CHAPTER TWELVE

Participation in Congregation-Based Organizing

A Mixed-Method Study of Civic Engagement

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Statement of the Problem

Empowerment refers to a social action process through which individuals, organizations, and communities gain greater control over issues of concern to them (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Speer, 2000; Zippay, 1995). Community participation in activities such as community organizing has been identified as a critical route to empowerment (Cox, 1991; Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Although there are numerous models and approaches to community organizing (Brager, Specht, & Torczyner, 1987; Rothman, 1996; Smock, 2004), the approach of congregation-based organizing emphasizes relationship building and joint action that improves a community's quality of life (Swarts, 2008). Whatever the approach, community organizing is an activity that involves a set of strategies that an organization undertakes to create individual, organizational, and community change.

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This chapter presents a study that applied a mixed-methods approach incorporating multiple designs (i.e., pretest-posttest comparison group design and case study methods) and levels of analysis (i.e., individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis) to evaluate factors including participation and civic engagement in a community organizing initiative affiliated with the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations (PICO) National Network (www.piconetwork.org). Most published studies of community organizing have been case studies (Fisher, Brooks, & Russell, 2007; Warren, 2004; Wood, 2002) or cross-sectional studies of organizing members (Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer, & Adams-Leavitt, 1995; Swarts, 2008). Few studies have evaluated organizing outcomes using mixed-methods designs incorporating experimental or quasi-experimental approaches. This study of a community organizing initiative is unique because it provides rich, long-term data about the process of this planned change effort. A key aim of the study is to measure the degree to which the PICO National Network organizing effort engaged and empowered citizens toward changing policies and practices of community institutions that shape the context for the development and maintenance of quality of life in one community organizing site.

Literature Review

The PICO National Network builds community organizations that are primarily based on organizing efforts through religious congregations, and to a lesser extent through schools and community centers (Keddy, 2001). The PICO organizing model brings people together on the basis of faith and values while embracing an American pragmatic philosophy of using the tools of democracy to improve communities (Boyte, 2003). From a values perspective, religion offers one of the most powerful alternatives to market-driven ideology. Across denominations and faiths, religion often presents an anchoring in the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, regardless of race, class, sex, or other characteristics along which society is divided. Community organizing that draws on these common values has the potential to be a force for positive change in communities.

From a pragmatic perspective, religion is one of the strongest institutions in American society. Particularly in working-class and lower-income neighborhoods, disinvestment, deindustrialization, school busing, and similar processes have served to substantially weaken traditional community institutions (Pilisuk, McAllister, & Rothman, 1999). Despite the resultant weakening of established mechanisms of collective action and the social capital necessary for such action, religious institutions
have remained relatively strong and uniquely viable in these communities.

Neighborhood organizing and faith-based community organizing have become leading forms of social action since the 1960s (Fisher, 2008; Warren, 2008). DeFilippis and Saegert (2008) note that concepts of social power and empowerment are critical in understanding traditional community organizing.

Empowerment can be considered a construct involving multiple levels of analysis (Gutierrez, Lewis, Nagda, Wernik, & Shore, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Theories of empowerment are relevant to community organizing especially when considered at the individual and organizational levels of analysis. At the individual level, participation in a community organization provides experience that challenges individual cognitions of social power and provides a collective context through which one can process or reflect on emotional reactions to that power. Freire (1970) described this action-reflection process as dynamic praxis. This principle comports with two concepts from empowerment theory: (1) empowerment as an intrapsychic phenomenon and (2) empowerment as a process cultivated by specific settings, that is, empowering organizations (Peterson & Speer, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, a feature of an empowerment setting would be “opportunity role structure” (Maton & Salem, 1995, p. 643), or the roles available in organizational settings that encourage individual participation (Speer & Hughey, 1995). These structures refer to the amount, accessibility, and arrangement of formal positions or roles in an organization that provide chances or opportunities for members to cooperate and build relationships and to strengthen their leadership skills and competencies.

At the organizational level, empowerment theory is relevant to community organizing because it involves the development of collective or organizational power that can change policies or practices of communities (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Although theories of empowerment are crucial to community organizing, few systematic evaluation studies have been conducted to empirically demonstrate those linkages.

