Relational Organizing

Why using our relationships is important to build power
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 relies 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

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

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

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

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

Figure 3: ITT and CACE estimates with and without covariates.
**Research Study #2: Turnout Nation**

### Table 1:

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Sites</th>
<th>Ohio Only</th>
<th>Outside Ohio (California, Connecticut, Colorado)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Effect</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-sided p-value</td>
<td>Less than .001</td>
<td>Less than .001</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
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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.
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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old School</th>
<th>New School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Door-to-door knocking</td>
<td>1. Facebook, Instagram or Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Having an in-person face-to-face conversation</td>
<td>2. Apps like Turnout Nation, Tinder, Bumble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Street teaming at your school or neighborhood</td>
<td>3. Texting, Whatsapp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Identity

• People look at their past actions and craft an identity that can encapsulate all of them

• People also proactively create identities, and can then take actions that align with the way they see themselves
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

Culture

Collaboration

Creativity

Communication

Community

Hip Hop Caucus
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