What is Organizing?

The Jyot Curriculum

THE SIKH COALITION
## What is Organizing?

### Learning Objectives
- Define organizing and identify components of organizing
- Distinguish organizing as a unique way of creating social change
- Describe skills of an organizer
- Apply the principles of organizing to develop solutions to community problems

### Materials Needed
- Easel with chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- “Yes” and “No” signs
- Tape

### Skills to Learn
- Leadership
- Campaigning and Organizing
- Community Bridging

### Prerequisite?
*Pyramid of Power*

### Facilitator’s Key
- Say out loud
- Video
- Conversation/Debrief
- Reference Powerpoint

### Workshop Timeline

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<th>Activity</th>
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<td>Issue Brainstorm</td>
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<td>Definition of Organizing</td>
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<td>How Organizing Has Impacted Our lives</td>
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<td>Organizing Myths</td>
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<td>Different Ways to Create Change</td>
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**What is Organizing?**

### Issue Brainstorm

Today we’re going to talk about issues in our communities and how to combat them. Can you all tell me of some important problems that you see in your communities?

- Mental Illnesses
- Sexual Assault
- Domestic Violence
- Gender Roles
- Sexism

*These are a few issues we see in the Sikh community. Before tackling these issues, it is important to sketch out a plan and create a blueprint. Next we are going to discuss how we can organize and create a blueprint to initiate change.*

### Framing

The ruling class is organized to build and maintain power. This group consists of a small group of people holding a huge amount of power, and they hold on to this power by actively by oppressing the majority. It has organized wealth; it controls the government, the military, and the media. We, on the other hand, are a much larger group of people (generally poor and working class, people of color, youth, women, queer, etc.), but we’re disorganized and not unified behind a vision for change.

*But the reality is that we have the power to change the system, because it relies on us to function. Minorities built this system with their blood and sweat, and we can take it down if we decide to. Its power depends on us.*

What are some examples of how minority and/or oppressed groups built this system?

- Slavery
- Violent takeover of Native American land and resources
- Women's unpaid and unrecognized labor
- Modern day slavery via prison labor
- Sweatshop labor
- Immigrant labor

*Our collective power as a people is the only thing that can change the current set-up.*
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Framing (continued)  

What do we mean by “people power?” What kind of power do we have? And how can we exercise that power?

➢ Ask youth to shout out answers. Write down answers on chart paper. Some examples include:

➢ We have the power of our labor, and that power can be exercised through strikes
➢ We have the power of our larger numbers, and that can be exercised through mass demonstrations and civil disobedience to shut down the system.

We need organized power to directly challenge their organized power. History has shown that people with power will do almost anything to keep it.

Can you think of examples of people in power who have done anything necessary to keep it? [Example: Indira Gandhi in India – declaring state of emergency when her power was in jeopardy.]

Organizing is the main tool that people have for harnessing collective power to change the balance of power. Organizing is the process we use to engage masses of people. We organize to build people’s power and dismantle the system’s power.

Definition of Organizing

➢ Write out on chart paper or a whiteboard: Organizing is the process of building organizations of oppressed people who use their collective power to win changes in peoples’ lives and shift the balance of power.

➢ Review parts of the definition:

➢ Building organizations of oppressed people: Our main power is our collective power, and our collective power can only be sustainably expressed through organizations. Also, the organizing approach believes that we have to build organizations of people who are directly impacted by issues because oppressed people will be in the fight for the long haul and because we have fundamental power in society.
**What is Organizing?**

**Definition of Organizing (continued)**

➢ **Win changes in people’s lives:** An anti-colonialist leader, Amilcar Cabral, once said, “Remember always that the people do not fight for ideas, for things that only exist in the heads of individuals. The people fight and they accept the necessary sacrifices. But they do it in order to gain material advantages, to live in peace and to improve their lives, to experience progress, and to be able to guarantee a future to their children.”

➢ **Shift the balance of power:** While we have to fight for immediate changes in people’s lives, we also have to keep the long-term movement and the long-term shift in the balance of power always in sight. The term organizing is often used to refer to all kinds of social change work. The reality is that organizing is a specific social change tool within a spectrum of social change work.

**How Organizing Has Impacted Our Lives**

➢ Post a sign on one side of the room that says “YES,” and a sign on the opposite side of the room that says “NO.”

> We're going to get up from our seats and get moving. Everyone should get in to a line down the middle of the room. As you can see, the sign on one wall says, “YES,” and the sign on the other wall says “NO.” I’m going to read out a statement and if the statement is true for you, then you move to the YES wall. If the statement is not true for you, then you move to the NO wall. After each statement, I will read out a fact that relates to each statement. You can line up again in the center after you hear each fact.

➢ **Statement:** You have worked a minimum wage job.

➢ **Fact:** Historically, workers organized and fought for the implementation of a minimum wage so that legally, bosses had to pay workers at least a certain amount.

➢ **Statement:** You have worked a living-wage job (look up the current living wage for your state).