In their review of the literature related to community interventions, Ohmer and Korr (2006) noted that only a small number of studies using comparison group designs or statistical control have been conducted to evaluate community organizing initiatives. Although important to the knowledge base, the few studies conducted in this area of macro practice have consisted of cross-sectional studies or case studies of an organizing effort to demonstrate a particular approach to community organizing. For example, Slessarev-Jamir (2004) conducted interviews with fifteen pastors to explore the reasons their faith institutions became involved in community organizing. She found that pastors perceived organizing as a fit with the congregations’ localized priorities and viewed organizing as leading to tangible community improvements, especially in poorer communities, which are often excluded from professionalized forms of civic engagement. Although faith-based organizing groups vary, they typically engage in a process that has its roots in the work of Saul Alinsky. However, none of the studies included in Ohmer and Korr’s (2006) review focused specifically on faith-based community organizing.

Faith-based community organizing draws on religious congregations as its institutional base. In general, the initiatives reflect broad-based efforts to bring people together primarily through their religious organizations, although some of these organizing groups also include unions and other types of not-for-profit organizations. Two national faith-based community-organizing networks, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the PICO National Network, have received substantial attention in the academic literature.

Speer and colleagues have contributed much of the empirical work on the faith-based organizing of the PICO National Network (e.g., Christens, Hanlin, & Speer, 2007; Peterson et al., 2008; Speer, 2008; Speer et al., 2003). However, like other areas of research on community organizing, much of that work has been cross-sectional, descriptive case studies, or the development of measures for use in organizing contexts. None of those studies used a mixed-methods evaluation design to assess the effectiveness of PICO on individual, organizational, and community outcomes. The present study applied a mixed-methods approach incorporating multiple designs (i.e., pretest-posttest comparison group design and case study methods) to gather data from several levels of analysis (i.e., individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis).

### Methodology

The current study focused on a community organizing initiative that the PICO National Network launched in five communities across the country. Results presented here are from one site in northern Colorado: Congregations Building Community (CBC). Ten congregations in the CBC were actively involved over the course of this study, but another twenty-two less involved congregations participated in CBC activities during the period. Four factors were analyzed to document the impact of the CBC’s efforts on community organizing:

1. Rates of participation in community organizing over time
2. Levels of civic engagement
3. Levels of empowerment
4. Community-level variables (e.g., city policies and availability of affordable housing) affecting the quality of life

STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Five communities were selected for a larger study using a set of criteria defined by the funding organization rather than being selected by the research team. All five communities were part of the PICO National Network. However, data on only one of the communities are reported here.

To study organizing effects on individual participants, a pretest-posttest comparison group design was employed. The sampling frame was generated from the population of individuals who had signed attendance sheets at organizing events over a two-year period. To ensure a balance of participation levels, the sampling frame was divided into two groups: (1) individuals who had attended one, two, or three events over two years and (2) individuals who had attended four or more events. For each group, the sample was drawn at random for inclusion in this study. To develop a comparison group, random-digit dialing was targeted to the same geographic neighborhoods in which the CBC is located.

Both CBC participants and the comparison group of residents were contacted in year 3 and again in year 5 to complete a twenty-minute telephone survey on civic engagement, empowerment, and several other constructs, as well as a series of demographic questions. The survey response rate for CBC participants was 48 percent; for the comparison group, it was 20 percent.

The measures of civic engagement and psychological empowerment were consistent with those used in prior research. An abbreviated version of Speer and Peterson’s (2000) Behavioral Scale was used to assess civic involvement and participatory behaviors in community-action activities. Six items asked respondents to indicate their frequency of participation in a variety of community meetings and events (e.g., wrote a letter to influence local policies, attended a public meeting to pressure for a policy change) over a three-month period. Respondents answered the items using a six-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “about weekly.” In addition, an abbreviated version of the Sociopolitical Control Scale (SPCS) (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991) was used as the measure of empowerment. Respondents answered the eight SPCS items using a five-point, Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

SOURCES FOR COLLECTING DATA

Sign-in sheets. Participation in community organizing activities is documented through sign-in sheets. At every organizing activity,staff persons have attendees sign an attendance form. These meetings vary from small planning committee meetings to large, public-actions. Over the five years that the research team tracked attendance in the meetings at CBC, there were 724 meetings. The mean number of attendees at meetings was 9.39. Infrequent, large public actions involved up to 356 attendees. Data from the sign-in sheets were entered into a database that tracked individual participants over time. The number of individuals participating (N = 1,919) and the frequency (M = 3.54 meetings) of their attendance at meetings were tracked over the five years of this study.

