The 'Community' of Community Organizing

Learning how to engage with and build up leaders in our own neighborhoods
Organizing Neighborhoods for Equality: Northside is a mixed-income, multi-ethnic, intergenerational organization that unites our diverse communities. We build collective power to eliminate injustice through bold and innovative community organizing. We accomplish this through developing grassroots leaders and acting together to effect change.
My Year With ONS

A timeline of events and highlights from the past year

**SEP 2021**
I joined ONS in the fall of 2021. The Economic Justice team was already in the middle of a campaign around the budget so after a week of introductions I jumped right into the work. I canvassed, phonebanked, and had 1:1’s with community leaders.

**OCT 2021**
The budget campaign that the EJ team was working on when I started culminated in an Action on Ald. Cappleman of the 46th ward. This was the first time I got to see the behind-the-scenes work and the first time I realized what escalation truly meant in organizing.

**JAN 2022**
After winter break I assumed my first leadership position on the team. I was in charge of our canvassing from start to finish. That meant coordinating with the canvass captains to plan logistics, actually attending the canvasses, and evaluating our successes and failures to plan for next time.

**MAR 2022**
At the end of March ONS hosted a hybrid Town Hall on the Bring Chicago Home campaign. While this event really marked the start of our community outreach, it was the last major event I got to participate in with ONS. It also marked the culmination of all my turnout efforts with the canvass captain team.
People Power

How ONS Supports Community Leaders

Finding Leaders

The foundation of OneNorthside is bringing together the community. When the community comes together some members will stand out as those wanting to stand up. Identifying leaders in a community is as simple as finding people who want to lead. OneNorthside emphasizes the importance of shedding the singular definition of leader and helps folks identify their own personal leadership style.

Creating the Platform.

Once leaders have been identified they are given opportunities to practice and refine their skills through training. As we work on campaigns our leaders are encouraged to take on different roles. In fact, without our leaders taking on these roles our campaigns would never happen. All of our organizers are community leaders.

Supporting the work.

While some community leaders rely on organizations like OneNorthside for getting involved, many leaders are already out in their communities initiating change. OneNorthside fosters this change by providing support to these leaders and their organizations.
One-on-one conversations are intentional and thought-provoking. They give you the chance to really get to know someone and understand what brings them to community organizing. By having these conversations with other leaders I have learned that everyone has a unique reason for getting involved. The purpose of these conversations is to share your own self-interest and learn about others' self-interest in getting involved. The idea of self-interest being bound to successful service work seemed contradictory when I started the year. After all isn't service work supposed to be self-less? But this is contradictory to our own nature. No matter how much we may tell ourselves we are putting others first everything we do will come from our own self-interest. By identifying this and understanding how it connects to the work we do we realize that we are members of our communities. We are not putting aside our needs for our community rather we are centering our needs for the community.
At the start of each campaign, we would set quantifiable goals. These might be the number of people we mobilized or dollars we got allocated in the city budget. Whatever the goal was it helped us frame our efforts because for every person we wanted to turn out we'd have to talk to three. Over the year we hit some targets and missed others but even the targets we did not reach still accomplished something. Every person we do reach is a win. I had a hard time coming to terms with this notion of success. After all, as a student, my entire life has been structured in rubrics and quantifiable metrics of performance. But community organizing is ultimately about building networks and I've come to realize that when you successfully reach one person you are actually reaching everyone in their network as well. This is why it is vital to center meaningful conversations rather than quick spiels. Getting a person to sign a petition is only really beneficial if they are also going to be inspired to tell others as well.
The Post-Script

What I'm taking with me from my ONS experience

- Intentional conversations are at the heart of lasting change
- Identifying and mobilizing my own network is how grassroots efforts start
- Recognizing my own capacity is just as important as knowing my strengths
- Every step forward should be recognized and celebrated.
Thank You!

We've got the power; PEOPLE POWER!