➢ **Fact:** Workers in some cities have even succeeded in getting a living wage – this is the wage that is considered to give workers enough money to comfortably survive.
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How Organizing Has Impacted Our Lives

20 mins

➤ Statement: You have ridden the bus (school bus or public transportation).
➤ Fact: Black community organizers led a citywide bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, which contributed significantly to desegregating public transportation in 1956.

➤ Statement: Your family has had to move around because the rent became unaffordable.
➤ Fact: In the 1930s, community organizers in New York fought for rent control, so that landlords could not charge outrageous rents that poor people could not afford.

➤ Statement: You or someone you know has taken an ethnic studies class, either in high school or in college.
➤ Fact: Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, and Asian American youth fought and led school walkouts in the 1960s to demand more community control over our schools. These strikes led to the creation of ethnic studies programs in several high schools and colleges. The first Black Studies Department in the nation began at San Francisco State University in the ’60s.

➤ Statement: You or someone you know voted in the last election (local, state, or national).
➤ Fact: Women and black people organized for the right to vote. Women were granted the right to vote in 1921. Black people were granted the right to vote, first after the Civil War, and then again in 1964 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

➤ Statement: You’re currently wearing anything that is Nike, Gap, Old Navy, Rocawear, Sean John, Baby Phat, or Victoria’s Secret.
➤ Fact: All these companies use sweatshop labor – exploit their workers to make a bigger profit. In 1995, Asian American Immigrant Advocates led a successful campaign against Jessica McClintock, whose sweatshop workers manufacture party dresses. As a result of their organizing, the workers won back wages for laid-off garment workers, money for an education fund for garment workers, state literature to inform garment workers of their rights, and a hotline for garment workers to report abuse by employers.

Everyone can go ahead and sit down now. All of these statements/facts relate to victories that have been won as a result of people organizing and fighting for change. We did this activity so we can understand how organizing has had an important impact on our lives.
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How Organizing Has Impacted Our Lives

- We should also understand that even though victories have been won, there is still a lot more our communities need to fight for.

- Ask for examples of organizing in Sikh history? For example:
  - Banda Singh Bahadur organizing forces during Khalsa Raj
  - [Have four components written up on pieces of paper on the wall, and ask individuals to read them aloud.]

- There are four major components of the organizing process [have students read them aloud]:
  - **Base-building:** Reaching out to and educating members of your constituency in order to engage them in organizational activities and recruiting them to become members of your organization.
  - **Leadership Development:** The constant work to develop new leaders while simultaneously deepening the leadership of more veteran members.
  - **Campaign Development:** Building intensive, sustained, coordinated, and strategic fights to win change on specific issues.
  - **Organizational Development:** Building clear and stable organizational structures and systems that enable the participation of members and the long-term survival and growth of the organizations.

These four components are the cornerstones of the role that organizing plays in the movement-building process. Base-building is the way that organizing engages masses of people. Leadership development is how organizing helps to develop people to lead the broader movement. Campaign development is what puts the movement in motion in a particular direction, and organizational development gives us the structures that move forward the overall movement process.

These four components don’t function separately. They are deeply interconnected and they build on each other. For example, if you build a large base, you are able to have great campaign success. At the same time, your campaigns are key leadership development opportunities.
Now let’s discuss a historical example of organizing. Who knows who Rosa Parks is? [Let 1-2 youth describe who she was/what she did.]

So the story we usually hear about Rosa Parks is: One day, spontaneously, Rosa Parks was tired and didn’t want to give up her seat and so she decided not to get up, and this sparked a movement.

In reality though, Rosa Parks was not just some random woman who was really tired one day and decided not to give up her seat on the bus. She was actually an experienced civil rights organizer who organized the Women’s Political Caucus, and knew that when she didn’t give up her seat, she would be sparking a movement. It was a planned action, not just an accident.

We are not taught the whole truth about Rosa Parks. Her story is a good example of two myths that exist about organizing: the “superhero myth” and the “spontaneous combustion myth.”

What do you think the superhero myth is? [Take some responses and then clarify the definition.]

➢ Superhero Myth: the idea that a superhero swoops out of the sky to save the day.
➢ This myth makes us believe that we just have to wait around for the superhero to appear, because we are not superheroes, and therefore we can’t change things.

People think that Rosa Parks was some superhero woman who sparked this whole movement, when actually she was just a normal woman who took a stand for justice for black people. Leaders do have a role, but the movement is made up of all the people who take part in it. Any questions?

What do you think the spontaneous combustion myth is? [Take some responses and then clarify the definition.]

➢ Spontaneous Combustion Myth: the idea that movements happen like a big explosion – all of a sudden, usually following a crisis.

We hear that one day, out of the blue, Rosa Parks was tired, decided she didn’t want to give up her seat, and all of a sudden, a movement happened. This gives us the idea that movements explode out of nowhere.

The truth is that Rosa Parks was an experienced civil rights organizer who had been in the movement for a while. She did not just randomly choose not to give up her seat. She knew that it was politically strategic and that by doing it, she would be sparking a movement a long time in the making. Movements are built slowly and consciously over time – they don’t just erupt randomly.
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Organizing Myths

What effects do these myths have on changing our communities? [Take some responses and then clarify the answer.]

