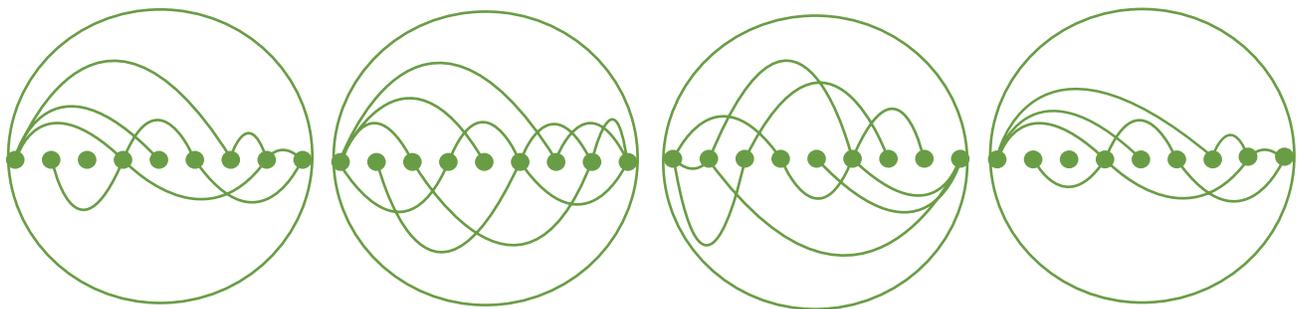


**LISTENING—BUILDING—MAKING CHANGE:  
JOB PROFILE OF A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER**



**community learning partnership**  
*Pathways into Community Change Careers*

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## **community learning partnership** *Pathways into Community Change Careers*

The Community Learning Partnership (CLP) is a national network of community change studies programs, based in community colleges in partnership with local nonprofit and civic organizations. Our mission is to develop a diverse workforce to address injustice and inequality, and to improve the quality of life in low-income communities. We reach out to low-income students and people of color who may not otherwise gain exposure to the career possibilities in organizing and related fields.

CLP's programs offer specialized degrees or certificates that can lead directly to jobs or provide transfer credit to other educational institutions. Community change studies prepare students for jobs in community organizing, economic development and policy advocacy — and to be agents of positive, social change in various aspects of their careers and communities.

Please use and share this information widely, and acknowledge the Community Learning Partnership. Thank you.

**Production of this report and support for the Community Learning Partnership is provided by the U. S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Deerbrook Charitable Trust, The California Endowment and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.**

# CONTENTS

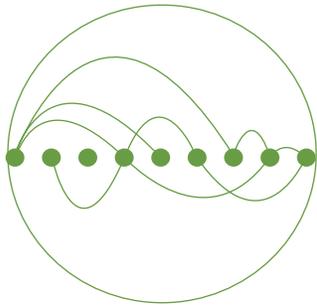
<b>1. A LETTER FROM KEN ROLLING AND DENISE FAIRCHILD</b>	<b>page i</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>page 1</b>
Why Create a Job Profile of an Organizer.	
Summary of Findings.	
The Value of this Job Profile.	
Nearly 100 Organizers and Experts Engaged.	
<b>3. THE COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP</b>	<b>page 2</b>
Forging Community and Academic Partnerships: Toward a Lifelong Path.	
Diversifying the Community Change Fields.	
Cultivating Cross-Sector Skills.	
Training On the Job.	
What an Educational Program Offers Organizers.	
<b>4. JOB PROFILE OF A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER</b>	<b>page 4</b>
Definition of a Community Organizer.	
A Community Organizer’s Five Primary Duties with Definition of Terms.	
Tasks and Skills of Organizers: Tables.	
Occupational Characteristics: Worker Behaviors Needed for Organizers.	
General Knowledge that Organizers Need to Have.	
<b>5. ORGANIZERS TALK ABOUT ORGANIZING:     The New York Focus Group</b>	<b>page 9</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION:     Using This Job Profile for Training and Education</b>	<b>page 13</b>
<b>7. SOCIAL CHANGE ORGANIZATIONS REFLECT     ON THEIR TRAINING PRACTICES: The De Anza Focus Group</b>	<b>page 14</b>
<b>8. THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER JOB ANALYSIS PROCESS:     DACUM (Develop A Curriculum)</b>	<b>page 15</b>
<b>9. COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP:     Sites, Steering Committee, Staff</b>	<b>page 16</b>

## OUR GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

From Ken Rolling, Executive Director and Denise Fairchild, Co-Chair,  
Steering Committee, Community Learning Partnership (CLP)

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

We are pleased to share this job profile of a community organizer with you. CLP developed this profile over the past year through extensive dialogue and consultation among the organizing community, our staff, faculty and trainers. When we posed the question: “*What Does a Community Organizer Do?*” we were thrilled that nearly 100 organizers and organizing experts from across the country weighed in. Collectively, we shaped the list of tasks, skills, knowledge and characteristics needed by community organizers that you will find in the job profile, which begins on page 4. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to its development.



**More Information Online.** Visit us online for more information about the steps in this process, to review the data we gathered, and to learn more about how we are using this job profile at CLP.

