

Introduction to Community Organizing and Development

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(A concise, easy-to-read guide for students, practitioners, and anyone interested in building stronger, more resilient communities.)

1. Core Concepts

Term	Definition	Key Takeaway
Community Organizing	A participatory process that empowers residents to identify common problems, develop collective strategies, and take action to achieve shared goals.	Focuses on power building and leadership development within a specific locality or group.
Community Development	A broader, long-term effort to improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of a community through sustainable programs, policies, and infrastructure.	Emphasizes capacity building , resource mobilization , and systemic change .
Asset-Based Approach	Starts with what the community already has—people, skills, institutions, natural resources—rather than its deficits.	Shifts the narrative from “needs” to “strengths.”
Power Mapping	A visual tool that identifies who holds influence over a given issue and the relationships among stakeholders.	Helps organizers target allies, opponents, and decision-makers strategically.
Facilitation	Guiding group processes so that all voices are heard, decisions are transparent, and conflict is constructive.	Essential skill for building trust and consensus.

2. Historical Foundations

Era	Milestones	Influential Figures
Early 20th c.	Settlement house movement (e.g., Hull House) – providing services & civic education to immigrant neighborhoods.	Jane Addams, Lillian Wald

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1930s–1940s	New Deal programs (CDB, CH, HOPE) and organizing – demonstrated the power of collective action for public works.	John L. Lewis, Dorothy Day
1960s–1970s	Civil rights, anti-war, and women's movements; emergence of "grassroots" tactics and community control of schools.	Saul Alinsky, Ella Baker, Ruth Bader Ginsburg (early activism)
1980s–1990s	Shift to "community development" with federal programs (CDBG, HOPE) and the rise of "asset-based community development" (ABCD).	John McKnight, John Kretzmann
2000s? present	Digital organizing, climate justice, and "participatory budgeting" spread globally; emphasis on equity and anti-racist frameworks.	Marian Wright Edelman, Angela Davis, Ada Colau

3. The Organizing Cycle

1. Pre-Assessment

- Conduct a **community scan** (demographics, existing institutions, recent events).
- Identify **key issues** through informal conversations and quick surveys.

2. Relationship-Building

- Attend local meetings, faith gatherings, schools, and markets.
- Practice **active listening** and **mutual aid** (e.g., sharing food, childcare).

3. Issue Selection & Framing

- Choose a problem that is **specific, urgent, and actionable**.
- Develop a **clear narrative** that connects personal stories to broader structural causes.

4. Leadership Development

- Identify **natural leaders** and **emerging leaders**.
- Offer skill-building workshops (public speaking, media, negotiation).

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5. Power Mapping & Strategy Design

Development

- Plot decision makers, allies, opponents, and leverage points