Surveys. The impact of participation in CBC was examined through telephone surveys with a random sample of CBC participants, compared to a group of randomly selected residents from the same neighborhoods who were not participants in CBC. A total of 309 individuals completed wave 1 of the survey: 108 were participants in CBC and 201 were nonparticipating residents in the same communities. In contrast, a total of 106 individuals completed wave 2: forty-nine participants from CBC and fifty-seven nonparticipating residents completed the survey.

Archival data. In addition to individual-level data, archival data sources were collected to gather neighborhood and community characteristics. Archival sources included the U.S. Census and Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data.

Statistical procedures. Analyses employed in this study include descriptive and inferential statistics. Inferential statistical procedures include multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and repeated-measures MANOVA.

Results

ANNUAL RATE OF PARTICIPATION

Analysis of sign-in sheets gathered from organizing activities showed a wide range of participation. Both the unique number of attendees and the total attendance were extracted from the sign-in sheets. By dividing the total attendance at organizing activities by the number of unique individuals participating in CBC, a rate (calculated annually) was generated. Figure 12.1 expresses these rates on a yearly basis. As Figure 12.1 shows, the average participant in CBC increased their level of participation from 2.1 meetings per year to 2.7 meetings per year. The number of
unique participants involved in CBC varied between four hundred and five hundred in each of the first four years studied, whereas the number of times people participate in organizing events increases in all five years. The rate of participation dipped in 2005 because, although the number of times people participated increases, the number of unique people attending had a greater proportional increase.

In addition, organizing events were analyzed to assess the interaction of CBC with other groups in the community. This assessment at the organizational level of analysis can be thought of as a bridging form of social capital (see Stolle & Rochon, 1998). The CBC connects with other organizations via meetings between organizational participants and representatives of other groups, agencies, and organizations. In 2001, CBC met with fifty-six organizations in the community, such as other faith groups, local governmental entities, banks, policy groups, and social service agencies. In 2002, the CBC met with sixty-four organizations, as compared to sixty-three in 2003 and seventy-six in 2004. In 2005, CBC met with only twenty-eight organizations.

**INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS FROM TELEPHONE SURVEYS**

In the third year of the study, the comparison group consisting of a random sample of residents was compared with CBC participants. To scrutinize the comparability of CBC participants relative to the random sample of residents, an analysis of variance was conducted to test for differences between the two groups on five demographic characteristics: age, gender, ethnicity (African American, white, and Latino were each tested separately), education, and income. The comparison group was comparable to the CBC group on all but two of the characteristics: age \( (F = 12.4 \, (1, \, 307), \, p < .001) \) and Latino ethnicity \( (F = 8.68 \, (1, \, 307), \, p < .001) \). Residents in the CBC group were older and had more Latino members.

One question examined in this study was the PICO organizing model's assertion that there were practical advantages from organizing through religious congregations. Levels of civic engagement were compared between CBC and the non-CBC community sample. Non-CBC community members were asked to identify the local organization or mediating structure in which they were most involved (e.g., church, synagogue, school group, block or neighborhood group, another group, no group).

The data suggested that working through churches for community change is effective because so many people are connected to a religious institution. Among those contacted through random-digit dialing, 50 percent were members of religious organizations, 9 percent were members of school groups, 8 percent were members of neighborhood groups, and 32 percent were not members of any of these organizations. (Two non-CBC respondents identified “other” local group as a group that they were most involved with, but because of their small sample size, they were dropped from analysis.)

An analysis of covariance was performed on the data to examine group differences with regard to civic engagement, adjusting for differences between groups based on age, gender, ethnicity, education, or income. In the multivariate analysis, only two demographic characteristics were significant: gender and education level. Members of school groups were more often female and more educated. As Table 12.1 reports, after holding demographics constant, there was a significant difference in civic engagement between these groups \( (F = 10.1 \, (4, \, 295), \, p < .001) \).

Individuals participating in CBC demonstrated the greatest degree of civic engagement. The CBC participants had significantly greater levels of civic engagement than participants who were members of churches or synagogues, groups, and those who identified as not being an active group member, and greater levels, but not significantly greater, than parent-teacher organizations and/or school groups or block and neighborhood groups. Because there were relatively few citizens engaged with schools or neighborhood groups, the variability of participation of those members fluctuated greatly, thereby limiting the confidence in
TABLE 2.1. Mean civic engagement scores for individuals by most active group membership category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBC (N = 108)</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-CBC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/synagogue (N = 100)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-teacher organizing/school group (N = 18)</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block/neighborhood group (N = 16)</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No active group (N = 65)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F = 10.1 (4, 295), p < .001.