[www.communitylearningpartnership.org](http://www.communitylearningpartnership.org)

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Thanks to the organizers and CLP faculty who met for two intensive days last year to come up with the initial list and descriptions that form the basis of this profile. They are as follows: Francisco Arzu, Crystallee Crain, Steve Diaz, Denise Fairchild, Kei Fischer, Lena Jones, Jessica Nizar, Sherrie Pugh, Igdalia Rojas, Ken Rolling, Ericka Stallings, Elizabeth Sunwoo, Benjamin Torres, Enrique Velasquez and Jann Whetstone. Joan Minieri, national CLP Program Director, worked with Bruce Campbell, our technology consultant, to facilitate a national survey of organizers. Joan wrote this report. Kathryn Weinstein created the design. Andy Mott, Senior Advisor to CLP, supported this project from the beginning, and reviewed report drafts.

We will use the job profile to drive our work to establish *Pathways into Community Change Careers* throughout the country. It is especially useful for setting learning objectives for the curriculum, training and internships that are essential for preparing students for careers in community organizing. We will share the tools that we design to reflect our findings, with the field of community organizing.

We welcome your comments!

In Solidarity,  
Ken Rolling, Executive Director  
Community Learning Partnership

Denise Fairchild, President, Emerald Cities Collaborative;  
Co-Chair, Steering Committee, Community Learning Partnership  
June 2013

## INTRODUCTION

**Why Create a Job Profile of an Organizer.** The Community Learning Partnership (CLP) is a national network of community change studies programs based in community colleges in partnership with local nonprofit and civic organizations. We analyzed the job of a community organizer in order to gain a detailed and cohesive profile of this core change-agent role. We wanted to ensure that we are training and educating students in ways that reflect the current needs of the field. The following is an overview of what we discovered and how we proceeded.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- Organizers have definable duties, as well as a skill set, knowledge base and worker characteristics that influence their ability to do their jobs successfully.
- Organizers have cross-sector skills that they can apply to a range of job categories.
- Learning organizing requires hands-on practice, self-reflection capacity and access to mentoring by experienced organizers.
- Academic programs can make a particular contribution to supporting the knowledge base that organizers need, something that training programs that focus on skills and tactics generally do not emphasize.

*For the Job Profile of a Community Organizer, see page 4.*

### THE VALUE OF THIS JOB PROFILE:

- Analyzing the job of an organizer illuminates the distinctions among skills, background knowledge and personal characteristics of effective organizers.
- The profile gives direction for training and teaching about organizing.
- The profile offers the basis for assessment tools for students and for the field.
- The format is adaptable to reflect changes in the field.

### NEARLY 100 ORGANIZERS AND EXPERTS ENGAGED:

- Fifteen experts gathered to develop a list of the traits, skills and knowledge of organizers.
- Sixty-one organizers completed our national online survey.
- Twenty participants met, in two focus groups and informal discussions, to consider our initial findings and offer their insights.

*For more on the steps and participants, see page 15.*

*“This is a good idea. I’ve never seen this done before.”*

*“Looking forward to seeing the results. This could be an insightful process for many of us.”*

— Organizers from the national survey

## **THE COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**

**Forging Community and Academic Partnerships: Toward a Lifelong Path.** CLP is opening up the pathway to change-agent careers at the community college level. A cornerstone of our approach is cultivating locally driven partnerships that include nonprofit and civic organizations working with community colleges. CLP’s community change studies programs offer specialized degrees or certificates that can lead directly to jobs or provide transfer credit to other educational institutions. Courses include community organizing and development, participatory research, communications, public policy and political economy.

Students gain theoretical knowledge and shared terminology. They examine critical perspectives, cultivate self-awareness, access mentoring and engage in experiential learning and internships, on and off campus. Community change studies prepare students for jobs in community organizing, economic development and policy advocacy – and to be agents of positive, social change in various aspects of their careers and communities.

*“Learning about other people in history who made mass change a possibility, who started movements and whole eras of change was inspiring. It taught me that I could do the same. It has changed everything; the way I see myself, the way I see others, and mostly the way I want to be that change.”* — Graduate of De Anza College Certificate in Leadership and Social Change

**Diversifying the Community Change Fields.** Our mission is to develop a diverse workforce to address injustice and inequality, and to improve the quality of life in low-income communities. Our programs bring out the skills and talent from within these communities. We intentionally reach out to low-income students and people of color who enter post-secondary education through their local community college and who may not otherwise gain exposure to the career possibilities in organizing and related fields.

CLP addresses a problem summarized by one organizer we surveyed: *“Many organizers come into communities and learn their craft and move on and once they do they leave a major void behind in a community or setting they worked in. It’s been my experience that many organizers themselves move on and up the ranks and local community leadership stays behind.”*

**Cultivating Cross-Sector Skills.** In addition to advancing a field-building mission, CLP programs cultivate the cross-sector skills highlighted in this job profile. Students who are, for example, skilled listeners, critical thinkers, verbal communicators, relationship builders and are culturally competent, are more qualified for many kinds of jobs, including management, teaching, social service, government, sales or business jobs. They are more prepared to be leaders in civic life and to strengthen their communities.

Our expert group listed various types of organizations that hire people with organizing skills and the national survey validated this list. Those we surveyed believe that the five types of organizations that most hire organizers are: labor and community organizations, community development corporations, public policy advocacy organizations and neighborhood associations. Job opportunities for workers with organizing skills may also exist in non-institutional organizations, social services, city and county government, arts and culture organizations, elementary-secondary educational institutions, and colleges and universities.

