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Relational Organizing

Why using our relationships is important to build power



CLIMATE
ADVOCACY
LAB

Learning objectives

- Gain a clear understanding of how it has been used in movements and the effectiveness based on voter engagement research
- Learn how to develop a relational organizing program strategy
- Develop a list of tools and tips that can help you strengthen your plan
- Understand how relational organizing builds power and leadership development
- Connect relational organizing with cultural organizing and arts
- Learn how to properly conduct a 1-on-1 and have time to practice



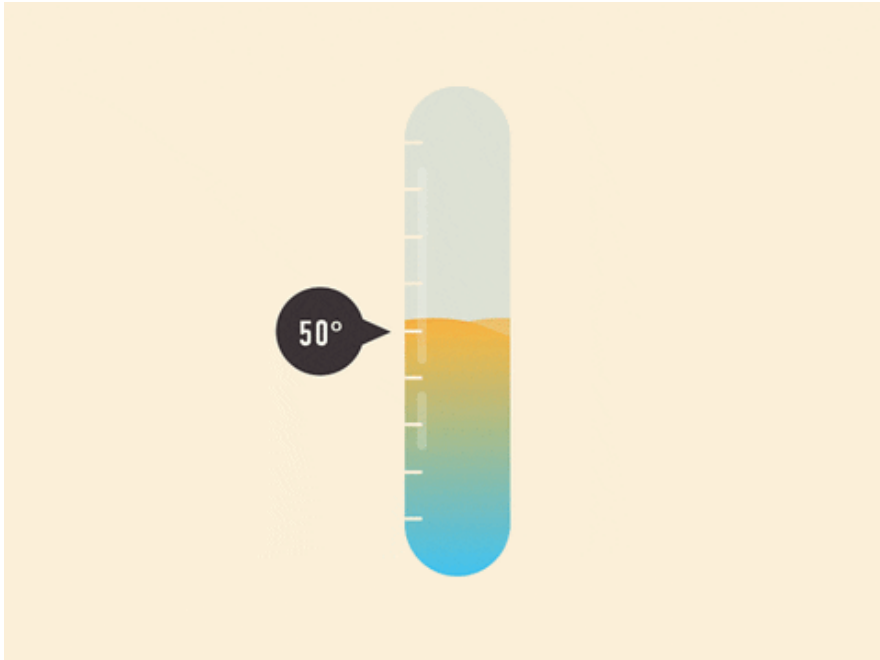
What is relational organizing?

From Southerners on the Ground (SONG):

"Relational organizing starts with a group of people who have relationships with each other. It is a type of community organizing that ~~tries~~ ^{aims to add text} on and prioritizes relationships both inside and outside of an organization in order to build stronger, more dynamic and creative collective power. It includes base building, political education, issue identification, training & action."



Leveraging relationships



Most Personal Relationship (Warm)

- Relationships with family member or household
- Relationships with friends and peers
- Relationship with a volunteer you have a connection with
- Relationship with a volunteer from an organization you belong to but do not personally know
- Relationship with a paid vendor

Least Personal Relationship (Cold)

Example #1: Pembroke Township Pipeline Fight

POLITICIANS STRUCK OUT. SO DID OPRAH.

Can Rev. Jackson finally help Pembroke Township?

There's a three-bedroom, 1,500-square-foot house for sale in Pembroke Township near Kankakee. The asking price? \$24,000.

The home's photos on a local real estate site capture the abandonment of one of the nation's poorest town-

Now, though, pressure is building from a local mayor, Mark Hodge, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson to bring natural gas to the township. Officials from Nicor Gas met with township officials recently and committed to exploring a 29-mile pipeline exten-

But a gas line extension would remove a barrier to jobs. What company is going to build anything in a town with no natural gas access?

Jackson is pushing for results this time, not conversation. He is

Main Point:

Community members have used relational organizing to build awareness and start to imagining a future beyond natural gas.