A pretest-posttest design was constructed. In year 5, a second wave of the survey was conducted. A total of 106 individuals, 49 from CBC and 57 randomly selected residents, participated in the survey at two time periods. To explore for bias in the retention of research participants for each group (45 percent for CBC and 28 percent for the comparison group), an analysis was conducted to determine whether those participating at posttest were significantly different from those participating at pretest according to demographic characteristics. No demographic differences among the posttest respondents compared to the pretest respondents were found. A repeated-measures MANOVA was conducted to test for differences between the pretest and posttest scores on measures of civic engagement and empowerment between the community organizing and comparison groups. This analysis applied to the within-subjects design reduces error variance while allowing for a comparison of the vectors of mean differences across the two independent variables and the two measurement occasions.

statistical significance between CBC and participants of block and neighborhood groups. In addition, the difference between participants of CBC and those of non-CBC involved churches was great, undermining the idea that CBC simply capitalizes on the elevated levels of civic engagement among members of churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions.

To understand the differences between the organizing efforts in CBC and the comparison group, we explored two questions:

1. Does CBC (and other congregation-based organizations) simply recruit the most active individuals within religious congregations?
2. Does the organizing process itself add value to individuals in religious congregations?

Results of the repeated-measures MANOVA are noted in Table 12.2. (Covariates were not used, as there were no significant demographic effects.) A statistically significant interaction effect was found between the two groups (i.e., CBC versus the comparison group) for both civic engagement (Wilks's lambda = .82; F(1,104) = 22.36, p < .001) and empowerment (Wilks's lambda = .95; F(1,104) = 5.42, p < .05). Members of CBC showed increased civic engagement over time (wave 1 M = 1.68, wave 2 M = 1.88), though there was no change in civic engagement among individuals in the comparison group (wave 1 M = 1.00, wave 2 M = 1.01). Table 12.2 also suggests that members of CBC showed increased empowerment over time (wave 1 M = 3.62, wave 2 M = 3.82), whereas there was no significant change in the empowerment among individuals in the comparison group (wave 1 M = 3.74, wave 2 M = 3.65). Taken together, the data show that, although CBC members initially had higher rates of civic engagement than non-CBC members, participation in CBC organizing activities further differentiated the groups over time, with a significant increase in both civic engagement and empowerment for members of CBC.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS
Community impacts are difficult to assess because communities are dynamic, with complex, multilayered influences. Given that local initiative determines CBC organizing, and that strategies, goals, and targeted impacts evolve through the organizing process, standard research methods that measure baselines and change in dependent variables

Table 12.2. Pretest and posttest means and standard deviations for civic engagement and empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Civic engagement (CE)</th>
<th>Empowerment (EMP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizing (CBC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest (N = 49)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest (N = 49)</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest (N = 57)</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest (N = 57)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CE = group x time interaction: Wilks's lambda = .82; F(1,104) = 22.36, p < .001. EMP = group x time interaction: Wilks's lambda = .95; F(1,104) = 5.42, p < .05.
over time are not available. Nevertheless, case studies can capture community impacts of organizing efforts.

An example of the community impacts generated by CBC's organizing is described here through the work of one congregation on the issue of affordable housing. Members of a particular congregation, who were primarily Latino and resided in a largely Latino area, identified housing affordability as a critical issue in their community.

In early 2003, the organizing group in the congregation began a research process to understand the issues around affordable housing and to learn about the causes and magnitude of the problem. This research was instigated by a team of leaders in the congregation who engaged their membership and communicated with others in the congregation. This research started with surveys of the congregation at worship services. Specifically, the survey was based on issues that surfaced in the one-on-one organizing process (see Speer et al., 1995) and inquired about issues of housing quality, landlords, rents, down payments, residency documentation, and credit. Next, the organizing group conducted fourteen research-related meetings and attended three meetings sponsored by other groups (the city council and a nonprofit housing provider) to learn about affordable housing. The group also gathered information about affordable housing by meeting with governmental housing agencies, nonprofit housing providers, nonprofit service providers, mortgage lenders, real estate developers, media, and local elected officials.