**Training On the Job.** Community organizing has long been a craft that people learn by doing. A traditional, typical pathway to an organizing career would be to get involved in an issue campaign and move into a paid role, or to take an entry-level position that sounds interesting and get hooked. Longtime organizers can often recall the moment when they realized: ‘Wow! This is a *job*!’

**What an Educational Program Offers Organizers:** The traditional path to professional community organizing could proceed with or without a college degree. This is rapidly changing as the social, economic and political challenges organizers face become more complex, and as a degree becomes a credential that employers, including community organizations, more frequently require.

In our national survey, we asked what organizers could gain from an educational program, in addition to what they need to learn on the job. They responded that a curriculum could offer history, theory and training in specific skills, in the following ways:

- **Theory**, including a more systematic approach to learning the principles, lessons and craft of community organizing.
- **History** of social movements and community organizing.
- **Examples** of specific organizing efforts, as practiced in the U.S. and globally.
- **Strategy** and how to build a strategic analysis.
- **Pedagogy**, specifically methods of participatory education.
- **Civics**, including levels of government and types of community support.
- **Communication** skills such as writing and public speaking.
- **Time management** and organizational skills.

*“History and theoretical background to what community organizers do is very important because it gives you a grounding in what others have tried before and what informs the current situation that people find themselves in.”* — Organizer from the national survey

*“History of community organizing and social movements nationally and internationally; using that history and current organizations as examples of various models. These are all skills that people often do not get on the job and are only becoming more important the more our work becomes less localized...”* — Organizer from the national survey

## **JOB PROFILE OF A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER**

This job profile, which continues through page 8, consolidates what we learned in our job analysis. It defines terms and describes what an organizer does. It breaks down the tasks, skills and occupational characteristics of an organizer. It summarizes the knowledge an organizer needs to have in order to be effective.

**Definition of a Community Organizer.** A community organizer builds a group of people or institutions to address the social and political problems they experience directly and have in common. Core tasks include base building and sustaining powerful organizations that can run successful campaigns and win change.

An organizer finds, trains, supports and educates community-based leaders to make their own decisions on their own behalf, and to build their own institutions and power. This includes stimulating their curiosity about what they are experiencing in ways that help people to understand their own assets as well as their need for power. It also includes building relationships among community leaders and between community leaders and power holders.

An organizer moves the base to action to address the systems and public policies they collectively want to change. This includes engaging leaders in research in order shape effective, strategic campaigns. Organizing campaigns are the vehicles through which the base understands, identifies and wins concrete solutions to the problems they identify.

*“If you as a human being cannot see that humanity in people and understand what is justice, what is social justice, you cannot do community organizing.”* — Organizer from the New York focus group

## **A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER’S FIVE PRIMARY DUTIES WITH DEFINITION OF TERMS**

*Duties are the general areas of competence that successful workers in an occupation must demonstrate or perform on an ongoing basis.*

The following are the primary duties of an organizer:

### **1) FIND AND BUILD A BASE**

A **base** is a group of community members who demonstrate a commitment to a project or organization, as defined by that organization. Those in the base directly experience the social and political problems the organization addresses or they identify as being part of the affected community. A base can include individuals or institutions, or both. Members of the base engage in the decision making and work of the organization and participate in events and actions. In some organizations, they are dues-paying members or otherwise defined as ‘members’ according to their level of involvement. Organizers continually build the base.

### **2) TRAIN, SUPPORT AND EDUCATE LEADERS**

A community organizing **leader** makes decisions, represents the organization, helps build the base and exercises leadership in the broader community. Developing leaders to fulfill their roles is one of an organizer’s primary duties.

### 3) IDENTIFY ISSUES

An **issue** is the solution to a problem. It is what community members and organization leaders decide will resolve the economic, social or political problem they experience. An issue directly affects and motivates the base, and is something the base can successfully take on and win. Organizers listen, guide and skillfully agitate members and leaders to identify their own issues.

### 4) MOVE THE BASE TO ACTION THROUGH STRATEGIC CAMPAIGNS

A **campaign** is a series of steps aimed at achieving a goal, usually a change in social policy or administrative practice. Campaigns provide the opportunity for leaders to have hands-on engagement and public roles. Action in the context of a campaign focuses on strategically and systematically achieving a series of clearly established objectives in order to attain a goal. Organizers move the base to action to achieve campaign goals and to build leadership skills.

### 5) BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL POWER

The organizing concept of **power** means that the base of an organization and the broader communities they identify with can win their campaigns, manage a strong organization, and have the knowledge and skills to fully participate in and shape the social and political processes that affect them. This includes building relationships among organizational leaders, and between leaders and perceived power holders. The concept of community includes the full range of community identification, from the local to the global, including shared interests if not shared geography. Organizers build power.

## TASKS AND SKILLS OF ORGANIZERS

Table 1 and Table 2 consolidate the information from our national survey, focus groups and our own analysis. Table 1 lists the tasks of organizers and shows where they encounter these tasks. Table 2 lists the skills of organizers and shows where they apply these in carrying out their duties. (Tables on following page)

**Tasks that Apply to All Duties.** Note that there are three tasks from those listed in Table 1 that we believe organizers encounter in all of their duties. First, they must always practice good listening skills; be able to process; to effectively agitate; and to identify people's needs and potential. Second, they need to always establish and build working relationships with other people. Finally, organizers plan and run meetings in every area of their jobs. They need to be able to set the goal and agenda, facilitate dialogue and keep to the task at hand.

