Catalyst Summer Program

Summer 2015

SEAC

**Entering A Community**

**Objectives:**

* Appreciate the delicate nature of working within a (new) community [Attitude]
* Understand how to humbly approach a community and create open dialogue about resources and intentions [Knowledge]
* Acknowledge the need for community consent in organizing work, and recognize community members as more than a means to an end [Attitude]
* Value the development and support of campaigns that are driven by a local voice [Attitude]
* Learn active listening skills and be able to communicate more effectively with community partners [Skill]
* Be willing to adopt community-generated models of organizing and convening [Attitude]
* Be able to apply knowledge gained from Anti-Oppression trainings (*identity and privilege*) and begin to explore the roles of power and solidarity in community work [Knowledge]

**Context:** This training is on the 7th day of Catalyst and builds on several previous trainings including: Campaign Planning 101 & 201, Leadership Development, and Anti-Oppression 101 & 102. Entering a Community is a critical skill to anyone attempting to organize with other organizations or communities outside of their own, but especially for people who come from places of privilege or mainstream identities. Furthermore, collective liberation requires marginalized and mainstream organizations to work together in solidarity to overcome systemic and structural oppression and violence. Therefore this training should be described with emphasis of its importance and also with the caveat that to be able to effectively and respectfully enter a community requires much more learning and practice than is afforded in this training alone.

**Materials Needed:**

* Flipchart

**Time Needed: 45 min**

**Training Agenda:**

1. **Introduction [1 min]**

Each trainer introduces themselves and why they think this training is important.

1. **Big Group Discussion [7 min]**
   1. Ask group to discuss what “Entering a Community” means to them.
   2. Ask group to think about anytime in history when a person or group entered a community that was not their own with “a plan for what’s best for them”, regardless of if they were invited by the community. Share back.
      1. *Have folks open their eyes and shout out examples, add context if necessary. (Participants have, in the past, listed instances such as Christopher Columbus, Cortez, The Crusades, and Nazi Germany as well as Martin Luther King Jr. and Ghandi. Local examples may include coal companies in Appalachia, the Webb Brothers Centre Point plan in Lexington, and the Federal Government’s “War on Poverty” as well as the Cumberland Sierra Club plan to stop the damming of Red River Gorge. Try to leave the space open so that the responses are not influenced by the examples.)*
   3. What were the results of all of these instances? Overall, did they end well? Are there patterns in the historical and personal examples?
   4. Why is this relevant to us, as new organizers?
   5. What are some challenges we may face when trying to enter a new community?
2. **Community Organizing and Working with a Community [5 min.]**

It is important to recognize, first of all, the distinct forms of campus organizing and community organizing. While this training attempts to locate the SEAC model within both of these contexts, the process of integrating and adapting Catalyst knowledge will be unique to every community or campus you will work in. This training is geared towards helping you find your place in a new community by giving you tools to collaborate with and contribute to the goals of that community.

* In community organizing, it’s important to **work with a community in a way that respects existing knowledge**; it is important to be a resource without trying to direct the activity of the community or assume that you have a complete understanding of the issues at play.
* We must **understand our personal goals for a group or community, and that these goals may be very different from what that group or community needs or wants.**
* We must **understand of the limits of our knowledge as individuals**, remembering that entitlement only ever invites backlash and resistance.