On the basis of this information, the organizing group in the congregation found that the city had no plan or coherent policy regarding affordable housing. This group then held an action meeting—conducted in both English and Spanish and attended by 214 people—with the mayor, a city council member, and the director of city planning. The group requested that city officials develop a task force to examine the affordable housing issues that had been raised as result of the group's research. The officials were committed to developing a task force to consider affordable housing. Members of the organizing group participated in the subsequent task force meetings, raised issues, presented research, and actively shaped how the task force deliberated during its decision-making processes.

In April 2004, the task force completed its report and made recommendations to the city council. The organizing group pushed the council to accept and implement a set of recommendations. The council approved the recommendations in May 2004. Four new policies that the city adopted included the following: (1) the creation of mixed-income housing developments, where at least 20 percent of housing would be developed for lower-income families (80 percent of median or below-poverty level); (2) expansion of a city program to help low-income home buyers with down-payment assistance via low-interest loans (from $4,000 to $10,000, with 70 percent of this financial support to come from Department of Housing and Urban Development or Community Development Block Grant monies, and 30 percent from the city); (3) the development of a program in two neglected neighborhoods that made $15,000 loans available to support renters who wanted to purchase their rental property and become homeowners; and (4) housing rehabilitation funding for low-income households needing maintenance and repairs (up to $30,000 in low-interest loans per household, and 50 percent of the loan could be held until the sale of the property).

In conjunction with these successful efforts to alter policies regarding affordable housing in the city, CBC also worked to increase access to home mortgages by residents in the largely Latino neighborhoods of the city. For example, very few mortgages were available in the neighborhood of the congregation and the surrounding neighborhoods. In response, through a series of meetings with several banks, the group discovered that local banks claimed that they could not make loans to families who did not have permanent resident alien status. In response, CBC conducted more research efforts that leveraged several organizational relationships. For example, through the PICO National Network, CBC contacted the National Training and Information Center, which directed the local congregation to a bank in Milwaukee that understood how loans could be made, legally and profitably, to those who did not have permanent resident alien status (i.e., families similar to the types of families in CBC's local community). During a conference call, organizing leaders from CBC asked the Milwaukee bank president to call a local bank president with whom CBC had been meeting. In the end, by leveraging the social capital embedded in organizational networks (Hughey & Speer, 2002), CBC was successful. The local bank developed a loan program for members of the congregation that included bilingual trainings by the bank (held at the church) about how to apply for a home loan, eligibility considerations for non-permanent resident aliens, acceptance of nontraditional credit sources, and down payments set at 3 percent.

In an effort to analyze the impacts of these policy changes, an analysis of Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data (www.ffiec.gov/hmda) examined whether increases in mortgage loans were made in targeted neighborhoods of the community where CBC was working to increase mortgage loans. To conduct this analysis, the census tract of the congregation and the five census tracts contiguous with the congregation's tract were identified and compared with the other census tracts in the county. The six tracts composing the target of this policy change in bank lending represented 9.2 percent of the county's population. The
target area was 61 percent Latino and represented 24 percent of the county residents.

By analyzing HMDA data over time, annual rates of change in conventional loan dollar amounts invested in the target neighborhoods were compared with other areas in the county. Figure 12.2 depicts these changes over time and reveals substantial fluctuations. Overall, Figure 12.2 does not support evidence that congregation-based organizing had an impact on changing mortgage investment policies. Although a substantial percentage change was realized between 2005 and 2006 (when the program was implemented), it is still less than the change between 2002 and 2003, raising the question as to whether the change in the targeted time period can be attributed to CBC activity or simply to normal variation.

**Implications for Decision Making**

This study generated empirical evidence on changes in participation, civic engagement, and psychological empowerment among members of a PICO-affiliated community organizing initiative (i.e., CBC), as well as community-level policy changes. It used a longitudinal, mixed-methods research design including quasi-experimental and case study methods. The study found that average rates of participation among CBC members increased from 2.1 to 2.7 meetings yearly over a five-year period, peaking at 3.7 meetings in year 4. Tracking interorganizational contacts, analyses found that the CBC leadership had a total of 287 formal organizational contacts, with a high of 76 contacts in year 4. In a pre- and posttest comparison, members of CBC were significantly more likely to be engaged in civic activities than were nonmembers affiliated with other organizations, including churches.

It is important to note that CBC members also had significantly greater rates of empowerment and civic engagement than did nonmembers over the five-year period. Case study material illustrates the ways that participation, civic engagement, and empowerment were realized. For example, members carried out an action in which a systematic research effort and a series of carefully planned meetings with town officials resulted in the design and implementation of municipal policies to enhance housing affordability. Similarly, by leveraging organizational networks, members were able to alter the lending policies of a private banking entity.