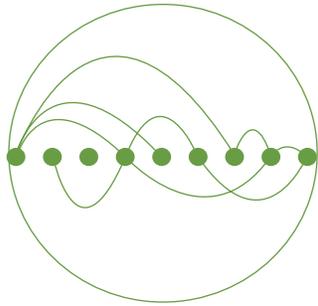
**Skills that Apply to All Duties.** Note that there are several skills listed in Table 2 that we believe organizers apply to all of their duties. They need to be skilled at active listening and in verbal communication. They need to be culturally competent and aware (of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability). Organizers must be able to prioritize and implement a work plan. In all areas of their work, they practice critical thinking, time management, social-emotional intelligent leadership/organizing skills and the ability to prioritize and be organized. Other skills that apply to all of an organizer's duties are: facilitation, agitation, able to multi-task and to delegate tasks and responsibilities. Finally, organizers need to be skilled in using a computer and in phone answering.

**TABLE 1. TASKS OF ORGANIZERS**

TASKS	DUTY ONE:	DUTY TWO:	DUTY THREE:	DUTY FOUR:	DUTY FIVE:
<i>Tasks are work activities that can be defined and observed, consist of two or more definite steps and lead to an outcome. The following are listed from Most Important to Least Important, as ranked on our national survey.</i>	<b>Find and Build a Base</b>	<b>Train, Support and Educate Leaders</b>	<b>Identify Issues</b>	<b>Move the Base to Action through Strategic Campaigns</b>	<b>Build Organizational Power</b>
Practice good listening skills; be able to process; to effectively agitate; and to identify people's needs and potential	●	●	●	●	●
Identify potential leaders	●	●			●
Establish and build working relationships with other people	●	●	●	●	●
Develop programs					●
Debrief/evaluate meetings, actions & campaigns		●		●	
Prep leaders for public roles		●		●	●
Engage in power analysis/power mapping			●	●	
Engage in base building tasks such as door knocking, calls, house visits to recruit members into the organization.	●		●	●	
Organize strategic actions				●	
Develop a campaign plan				●	
Plan and run meetings: be able to set the goal and agenda, facilitate dialogue and keep to the task at hand	●	●	●	●	●
Develop leadership plans		●			
Deliver workshops and trainings		●	●	●	
Build alliances				●	●
Build committees and boards that can make decisions	●	●		●	●
Engage in strategic planning					●
Manage projects				●	●
Research/investigate/analyze history, issues and strategy			●	●	
Manage volunteers	●			●	●
Collect and analyze data/translate it for public use			●	●	
Engage in community-based participatory research			●	●	
Make presentations	●	●	●	●	
Plan events			●	●	●
Engage in grassroots fundraising				●	●
Build social capital, including asset mapping			●		●
Design graphics and web materials (flyers, brochures, website)	●			●	
Develop skills training and political education curriculum		●	●	●	
Engage in organizational development and sustainability efforts, including structure, human relations, funding, planning					●
Write grant proposals					●
Promote solidarity with racial/cultural groups and unity across race and culture				●	●
Engage in publicity and public relations				●	●

**TABLE 2. SKILLS OF ORGANIZERS**

SKILLS	DUTY ONE:	DUTY TWO:	DUTY THREE:	DUTY FOUR:	DUTY FIVE:
<i>Skills are the ability to perform occupational tasks with a high degree of proficiency. Organizers require a range of skills, from basic to interpersonal to organizational. The following are the skills of organizers, from Most Important to Least Important, as ranked on our national survey.</i>	<b>Find and Build a Base</b>	<b>Train, Support and Educate Leaders</b>	<b>Identify Issues</b>	<b>Move the Base to Action through Strategic Campaigns</b>	<b>Build Organizational Power</b>
Active listening	●	●	●	●	●
Verbal communication	●	●	●	●	●
Culturally competent and aware (of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability)	●	●	●	●	●
Able to recognize strengths and weaknesses of different people in building a team		●		●	
Able to prioritize and implement a work plan	●	●	●	●	●
Critical thinking	●	●	●	●	●
Time management	●	●	●	●	●
Social - emotional intelligent leadership/ organizing skills	●	●	●	●	●
Prioritizing and being organized	●	●	●	●	●
Facilitation	●	●	●	●	●
Agitation	●	●	●	●	●
Able to analyze causes and sources of inequity			●		●
Able to multi-task	●	●	●	●	●
Able to find answers			●	●	
Know when to end a campaign, project or to close down your organization				●	●
Delegate tasks and responsibilities	●	●	●	●	●
Writing, such as professional e-mail and basic reports			●	●	●
Using a computer	●	●	●	●	●
Negotiating/arbitrating			●	●	
Multilingual speaking, writing, translating	●	●	●	●	
Phone answering	●	●	●	●	●
Writing reports, such as policy reports			●	●	●
Using Basic Office software: Excel/Power Point/ Quick Books			●	●	●
Using social media/social networking	●		●	●	
Marketing					●
Using GIS			●		
Video/film production					●



### FUTURE TRENDS.

The following are some comments from our national survey about directions and priorities in organizing:

**Going Beyond Local Models.** *“There is a strong movement toward innovation and experimentation in traditional community organizing. It’s not happening across the board, but the old model of community organizing has lost its utility. As power has grown and centralized, what is the value of purely local community organizing? Very little.”*

**Getting Local Leaders Involved.** *“How do we involve the populace with whom we work to become part of the solution to the problems we face in our neighborhoods?”*

**Sparking Community Resistance.** *“The community organizer doesn’t build [anything]. The people who are targeted by the particular oppression must create resistance on their own behalf and build their own movement...the organizer is a sparkplug, most importantly.”*

## OCCUPATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS: WORKER BEHAVIORS NEEDED FOR ORGANIZERS

*A worker behavior is an innate or learned ability or distinguishing quality that allows an individual to complete a job. These cut across all of the duties associated with the job. The following are the worker behaviors of organizers, listed from Most Important to Least Important, as ranked on our national survey.*

Integrity > Accountability > Reliable > Open and willing to learn > Able to identify one’s own skills > Able to take initiative > People-oriented > Self-reflective and self analytical > Understanding of histories & cultures of communities one is working with > Flexible and able to handle change > Follows through > Able to understand and accept one’s own power > Persistent > Committed to social justice > Able to ask for help > Able to work both independently and as part of a team > Strong sense of community building > Goal-oriented > Passionate about working with diverse communities > Able to understand the organization and its culture > Able to meet deadlines > Analytical > Thoughtful > Empathic > Likes being hands-on > Willing to take risks > Practice a healthy/sustainable lifestyle > Sense of humor > Curious > Decisive > Quick thinker > Fair > Militant: Activist fighter with a positive outlook > Fearless.

## GENERAL KNOWLEDGE THAT ORGANIZERS NEED TO HAVE

*General knowledge is the context for an occupation. It cuts across all of the duties and behaviors associated with a job. The following is the general knowledge organizers need, listed from Most Important to Least Important, as ranked on our national survey.*

- Understanding the political system and policymaking process (local, state, national).
- Understanding power, privilege and oppression.
- Understanding local issues, including the politics and the history of specific communities in the area.
- Able to engage in power analysis of personal and interpersonal dynamics, as well as social and structural.
- Understanding interracial and intercultural dynamics.
- Understanding global justice movements for reform and liberation, and what makes a movement a movement.
- Owning one’s own history and struggles.
- Understanding different organizational models: theory/practice/structure.
- Knowing different models/theories of social change.
- Basic understanding of social, economic, political concepts such as neo-liberalism, imperialism, democracy, socialism, communism.

*“An educational curriculum can provide important historical knowledge along with a good grounding in democratic movements and the various types of organizing. It can teach decision-making and critical thinking skills. It can teach writing and speaking skills. An educational experience cannot provide a good opportunity to practice and reflect on actual organizing experiences and activities. This needs to be done in the field and under the mentoring of a skilled organizer.”* — Organizer from the national survey

## **ORGANIZERS TALK ABOUT ORGANIZING: LISTENING. BUILDING. MAKING CHANGE.**

As part of developing a job profile of a community organizer, the Community Learning Partnership (CLP) held a focus group of organizers in New York City in October 2012. Their discussion of how, when and why organizers engage in particular tasks and use specific skills offers essential insight into their occupation.

The Association for Housing and Neighborhood Development (ANHD), a CLP partner organization, convened the two-hour discussion among six organizers. Ericka Stallings from ANHD facilitated the session. Joan Minieri from CLP also attended and took notes.

### **ORGANIZERS ARE SKILLED LISTENERS AND COMMUNICATORS**

The participants reflected on the complexity of their tasks and were unanimous in portraying a good organizer as a skilled listener and communicator who can build relationships, and identify and develop leaders.

Ericka gave the participants the list of the top 20 most highly rated traits, skills and knowledge areas from the online survey of organizers that CLP had recently completed. She asked them to take a moment individually to review these lists and rank their top five. The top choices were those mentioned above: listening, relationship building, and identifying and developing leaders, followed by being culturally aware and able to ask for help.

The organizers agreed that listening is, as one stated, *“the most important building block.”* They cited the need for communication skills overall, in doing one-on-one meetings, facilitating group discussion, and effectively agitating people. Most critically, they believed that applying what they hear in their communications is what really matters. They said that organizers need to be able to make connections between what they hear from community members and see ways to apply it to the work. *“A lot of these fall under being able to connect, whether it is individually, or between people,”* one organizer said. *“That is one thing I am always thinking about – like bad heat in your apartment equals bad policy. I am always building that narrative with people.”*

### **ORGANIZERS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationship building also appeared on nearly everyone’s top-five list. *“Organizing is about the strength of the relationships you build with other people,”* one affirmed. *“It is about love, and seeing together the lives you want to build together.”* They cited the concept of accountability as being an essential aspect of relationship building. This includes being able to follow through and to guide people to practice and expect accountability in all of their relationships. They noted

the importance of strong relationships and accountability with the organizer and with other organization members as well as with figures such as public officials and landlords.