Facts:

- Pembroke Township is an 80% Black community, have been divested from
- Project from Nicor Gas to construct a natural gas pipeline
- Community opposed to pipeline

Example #2: Black Lives Matter Protests



In the summer of 2020, over 26 million people participated in some form of protest to decry police brutality against Black people and white supremacy. This mobilization demonstrated the power of relational organizing as people turned their communities out.

Example #3: WAVE to end gun violence



In 2020, WAVE launched a relational organizing program to connect to different people and build power around ending gun violence. They built support and empowered marginalized communities to help mobilize voters. Given the pandemic, they used digital platforms and social media to empower volunteers and get new people involved.



Research Study #1: Outvote's Get Out the Vote

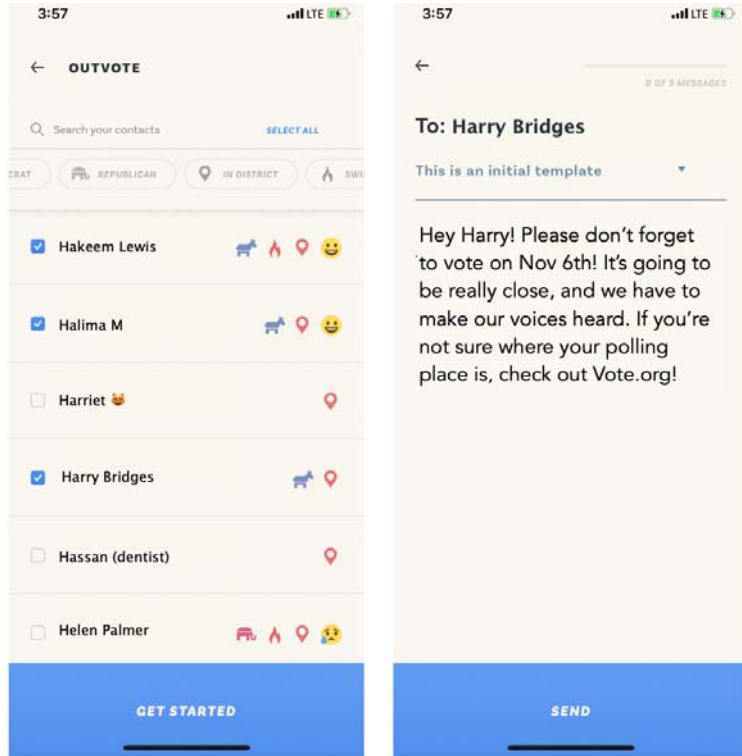
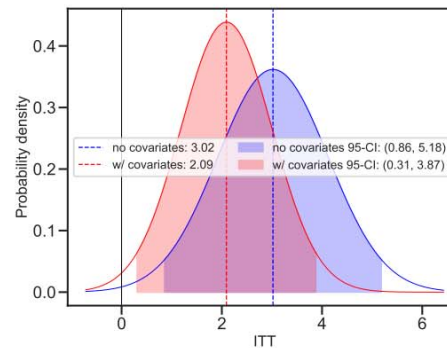
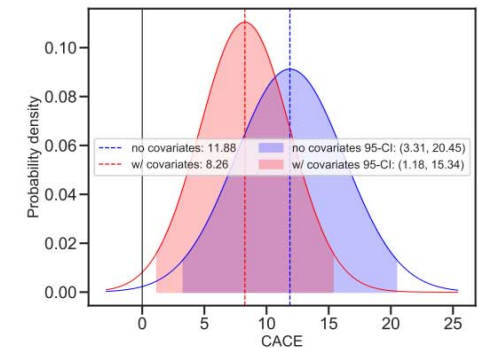


Figure 1. Example of Outvote platform and a typical message sent to unique phone contacts



(a) ITT estimates and 95% confidence intervals.



(b) CACE estimates and 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3: ITT and CACE estimates with and without covariates.