**STRATEGIES**

The findings of the present study suggest that congregation-based organizing involves a set of strategies that might be generalizable to other organizations in their efforts to facilitate relationship building and collaborative activities. These include development of an opportunity role structure for community-based groups, accessing the social networks of other organizations, and implementation of community actions.

Community organizers often strive to develop strong opportunity role structures among groups and initiatives (Speer et al., 1995; Speer et al., 2003). Previous empirical work suggests that opportunity role structure is an important organizational characteristic that can promote civic engagement and empowerment. One specific tactic to improve opportunity role structure may be role creation. By expanding the organizational roles available for individuals to fill, the development of opportunity role structures may facilitate civic engagement, empowerment, and change, as well as strengthen the capacity of an organization.

The second strategy involves efforts to access the social networks of other institutions in the community. This may be an important interorganizational process because it represents activity intended to establish links with other organizations in ways that can result in alliances to leverage policy change. In this way, accessing the social networks of other organizations may be crucial in the establishment of collaborative arrangements needed for organizations to influence their communities.
Another crucial strategy in which community-organizing efforts affect conditions is the implementation of community actions. A community action is a public meeting or event that an organization holds in an attempt to exercise social power. Community actions provide members opportunities to bring public attention to specific problems. Members can invite other community residents to the event, as well as the news media, and then provide testimony, present research, and publicly challenge community targets, such as elected officials, to change policies and resource allocations that might offer solutions to the problems plaguing their families and neighborhoods.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the institutionally based community-organizing strategies used by the PICO National Network had the effect of increasing civic engagement and psychological empowerment among CBC members in a northern Colorado site. With initial facilitation from PICO organizers, members gained knowledge of a community change process. That information was then translated into action via issue identification; research; and strategic engagement with a wide network of fellow citizens, organizational leaders, and public officials. The process gave political voice to a wider range of community members and broadened democratic processes, thereby leading to initiatives for change, including those involving affordable housing.

As a contribution to theory, this study has showed, at an individual level, that participation in community organizing increased civic engagement and empowerment, although the direction of causality between civic engagement and empowerment itself was not specified and tested in this study. In general, most theorists would posit that civic engagement precedes the development of empowerment (Itzhaky & York, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000), although others have suggested that this link may be more reciprocal in nature (Speer & Hughey, 1995) or that civic engagement may actually be a manifestation of empowerment rather than a contribution to it for some individuals (Peterson & Speer, 2000). Future research should employ the use of cross-lagged panel analyses and other longitudinal techniques to more carefully articulate the direction of causality between these constructs and the principles that govern the relationship between civic engagement and empowerment.

The CBC also was successful in creating policy change in both public (municipality) and private (bank) domains. Many efforts at local policy change are unsuccessful (Saxe et al., 2006), so the CBC’s accomplishments in policy changes are important. Despite impressive work to alter these policies, the increase in mortgage investment levels between 2005 and 2006 was consistent with but could not be clearly attributed to CBC’s efforts to change policies. Therefore, it is critical to scrutinize whether policy changes produce the type of impacts they claim to affect (Speer, 2008). Future research should continue to examine the relationships between process and outcome in congregation-based organizing and delineate the specific structural and relational components that are positively associated with sustained civic engagement.

Practice Guidelines

On the basis of evidence from this study, we suggest a few practice guidelines for practitioners to use in their planned change efforts to enhance civic engagement and empowerment:

- Consider congregation-based organizational settings as viable contexts for planned change efforts. Organizing initiatives formed in religious venues can draw on values of faith and social justice to identify, implement, and evaluate solutions to deep-seated community problems. Congregations are strong community institutions, particularly in neighborhoods with less access to material resources, through which the mechanisms of collective action can be developed and exercised.
- Provide community participants with formal roles or opportunity structures through which to build relationships, leadership skills, and organizational competencies. Practitioners can configure roles in ways that are multifunctional and provide opportunities for organizing members to assume responsibility for a wide variety of tasks and decision making. Community members can also be encouraged to rotate through multiple roles so that the organization benefits from an expanded range of positions in which people can function successfully.
- Pursue interorganizational connections to build relational and material resources. Practitioners should facilitate links between the organizing initiative and other community institutions to gain the legitimacy and support needed to effectively challenge policies in communities. Interorganizational connections may be crucial for organizing groups to marshal resources, provide and receive information, and achieve desired outcomes.

References