### **ORGANIZERS ARE CULTURALLY AWARE AND OPEN TO CHANGE**

In terms of cultural awareness, they explored the need for organizers to “*understand where people are coming from*” and to be able “*to relate that to a culture, gender, class level.*” One organizer spoke of cultural awareness as part of the “*integrity*” of an organizer. Another suggested, “*There is an inherent political analysis in that. The majority of what we want is systems change; at the same time we need to have an oppression analysis.*”

Being open to change includes the ability to reflect on and “*change strategies, messages, approach*” as one organizer said. Flexibility also includes “*being intentional about where you want to focus your limited resources.*”

### **ORGANIZERS THINK CRITICALLY AND CONTEXTUALLY**

The organizers also talked about the importance of critical thinking, and one added the need for contextually thinking. “*Our work is not always revolutionary,*” this organizer suggested. It is also about a systematic analysis of what is possible, “*breaking down a mayor’s race and how it will affect our work, for example, understanding points of pressure and windows of opportunity, understanding the context.*”

### **ORGANIZERS ARE COMMITTED TO JUSTICE AND TO SELF-REFLECTION**

The organizers highlighted the importance of having a dedication to social justice, and being open to self-reflection. They agreed that a commitment to social justice must be “*core to who you are,*” at some level, as one framed it.

Self-reflection was a theme to which they repeatedly returned. One suggested self-reflection is a particularly important attribute and something for anyone considering a career in organizing to be aware of: “*If I am not interested in looking at myself, maybe organizing is not the right career for me.*”

### **ORGANIZERS ARE INTENTIONAL AND TENACIOUS**

In several different ways, they said that organizers need to be prepared to work hard — to be tenacious, to challenge themselves, to take initiative and to be always pushing themselves and community members to see the connections between personal experience and public policy. “*The basis of organizing is the intentionality behind it,*” one said, naming the continual action/ reflection nature of creating change that the group referenced throughout the conversation.

### **ORGANIZERS LEARN BY DOING**

While they explored the various duties and tasks involved in organizing, from strategy development through campaign planning and organization management, the organizers focused on the building block skills. They talked about the differences between what an organizer needs to bring into an organization, versus what they expected to need to teach over time. Some tasks, such as campaign development, they noted as being critical, but suggested that acquiring the ability to complete these tasks requires on the job learning.

Other tasks and related skills require more immediate mastery. For example, the organizers noted that that they expect to train new organizers to do leadership development, in ways that

reflect how their organization defines leadership. At the same time, *“Identifying leaders is really hard for people,”* one experienced director asserted. *“It is something people need to have within six months to a year or you will not make it as an organizer.”*

While the building blocks the organizers kept returning to in the conversation were personal traits and basic skills that they expect to develop and strengthen in new organizers, they were clear that these needed to be there on some level if they were to hire or keep the organizer on staff. Their language was along the lines of ‘this is what I am looking for’ when talking to a potential staff person or evaluating a new organizer.

They also noted that what an organization needs is not always the same as what an individual organizer needs. Organizations, in a sense, need everything on the list, but people learn things at different points in their development, and not everyone can or should be expected to be good at everything.

### **ORGANIZERS DEVELOP LEADERS**

In terms of other aspects of leadership identification and development, cited as a core task, *“I don’t want to blankly talk about leadership development,”* one organizer said. *“I think you can learn coaching, how to accompany a person in a process, where you both identify where you both want to end up.”*

For leadership development in particular, the organizers said that this is not only necessary for building a strong membership-led organization, but that it is part of an organizer being able to develop her/himself, and to acknowledge that no one person can ‘do it all.’

### **ORGANIZING REDEFINES CULTURAL NORMS**

The focus group participants acknowledged that being able to ask for help is essential. They linked it to self-reflection and to leadership development. One organizer said that asking for help *“is the self-awareness to just be willing to get better.”*

This organizer noted that for new organizers, being able to ask for help is *“contrary to everything that they’ve learned.”* This idea that the job of an organizer is in many ways, counter to experience in the dominant culture, was a thread that ran throughout the discussion. At the same time, the organizers cited the importance of basic skills that could apply to any workplace, such as being personally organized so that others could follow or take up another’s tasks.

### **REFLECTING ON TECHNOLOGY TOOLS**

Ericka asked the participants to consider the most low-rated traits, skills, and knowledge areas on the CLP survey. They focused on skills related to resource development and to technology.

They thought that development needs vary, to a large extent based on the size of the organization. *“In a big organization, organizers may not need development skills, but for a small organization, they may.”* They also again referenced the fact that what an organization needs is not necessarily what every organizer needs to be able to do.

The technology discussion touched on computer use in a specific way. *“Using a computer is pretty important, because keeping track of the membership through the data base is really important,”*

one organizer said. *“I don’t know any group that doesn’t use a data base.”*

As for use of social media and video, both ranked at the bottom of the CLP survey responses. One said, *“It is incredibly important but we don’t do a good job with it...they are important skills but our generation does not have the skills to know how to make this work. I know that the investment now will pay off, but I don’t have that time to figure it out.”* Another had more direct experience using technology tools and suggested *“showing the work through video, photos is a great way to pull people in.”*

At the same time, they generally agreed that mastery of the tools is not as important as knowing your base, how people in your base communicate, and adjusting to accommodate that. One asked, *“What moves people and what’s going to be effective?”* As another put it, *“I can write an amazing two paragraph e-mail, but if no one in my base will read two paragraphs, so what?”*

Having the tools linked to strategy and the underlying skills was generally more important to these organizers. One said, *“I am on social media, so I get that,”* however *“it was not until someone came up with a strategy for how much, how many, and trying it, evaluating it,”* that social media could be applied to the organization’s work. *“Learning how to craft a public message is more important than how do you make a flyer or write a tweet,”* this organizer concluded. *“If I can craft a good message, that’s the skill, how you send it out is less important.”*

Finally, in reviewing the survey lists, the organizers also added the skills of being able to handle conflict and having a critical pedagogy by helping people to learn by doing.