Relational SMS was estimated to increase turnout by 8.26pp (see CACE graph with covariates)



Research Study #2: Turnout Nation



Table 1:

Estimated Intent-to-treat Effect of Turnout Nation's Mobilization Campaign, 2019

	All Sites	Ohio Only	Outside Ohio (California, Connecticut, Colorado)
Estimated Effect	13.2	17.1	9.5
Standard Error		4.7	4.5
Two-sided <i>p</i> -value	Less than .001	Less than .001	0.03
N		378	395

Note: Estimates obtained from weighted least squares using the model described in equation (1) and the weights described in equation (2). Estimates are expressed in percentage points.

13.2 percentage point increase in voter turnout from relational organizing!

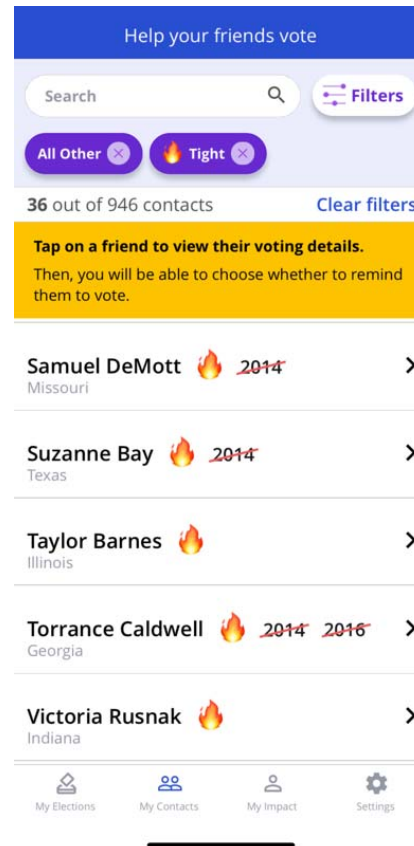


Research Study #3: Relational organizing in Kansas

In 2018, Kansas nonprofits launched a relational organizing program

- Movement leads had 3 points of contact with their network leading up to the 2018 election

Main Point: Relational organizing resulted in "blue wave" in a red state.



Opinion

A Blue Wave in Kansas? Don't Be So Surprised

If the Electoral College is the barometer, this state is deep red. But it's the only one that has elected three female Democratic governors.

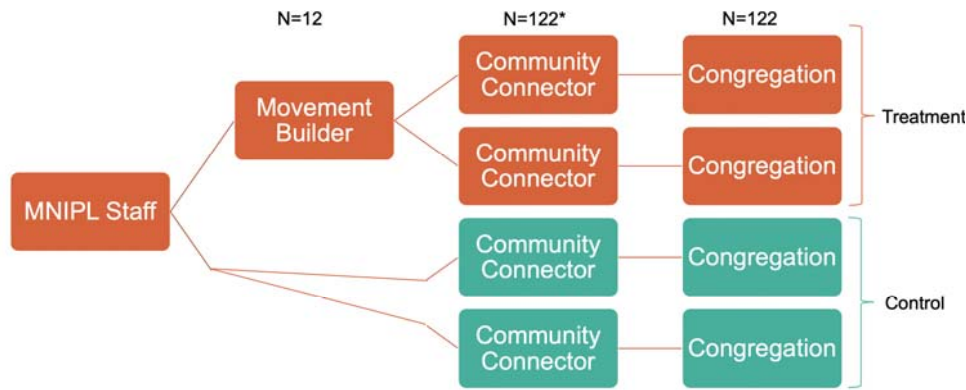
By Sarah Smarsh
Ms. Smarsh is the author of "Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth."