These myths hold us back from getting involved in organizing because they make it seem like we just have to wait around for a superhero or an explosion, and then we will have change. In reality, every single one of us has an important role in making community change happen.

Different Ways to Create Change

Next we’re going to look at different ways to create change and how these different ways work together with organizing to improve our communities.

Have youth read the following definitions aloud.

- **Service Provision:** To provide basic services to people who need them, often to meet people’s needs, such as food, health care, etc.
- **Education:** Raising knowledge about issues so that people affected by the issues can be informed.
- **Advocacy:** Pleading the cause on behalf of the individuals or groups affected by the problem.
- **Electoral Work:** Making change through the ballot – through voting, legislation, lobbying elected officials and government officials, etc.

How does each of these ways differ from organizing? [Take responses and discuss.]

Let’s go through an example of how we can use each of these ways to create change.

**Issue:** Lack of resources in low-income schools.

How can you address this issue using the ways of creating change?

Some Examples:

- **Service Provision:** Trying to meet the needs of disadvantaged students by providing new textbooks free-of-charge or volunteering tutoring services.
- **Education:** Raising awareness about the discrepancies between poor schools and rich schools.
- **Advocacy:** Writing letters to state officials about the issue.
- **Electoral Effort:** Lobbying elected officials whose platforms included educational reform.
- **Organizing Effort:** Collectively coming together to make changes in the way schools are funded by administration/district.
I am going to divide you into three groups. Each group will address the same community problem from a different angle. One will come at the issue from a service perspective, another from a youth leadership development angle, and the third from an organizing perspective. Each group will create a short skit to represent their group’s approach.

**Issue:** There’s no health clinic, or access to health professionals, in the X neighborhood of X city. In this community, there’s a high rate of asthma and other environmental illnesses. The Sikh Youth is in a position to do something about this problem. Most immediately, they want to address the health issues and lack of access to health services and information for youth in their neighborhood.

**Group A:** Your group is concerned about young people’s immediate health needs. Young people are missing school because of chronic illness, and you are worried about the impact that illness will have on these youth if their needs go unaddressed.

- **Step 1:** You identify that young people need referrals to health care providers because they don’t have information about where to go.
- **Step 2:** You conduct a survey of the providers available in your neighborhood, and the people who can get youth connected to your program.
- **Step 3:** You set up a case management program so that young people can have their health needs assessed and then link them with the appropriate providers.
- **Step 4:** You continue to monitor needs and provide case management support to youth in your community.

**Group B:** Your group believes that young people can play a leadership role in addressing the problem themselves, and can be an opportunity to develop young people’s skills and confidence.

- **Step 1:** You decide to set up a peer educator program out of your organizations’ leadership club at the local high school.
- **Step 2:** The leadership club discusses the issue and develops a survey of health needs in the high school.
- **Step 3:** Using this information, your staff and youth leaders design a program that includes workshops for middle and high school students, and peer counseling.
- **Step 4:** Youth leaders go through an intensive training to prepare them to start the program.
- **Step 5:** The youth leadership club launches their new peer health educator program with a publicity campaign/event at the high school.

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**Breakout Groups on a Community Problem**

Print out these scenarios beforehand and hand one to each group.
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Organizing Myths

➢ **Group C**: Your group is concerned about what will happen if the root issues are not addressed. You want to see a health care center established in the neighborhood, where young people have a role in designing the services, working as peer counselors, and doing ongoing health organizing.
   ➢ **Step 1**: Your organization’s youth organizing team decides to take this on as a campaign.
   ➢ **Step 2**: After collecting information about the health needs of the community and conditions that impact community members’ health, and identifying local decision-makers, your team develops an analysis of the problem and how to solve it.
   ➢ **Step 3**: Your group develops its campaign plan, which includes identifying goals, organizing base, key targets, actions, and public education plan.
   ➢ **Step 4**: Your group mobilizes students to walk out of their classes and do a “die-in” in front of the Department of Health. Because you contacted local TV and print media ahead of time, you get press on the event.
   ➢ **Step 5**: After your action, you have the leverage to set up meetings with the Board of Supervisors, Superintendent of Schools, and Director of the Department of Health to negotiate setting up a health center in a local classroom.

➢ Each group should create a two-minute skit to represent your group’s approach to the problem. Make sure to show your audience:
   ➢ How your team sees the problem
   ➢ How you are going to solve it
   ➢ The main players/characters in the story and their roles

➢ Have each group perform their skit and provide them with feedback.

Conclusion

➢ Recap main points from today:
   
   It’s important to understand that organizing is a part of our histories and we must all take a role to organize for justice in our communities.
   
   It’s the people who suffer the most under this system who should have the lead in changing it.
   
   Organizing is specifically important in making change because it seeks to transform things on a long-term basis.

   I’d like all of you to name one thing that you learned today, and how you’re going to use that information to organize in your community.
   [Go around the room and have each person respond.]
Sources


“Organizing 101: How organizing has impacted our lives” pages 178-193

Youth Organizing for Community Power: Organizing Skills Training Manual, The School of Unity & Liberation (SOUL)

pages 67-80