### **LEARNING TO BE AN ORGANIZER**

Finally, the organizers reflected on how they learned their craft.

*“It is relational,”* one said about how organizers learn about organizing, *“and that is important... having someone to process it with.”*

Another suggested, *“A lot of it is trial and error, and someone pointing out to you what you have just done.”* This organizer gave an example of getting a parent to stop cooking a meal you don’t like, and walking through the steps to do that successfully. *“You figure out how to do it, you get your sister involved, and you go through all the steps to get what you want, but you would not have known you ran a campaign unless someone told you it was a campaign.”*

Another agreed and said that training at ANHD in particular was critical. In learning to do a one-on-one meeting, the organizer reflected, *“I still remember the first time I was trained to do this and seeing it in a training context. I still go back to that. We had sessions here where we simulated things. Then a facilitator gave feedback on what happened, what did you notice? It was about having someone tell you what you actually did.”*

Another continued, *“When I started, I had some of the skills on this list, but I did not know what organizing really was.”* The organizer also recalled participating in training at ANHD. *“I used to think I knew what a one-on-one was then I came to training here and we learned organizing was about power relationships. I remember realizing that it was not about painting a mural together.”*

After that initial training, the organizer cited developing relationships with more senior organizers as well as coaching relationships. *“I would take agitational challenges, media hooks, and things like that, and bring them to talk about.”* Later, the organizer would do the same with newer organizers, to continue the mentorship process.

*“Having mentors and the opportunity to do things is how I learned,”* another agreed.

Learning requires *“shadowing and being shadowed,”* one noted. *“Understanding that action and reflection is equally important. You have to be open to being watched.”*

The organizers concluded with expressions of enthusiasm for CLP’s efforts at the community college level, citing the availability of on campus organizing projects for practicing skills.

They agreed that mentorship; the opportunity to reflect on one’s actions with trusted individuals and as part of intentional, group training; and naming the process of making change as ‘organizing’ have all been essential to their development. They offered that these could be part of any educational endeavor.

*“This is a great reminder of the complexity of what we do.”* —Organizer from the New York focus group

## **CONCLUSION: USING THIS JOB PROFILE FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

**Learning Objectives.** This job profile offers a basis for identifying learning objectives for each of the primary duties of an organizer. As CLP develops educational pathways into community change careers, this is a tool for assessing our courses to identify similar learning objectives and to advise our course development, including the creation of new courses.

**Experiential Learning.** This profile affirms and clarifies the CLP approach of combining practicum experiences and internships with theory and concrete skill development. It also strengthens our understanding of the specific skills that organizers need to practice and the knowledge that students need to learn in order to effectively perform the tasks and fulfill the duties of community organizers.

**Reflection Tools.** This profile clearly identifies the importance of self-reflection in organizing. CLP programs also include self-reflection as an integral component in learning about organizing. This profile offers the basis for self-assessment tools for students and for the broader organizing and community change fields.

**In Summary.** This profile supports the cornerstone of CLP’s approach, which is to build partnerships among colleges and local nonprofits and civic organizations, in order to make this full range of educational experiences possible.

This report is a living document. As we use and refine it, we look forward to engaging in dialogue with our colleagues and partners, learning from the students in our programs, and building a more just and equitable world, together.

## SOCIAL CHANGE ORGANIZATIONS REFLECT ON THEIR TRAINING PRACTICES

At a focus group at De Anza College in January 2013, ten participants from nine local advocacy, organizing and service organizations that all use a social change approach, considered the list of skills, traits and knowledge from our national survey. Cynthia Kaufman, director of De Anza's Institute of Community and Civic Engagement, and Kei Fisher, an organizer with the Institute, facilitated and took notes. De Anza's Certificate in Leadership and Social Change, a program of the Institute, is a CLP local program site.

Participants ranked the following as the five most important skills and traits: 1) able to take initiative, 2) able to establish and build working relationships, 3) self-reflective and analytical, 4) reliable, 5) flexible and able to handle change.

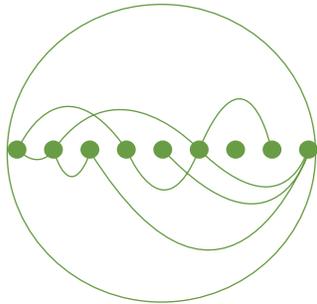
While some of the specific items are different, their views reflect those of the New York organizers, who continually returned in their conversation to the importance of assessment, intentionality and relationship building. In addition, as the De Anza group continued to prioritize from the longer list, they chose listening skills, being open and willing to learn, and cultural competency/culturally responsive organizing skills – all priorities of the New York organizers as well.

The presence of a range of social change organizations in the De Anza focus group suggests the cross-sector nature of some of the traits, skills and knowledge areas.

The organizations talked about how they train their staff and leaders, in light of these priorities. They noted that when interns, volunteers or new staff members begin working with them, the organizations initially focus their training on self-awareness and developing a political consciousness before moving into campaigns. Participants in the focus group created a list of the kinds of training they provided at their organizations as well as some examples of outside skills training programs they accessed for new staff.