Nov. 10, 2018





Research Study #4: Movement Builder Program



*Initial recruitment; attrition and filtering reduced final numbers

Question	Test	P value	Treatment Mean	Control Mean	Conclusion
Post Survey Action Score vs. Treatment Group	1 tailed T test	0.032458	21.05	17.44	More actions are taken when a MB is engaged
Number of hours vs. Treatment Group	1 tailed T test	0.159462	4.5	3.3	No significant difference in hours spent
MB engagement	1 tailed T test	0.008517	23.4	8.38	Treatment group significantly more likely to be engaged by a MB
Total engagement (Staff and MB) by Treatment	1 tailed T test	0.032546	38.2	21.46	Treatment group significantly more likely to be engaged by staff or MB
Staff engagement by Treatment Group	1 tailed T test	0.352654	14.8	13.08	Treatment and control groups both use staff. No significant difference
How important was support of others vs Treatment Group	1 tailed T test	0.133134	3.85	3.54	Both Treatment and Control groups valued the support of others - "fairly important"

Relational organizing program showed those engaged were more likely to stay engaged and more likely to take action





Why are we seeing this effect?



- Higher quality data
- More opportunities for contact and higher contact rates
- Legitimation rhetoric

Foundations of a relational organizing program

- **Base building**
 - How can you increase the number of people who have a similar theory of change, values, and vision?
- **Political Education**
 - How can we have a process of study, critical thinking, and accountability that leads to the development of leaders?
 - How can we ensure that our organization remains committed to those most affected/marginalized by the issue?
- **What is the issue?**
 - What are we fighting for? What are the struggles that are facing the community or the people we have the closest relationships with?



Graphic: John McCann

How to create your relational organizing strategy

1. Start early
2. Designate an owner for this strategy
3. Map out your strategy
4. Recruit people with social media presence
5. Use both online and offline techniques
6. Involve the entire campaign
7. Create ladder of engagement for volunteers
8. Have clear lines of recruitment and retention
9. Follow-up with volunteers
10. Host direct conversations with volunteers



Relational organizing: Tips and Tricks



- Storytelling is very powerful and helps build and sustain relationships
- Find out what are the common themes or similarities between you and the other person
- Have a conversation about the root causes and think through how this elucidation may help to build powerful movements
- Political education, political education, political education
- Develop your subject as a leader through base building, leadership development and action
- Develop a strategy to activate your relational organizing base
- Take some type of collective action
- Rinse and repeat



Evaluation

- What are the **quantitative** and **qualitative** ways to measure your organization's impact?
- How do you hold your relational organizing strategy **accountable to the communities** you represent?
- What worked well? What would you do differently next time? Where, with whom will you **share insights and lessons learned**?



Relational Organizing: Tools

Old School

1. Door-to-door knocking
2. Having an in-person face-to-face conversation
3. Street teaming at your school or neighborhood



New School

1. Facebook, Instagram or Twitter
2. Apps like Turnout Nation, Tinder, Bumble
3. Texting, Whatsapp

What other benefits come with building a relational culture of organizing?

Leaders who together can do new things

New projects built on real energy and motivation

Stronger and more dynamic organizational life

New people who can engage around their own interests

A network of people who know and trust one another

A relational organizing culture builds power

WHAT IS A 1-on-1?

- A 30-60 minutes face to face conversation (or over Zoom or Facetime)
- A time to build or strengthen a relationship
- Figure out what matters to the person and why
- A time to identify issues that need to be addressed that do not have a current plan of action
- A time to move people from inaction to action

WHAT A 1-on-1 IS NOT?

- An interview of non-stop questions
- The life story or resume of an individual
- Recruitment around agenda items
- A social encounter
- An intellectual conversation about policy
- A time to identify issues that need to be addressed that do not have a current plan of action

Okay, how do we do this 1-on-1 thang?!

- Make sure your 1-on-1 has a clear intro, middle, and end
- Make sure you take time to cover a few things instead of covering too many topics
- Make sure you ask “why” questions
- Make sure you also talk about yourself, too
- Close by leaving it open for additional conversations
- If you have an ask, ask it!
- The goal is to create long lasting transformative relationships

Union Organizing Model

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Issues and agitation
- 3) Vision and education
- 4) Call the question
- 5) Inoculation
- 6) Work assignment
- 7) Uplift and follow-up



Tip: Start from Yes, Assume Success!

