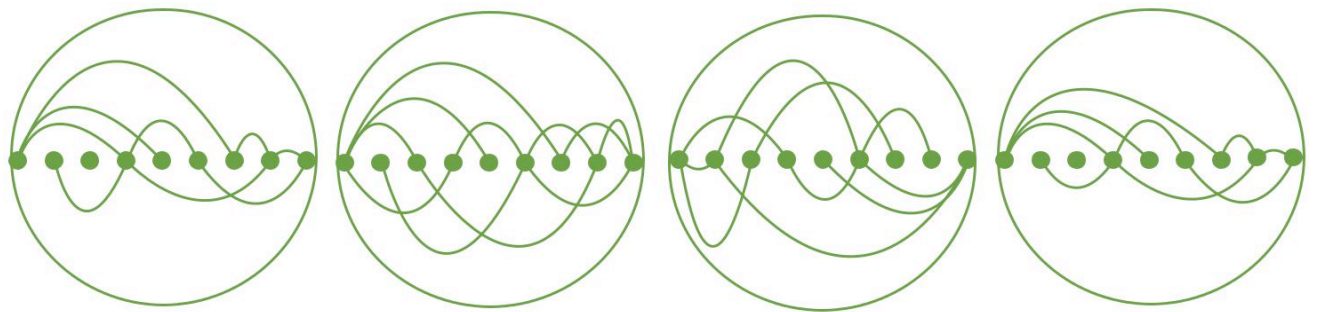


What Does an Organizer Need to Know?*



community learning partnership

Pathways into Community Change Careers

*Excerpted from “LISTENING—BUILDING—MAKING
CHANGE: JOB PROFILE OF A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER”

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. *“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.”

“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...”