1. **Principles of Working with a New Community** [15 min.]
   1. Know the Lay of the Land within the community
      1. Research, talk to people! to find out:
         1. Past and present social, political, economic, and cultural principles and norms that already exist. It’s important to have a good understanding of the existing norms in order to wholly communicate with those who are involved in the community already. Respecting what is already there and having an awareness of the dynamics helps you understand what community dynamics and frameworks to adhere to and perhaps what community dynamics and frameworks to add to/complicate as the collaborative process continues.
         2. Past and present status of organizing and activism around community issues.
         3. Groups and individuals already working on similar issues.
      2. Listening Projects!!
         1. A listening project is the process of **meeting with many community members with the intention of listening to their stories and experiences with their community and the issues at play in your campaign.** Sometimes these projects result in a compilation of notes or video footage, but not necessarily.
         2. When working with a new community, listening projects are one of the most important tools we have to identify community concerns and build preliminary relationships with community members. Crucial!
         3. **It’s imperative that the perspectives/concerns/issues of the local community are at the forefront of the campaign work.** Listening projects provide a great foundation for us to come to understand these localized perspectives and concerns.
      3. Leadership Identification
         1. Figure out who are the official leaders of the community or group: local politicians, elected club leaders, church leaders, etc.
         2. Figure out who has influence or power within the community or group (i.e. who are the folks that others really listen to and look to for direction; these people aren’t always the official leaders, e.g. old group leaders, faculty advisors, popular and respected community members, whoever runs the house that people gather and eat at, whoever throws the biggest parties).
         3. Figure out who has passion and a strong motivation to better their community or organization. Maybe these are folks you’ve identified during listening projects or during tabling events.
         4. And don’t forget to **reconsider your definition of “leader.”** A leader is not necessarily an outgoing or vocal individual. It’s important to know that there are different types of leaders that exist.
         5. Remember that **inter-generational dialogue** will be at the crux of this work. The environmental movement can become “youth-centered” sometimes, as we look to the future, but it is crucial that we engage the voices of elders and older leaders in our community work, as these voices are a source of community wisdom and perhaps history that is otherwise unavailable to us.
   2. 1 on 1’s
      1. Once you identify these leaders, set up 1 on 1 meetings with existing or potential leaders
      2. 1 on 1’s should be very natural and human. They should never become mechanical. Rather, they should be the opposite, dynamic and risky. It is important to throw yourself into a 1 on 1 and put yourself on the line. There are some ideas you can keep in mind which can provide a powerful framework for 1 on 1’s.
      3. Goals
         1. Human connection
         2. Exchange contact information and discuss best mediums for communication
         3. Listen about 75% of the time, but still share personal stories
         4. Identify self interest
         5. Expand self interest
         6. Be honest about where you’re coming from
      4. In 1 on 1’s be very, clear and honest about your objectives: don’t hide your motives, talk to them about what they are planning for the semester or year, share your experience of attending Catalyst or other relevant experiences and look for opportunities to offer what you learned to them or their group.
   3. Respect Existing Knowledge
      1. Be aware of and **respect pre-existing norms** that have already been established within a community (officially and unofficially). It’s important to understand these if we are to build new relationships.
      2. Remember that if you are working in a new community, your primary objective is to provide support to that community, not to expect or demand it for yourself. Always keep in mind which organizers have opted in to organizing, and which organizers have had to organize in self-defense.
   4. Listen to the Concerns of the Community/Group/Leader
      1. Spend a lot of time listening. It’s like the 50/50 rule in Lobbying or Indy meetings, but you can take it even further. If you are working with a new community, **follow the 75/25 rule.** Listen at least 75% of the time. You can learn a lot by listening and that can help you frame the skills you have to offer in a way that will be most appealing and approachable for the community.
      2. Note: in marginalized communities there is often a history of outsiders coming in and taking advantage of people. Sometimes, even well intentioned people entering marginalized communities replicate cycles of oppression by telling people what they think is best for a community.
      3. **Be the active listener: Listen to understand, not to respond.**
      4. When in doubt, listen. When not in doubt, listen some more. When people are tired of you listening so much, listen to their concerns and ask them what they’d like you to do. Listen.
      5. CAVEAT: There cannot be the expectation that community members will have the capacity to come up with jobs for you to complete. Do not expect direction, but create space for it to be voiced.
      6. Tip: Articulate your resources, not your “plans”
   5. Build Relationships/Focus on **Mutual Interest**—Try to build on common ground; be aware of differences, but focus on what you have in common.
   6. Be willing to **adapt your vision**--Often when we wish to work with a community we will realize that what is needed may not be what we were initially envisioning. People may need child care, not leadership development; they may want help mapping graveyards and encouraging local economic development, not massive protests. It’s important to have dialogue in these situations, but as the “outsider” it’s also important to be flexible.
   7. Be willing to **adapt your style** -- We have to be willing to adopt community-generated models of organizing and convening, and this means putting “the matrix” on the back burner sometimes.
2. **Discussion and Share Back [10 min]**

* Turn to a neighbor and discuss some ways that you (or KSEC) can use the information you learned today to be more successful in our organizing goals [5 min]
* In a the large group share out ideas that you came up with in pairs [5 min]

1. **Evaluation & Debrief [3 min.]**

* 5-Finger shoot—How valuable was this training? Probe for details, start middle, go low, end high.
* Have participants share some crystallized thoughts they have leaving the training.