- If you assume you will have a good conversation you are more likely to have one.
- Respect what the person says and start from an open-minded place.*
- Start with a YES and see where that takes you.
- Tool: “It sounds like X is really important to you...”

*Respect what people say within reason—if they say something that is completely racist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic then you should call them out/in. When we hear things like this and sit back, we are complicit.

Skill: Practicing “non-judgment”

- Neutral and inviting stance
- Sincere curiosity
- Listen as if you were listening to yourself
- Identify strongest judgments of the canvassed person
- Tool: Ask them to identify their strongest judgments

Skill: Modeling vulnerability

- Act of sharing your own story is a social cue to the person at the door that “it is ok to share now”
- The trust we bring to the conversation is (generally) the trust we get!

Skill: Active listening

- Listen, ask questions, repeat back, and paraphrase
- Clarify and deepen your own understanding of where they are coming from, and make them feel heard
- You don't need to know what they are going to say next or what you are going to say next!
- Use phrases like: "Tell me more about that" or "What I think I heard you say is..."
- Silence is okay. Pause and let them fill the silence.

Best Practices for Important Conversations

- Validate your own ignorance (responsibly)
- Redirect to shared values
- Appeal to their best self

Preparing for your 1-on-1

- Develop your Story of Self
- Identify key questions to guide the conversation
- Develop your Stories of Us and Now
- Next steps, asks, and referrals

Relational Organizing and Power-Building

- Bring new people into the movement
- Move people up a ladder of engagement
- Uses political education to develop leaders and build capacity
- Power built around a collective vision



Capacity building as retention



What counts as "retention"?

Examples:

- Activities geared to building an activist identity
- Building personal skills and capacity
- Building a sense of community.
- Contextualizing their actions within a coherent theory of change

Household spillover and foot in the door



- 1st action, then a 2nd similar action.
- Similarity can be in type (petition or LTE) or in commitment (time or money)
- Once you've asked for a similar action, you can make a higher-bar ask

Evidence-based insights & retention

Research suggests people participate when they:

Are asked to participate

These effects are intensified when the ask is in person and is also personalized

Want to participate

Location and issue context can also make a difference

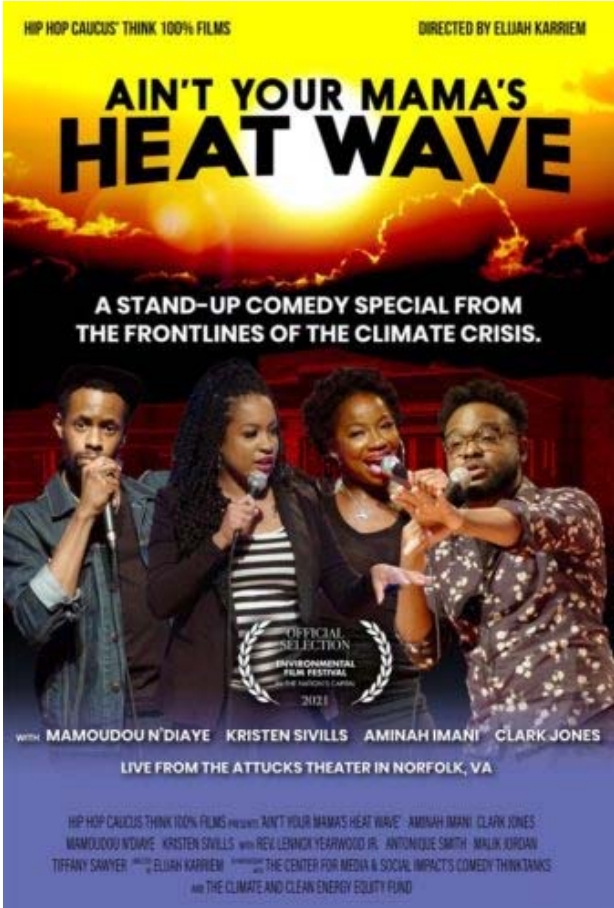
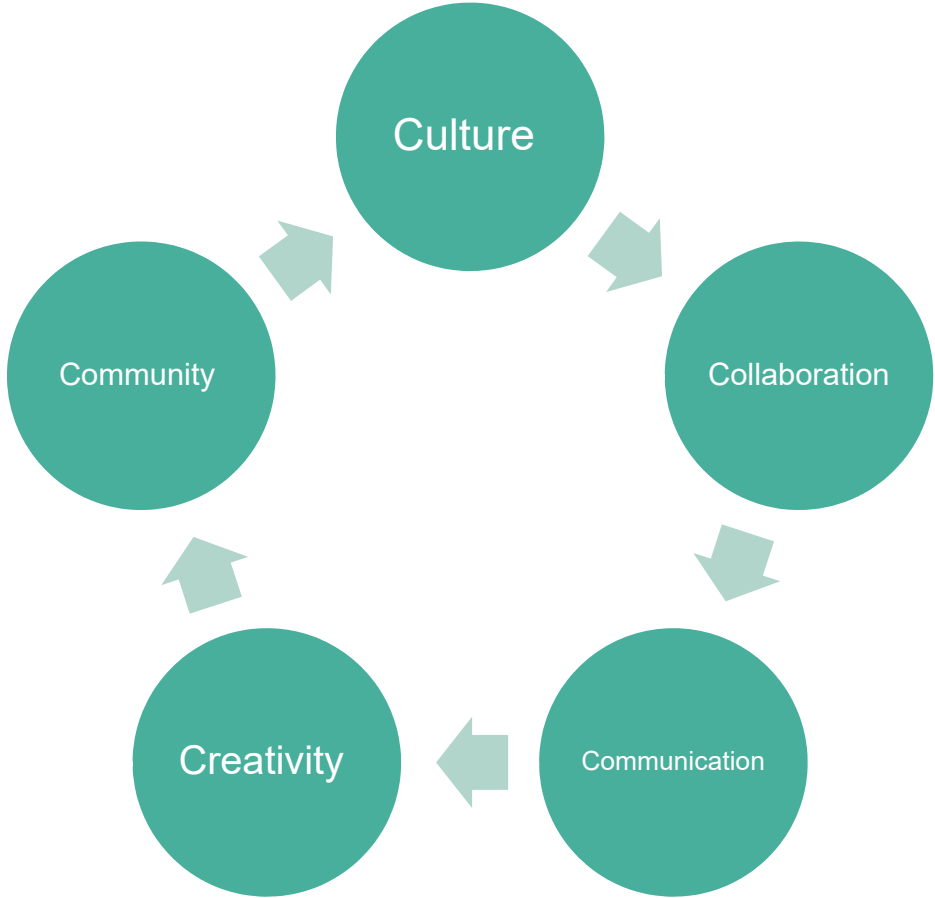
Have resources to do so

Free time, civic skills, knowledge, etc.

Have participated before

Action early in life can launch someone on a trajectory of ongoing civic participation

Relational and Cultural Organizing



Limitations of relational organizing

- Having 1-on-1 conversations can be time consuming, but necessary
- It can be difficult trying to organize all people in your network
- Like traditional organizing, some people do not want to talk your work
- If you do not establish the context in which you are engaging in RO, your efforts will be harder

To sum it up:

- Relational organizing is important in building up your base, developing leaders and having people agree to take collective action
- Research supports this strategy! Studies show engaging in a relational organizing model results in an increase in voter engagement
- Developing a relational organizing program involves base building, political education, and issue identification/accountability
- There are several different tools you can use ranging to offline (having an in-person conversation) to online (posting an Instagram post to your network)
- Relational organizing is about power building and leadership development (aka retention)
- Relational organizing and cultural organizing are synergistic and can very effective when arts are involved
- 1-on-1s are the cornerstone of relational organizing and knowing how to do these properly can lead to transformative relationships