UNITE

a. We'll always be going back through AEIOU, and hopefully the new organizers that we've built up will be giving us the same.
    i. When you inoculate, you should organize again; get a re-commitment.
    ii. If people are starting to express sympathy for the boss or landlord, you'll have to return to agitate and educate.
b. Everything in AEIO is about building the basis to take collective action with other people. Unite is about deepening that basis, so that we can take stronger and stronger actions together.

Exercise: "One Big Organizer"
One facilitator acts as a coworker/event attendee/contact while participants take turns trying to move them through AEIOU. The other facilitator chimes in along the way as participants skip steps or talk too much or get stuck.

Exercise: Break into pairs
One person plays organizer; then switch.

Break (5 minutes)

Part 4: Day-to-day practice (30 mins)

We've defined autonomous organizing and outlined how to wage campaigns.

In this final section, let's explore day-to-day practices that help build autonomous organizations.
As we organize and develop campaigns day-to-day, we work to

1. Foster relationships
2. Integrate and develop members in our autonomous organizations
3. Reflect on and improve our activities
4. Make meaning out of our milestones, setbacks and victories

A. Fostering relationships
    a. Intro
        i. It matters how many people your organization knows and integrates.
        ii. But anyone can make a listserv or gather 100 contacts on a signup sheet. We don't just want to "turn people out" like numbers.
        iii. What's more important is the quality of relationships you build with people.
        iv. *Question: How do we build real relationships that entail mutual respect, trust, and care?*
    b. **Take every opportunity**
        i. Every meeting, action, flyering (etc) is an opportunity to meet someone you could collaborate with
        ii. Some leftist events can be cliquey. But the point is to be outgoing and connect.
        iii. This can be challenging if you're an introvert like me. Challenge yourself! In changing the world we change ourselves!
    c. **Be intentional**
        i. Set goals: for this event, what types of people, how many, do you want to meet?
        ii. Example: at an open meeting, we prioritize meeting first-time attendees and aim to get their contact info
        iii. Write down memories of the people you meet. Otherwise you will forget!
    d. **Follow up**
        i. Check in about follow-ups at meetings: who is following up with who?
        ii. Invite the person to coffee, meet at an event or action, etc. In-person is best. Work around their availability.
        iii. Be direct about what you want to discuss: hear what they thought, to see if you can collaborate, to invite them into the organizing (because you think they'd care about the issue, they have unique perspective and skills, etc)
B. Follow up: Remember
    a. **Relationship-building is everyone's responsibility**
        i. One person can't hold all the contacts
        ii. The more your organization is a web, where each person knows several others, the stronger it is
    b. **Consider your social positions**
        i. You don't want anyone to think you're asking them on a date
        ii. Each person brings a unique perspective, skills, knowledge
    c. **Be honest when you build with people**
        i. Establish trust and forthrightness from jump
        ii. Don't promise what you can't deliver
        iii. We don't save people. We offer what we can to struggle together.
    d. **Every campaign or organization ends**
        i. When this happens, what will we have to show for it?
        ii. If we're successful, we will have waged campaigns, raised political consciousness, weakened the ruling class etc
        iii. Most important: we'll have built up networks of people with experiences of struggle

C. Integrate new members
    a. *Question: After any event or activity, you may have new people trying to join your project. How will you integrate them into the work?*
    b. **It helps to plan ahead**
        i. As you plan one event/action, what will be the next activity you invite new people you meet to?
    c. **Invite new members to do discrete, meaningful tasks**
        i. Research shows people get involved with new groups when they can start with tasks that are limited in scope, just challenging enough, and whose contribution to the larger goal is clear
    d. **Scaffolding**
        i. Think of your organization as a collection of activities, each one preparing members to take on the next-most-complex one. Aka "scaffolding"
        ii. You can also "scaffold" activities by making them easier the first time around. For example, by pairing a new member with an experienced member
    e. **Train for how you fight**
        i. Think about what tactics your group will have to carry out to pursue your strategy. Then, build scaffolding and trainings for these activities.
        ii. 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 practicing conversations and reflecting after door-knocking.
        iii. Example: If you host large public events, you'll need strong facilitators. Spend meeting time discussing ideal facilitation styles, rotating facilitation in your own meetings, etc.
    f. **Consider each member**
        i. Sometimes it helps to take stock of each member individually, and how they are growing. You can do this collectively too.
        ii. What are members skilled at already? Where do they know they need to grow? How do they want to challenge themselves?
        iii. What skills do they improve at quickly? What skills could they develop that the group needs?
    g. *Question: What skills do you need to develop to be a more effective organizer?*
D. Reflection
    a. Without it, you can lose direction and become reactive, or gloss over problems that could lead to defeat
    b. Revisit your goals, strategy and tactics at turning points in your organizing
        i. How do your current activities fit into the overall strategy?
        ii. How do your results compare with your benchmarks? What do you make of this?
        iii. Has anything changed that might cause you to try new tactics, adjust your strategy, or redefine your goals?
    c. Build reflection into your meetings, or schedule reflection meetings specifically for it
E. Make meaning
    a. **Define**
        i. By "make meaning" we mean developing a shared understanding of the broader significance of our efforts, setbacks and victories, beyond their immediate contribution to a given campaign
    b. **This aspect of organizing is often forgotten, but it is very important**

i. Helps us answer existential "what's the point" questions
ii. Reaffirms purpose, community, and hope in the face of cynicism, smallness and hopelessness
iii. Gives us emotional strength and conviction to continue in the struggle

c. **Can you think of any examples of how organizations make meaning?**
i. Throwing a party to celebrate achieving a benchmark or winning a small victory
ii. Hosting a welcome event for new members
iii. Holding a memorial for a member who has passed away
iv. Opening or closing public meetings with a song
v. Dedications in group writings
vi. Naming buildings after significant dates or people

<u>Review and conclude</u> (10 mins)

A. What we covered today
a. Defining "organizing"
i. *Ask participants to recall F-A-C-E and a simple definition of each.*
1. Facilitation, Autonomy, Confrontation, Everyday lives
b. Planning
i. *Ask participants to recall definitions of goals, strategy, tactics and benchmarks.*
c. Talking Politics
i. Ask participants to recall AEIOU with 1-3 word definitions of each.
d. The day-to-day
i. *Ask participants for 1 or 2 things that stood out from this part that they feel like they hadn't considered before or has dropped off from their practice.*

B. References and contact info
a. We'd love your feedback. Approach us after or send us an email.
b. Training to train: If you'd like to use this for your own purposes, let us know. We'll hook you up with the training materials, and can even help you run a training.