

Grassroots Organizing: Community Organizing Outcomes Map

Community organizing involves itself in urban social and political processes in dynamic ways. One of the challenges in studying organizing, however, is to understand the full breadth and depth of outcomes which are a consequence of organizing. This brief summarizes the results of a study at Colorado State University. The study examined outcomes of community organizing as practiced by a grassroots community organization (GCO) in a western United States city. The GCO includes schools and congregations among its member organizations. At the time of the evaluation, it had committees working on many issues including access to healthcare, education reforms, college access, and neighborhood safety.

To create an outcomes map, twenty-one community leaders participated in a process called *concept mapping*. Leaders brainstormed responses to the statement: “Think about yourself, your family, your child’s school, your church and your neighborhood. When [our GCO] does community organizing, this is what happens: _____.” After generating many responses, leaders then sorted a set of eighty-nine responses into groups. Each person sorted in accord with his or her own understanding of the outcomes; there were no pre-defined groupings. After sorting, statistical techniques were used to depict the many sets of sorted responses together on one map. Finally, community leaders reviewed the map and chose appropriate names for five groupings of the eighty-nine responses. The outcomes map is shown on the reverse page.

The first cluster (at left of map) is named *victories*. This name refers to the public outcomes of the organizing work, for example, the opening of a health clinic. Moving clockwise, the next cluster is named *personal development*. This name signifies the increased personal awareness and empowerment that leaders experience when they participate in organizing. For example, they may learn to look beyond narrow self-interest and may become aware of additional public issues. Moving down, the third cluster is called *public leadership skills*. This indicates the democratic process skills that leaders learn and use when they work to address community problems – writing a press release, for example. At the bottom left, the fourth cluster is named *relationships with power people*. It represents the GCO’s cultivation of relationships with public officials (such as the school system superintendent) and its leveraging of such relationships to effect positive change. Finally, the last cluster is named *culture of civic engagement*. This cluster reflects many of the activities and behaviors that GCO leaders use to carry out their organizing work, such as recruiting neighbors to attend a public meeting.

Leaders’ participation in the *concept mapping* process has produced a credible articulation of the results of this GCO’s work. The map showcases the range of outcomes from the organization’s work – both public goods and private gains – in a simple, yet comprehensive, visual display.

Rebecca Orsi, PhD
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado

Grassroots Organizing: Community Organizing Outcomes Map