Their training topics support experiential learning, with opportunities for reflection and for understanding the social and political context. For example, they teach tasks and skills like phone banking, door knocking and how to facilitate a meeting. At the same time, one organization engages staff in personal inventories of how one 'shows up' as a leader. Another works with staff on a power analysis of the city of San Jose, where many De Anza students live. Another cultivates an understanding of ideology.

All participants said they were open to creating opportunities for students in the Certificate in Leadership and Social Change program to intern with their organizations. They all wanted to join the Community Advisory Board for the certificate program as well. Many stressed their commitment to helping students define and reach their personal goals as interns. They wanted to develop leadership skills among the students as well as skills that would help them get a job.



### MORE INFORMATION ONLINE.

Visit us online for more on the steps in this process, to review the data we gathered and to learn more about how we are using this job profile at CLP.

[www.communitylearningpartnership.org](http://www.communitylearningpartnership.org)

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## THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER JOB ANALYSIS PROCESS: DACUM (DEVELOP A CURRICULUM)

**Overview.** To develop this job analysis, the Community Learning Partnership (CLP) used a modified DACUM process, an abbreviation for Develop a Curriculum. This is a widely used workforce development technique in which workers describe and analyze what they do on a day-to-day basis in order to determine the competencies that their educational or training curriculum needs to address.

**The Steps.** The following is a summary of our steps in developing this job profile:

- **Expert Convening.** First, we convened **15 experts** from the field to list the traits, skills and knowledge areas of community organizers. They included practitioners, professors and other supporters.
- **National Survey.** Next, community organizers and supporters of organizing from throughout the U.S. completed an online survey to validate the lists and findings of the expert group. With a pilot survey and a revised, final survey, we successfully sent the survey to a total of 164 people. **Out of the 164 recipients, 61 completed the primary questions, a little over a 37% response rate.** Nearly 2/3 of the survey takers reported that they were currently employed as organizers, with the rest former organizers, volunteer organizers or serving in support roles such as funders or trainers.
- **Focus Groups.** Two **focus groups with a total of 15 participants** illuminated the survey data. The survey and focus groups also offered insight into how organizers define organizing, what kinds of organizations employ organizers and how organizers believe college programs support on-the-job training. CLP sites held additional, more informal conversations with colleagues.
- **Writing the Profile.** CLP staff reviewed and categorized the lists and additional data into **Duties, Skills, Tasks, Worker Behaviors and General Knowledge.**
- **Using the Analysis and the Profile.** At a CLP national meeting of staff and Steering Committee members in January 2013, we reviewed the preliminary findings and **considered how to best deepen our analysis and apply it to our work.** We prioritized making our report, as well as the data from the online survey available to the broader organizing and academic communities and creating self-assessment tools. We agreed to explore using the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile as a possible tool for applying our findings directly to our community change studies curriculum.

## COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP: SITES, STEERING COMMITTEE, STAFF

### SITES:

**Cupertino/San Jose, CA – De Anza College:**

**Cynthia Kaufman**, *Director, Institute of Community and Civic Engagement*, De Anza College

**Detroit (2013 Start up):**

**Ozzie Rivera**, *Director, Community Engagement*, Southwest Solutions

**Linda West**, *Director, Earn and Learn*, Southwest Solutions

**Los Angeles, CA — Community Development Technologies Center (CD Tech):**

**Benjamin Torres**, *CEO/President*, CDTech

**Minnesota – Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC):**

**Sydney Beane**, *Field Director, Community Learning Partnership and Faculty*, MCTC

**Lena Jones**, *Faculty*, MCTC

**Mississippi (2013 Start up):**

**Lena Jones**, *Faculty, MCTC; Program Director, Race in America Then and Now: “Post-Racial” Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement for Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs*

**New York City:**

**Hector Soto**, *Assistant Professor*, Hostos Community College

**Oakland, CA – Laney Community College:**

**Crystallee Crain**, *Consultant*, Urban Strategies Council

**Alison Feldman**, *Program Associate*, Urban Strategies Council

### NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE:

**Sydney Beane**, *Field Director*, Community Learning Partnership and *Faculty*, MCTC, Minneapolis, MN

**Denise Fairchild**, *President*, Emerald Cities Collaborative, Washington, DC (co-chair)

**Brian Murphy**, *President*, De Anza College, Cupertino, CA

**Edmundo Norte**, *Dean*, Intercultural and International Studies, De Anza College, Cupertino, CA

**Hector Soto**, *Assistant Professor*, Hostos Community College, Bronx, NY

**Benjamin Torres**, *CEO/President*, CDTech, Los Angeles, CA (co-chair)

**Maya Wiley**, *President*, Center for Social Inclusion, New York, NY

### NATIONAL STAFF AND CONSULTANTS:

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**Ken Rolling**, *Executive Director*, Chicago, IL

**Hilary Binder-Aviles**, *Consultant*, Documentation/Evaluation and *Senior Consultant*, Mosaica, Washington, DC

**Bruce Campbell**, *Consultant*, Technology and *Faculty*, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI

**Daniel HoSang**, *Consultant*, Curriculum Development and *Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies and Political Science*, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR

**Andy Mott**, *Senior Advisor and Founder*, Community Learning Partnership, Washington, DC

## community learning partnership

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