

## **Frequently Asked Questions about Broad-based Organizing**

### **What is broad-based organizing and how does it work?**

- Broad-based organizing builds relational power to address social problems at their root instead of just treating symptoms. Through face-to-face, one-on-one meetings, we build relationships of trust across the lines of race, socioeconomic, and faith that so often divide us. Individuals and institutions working together give marginalized groups a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.
- Broad-based organizing develops leaders in congregations, nonprofits, civic organizations, and neighborhood associations and forges connections within and across these groups. It strengthens institutions and develops citizens in the fullest sense: as participants in our democracy and agents in the creation of a more just society.
- Organizing offers a concrete way to respond to systemic racial injustice. The relationships forged through organizing counteract the forces in our culture that keep us isolated and separated from one another, and leadership development builds the capacity to act against the root causes of injustice and inequality.

### **What is the history of Westminster's involvement with broad-based organizing?**

- For a number of years, Westminster supported the Micah Center, an organization of congregations in Grand Rapids focused on doing justice in the community through education and action. In 2018, the Micah Center contracted with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation's largest and longest-standing network of local faith and community-based organizations, for training and guidance in building a broader and more diverse coalition of institutions.
- Since 2018, Westminster members have participated with several congregations and community groups associated with the Micah Center in local trainings, one-on-one meetings, and Sponsoring Team meetings to build a broad-based

organization in West Michigan. Invitations to these trainings and events have been announced in the church bulletin and Westminster Weekly.

- In 2020, Session approved approximately 1% of Westminster's operating budget to be paid annually as dues to the broad-based organization. The financial commitment of Westminster and other institutions made it possible to launch an IAF affiliate in West Michigan in October of 2021.

### **Why is a financial commitment needed? How is this money used?**

- The annual dues from participating institutions allow the organization to be member-led and independently run without obligation to outside funders. The IAF recommends 1% of each participating institution's operating budget as the annual amount.
- A percentage of the dues helps the organization contract with the Industrial Areas Foundation for consultation and leadership training from experienced professional organizers. Another percentage pays the salary of a professional organizer who will work full time for our local organization, and the rest goes toward rent for office space and expenses such as large public events.
- In the initial stages of an institution's involvement in broad-based organizing, it might pledge less than 1% to indicate a commitment until further funds are approved by that institution's leadership.

### **Is there room in Westminster's budget for annual dues? How did the federal government's CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) affect the church budget?**

- We have a choice in which missions, projects, and activities we prioritize in our budget. Ideally, our budget should reflect our identity as a congregation. If active and direct engagement in matters of social justice is important to our congregation, broad-based organizing is one of the most effective means of action with the potential to make lasting change.

- In 2020 Westminster qualified and approved to receive funds under the CARES Act in the form of a Payroll Protection loan two separate times. These funds were used to keep all employees paid through the pandemic lockdown, including the employees of Camp Henry, the Food Pantry, Westminster Child Development, and Westminster Presbyterian Church. Because these funds were used only for payroll expenses, we were then able to apply for forgiveness of the loan and were approved to be able to use the amount given to us as income.

### **What is the Industrial Areas Foundation?**

- Founded in 1940, the Industrial Areas Foundation is the nation's largest and longest-standing network of local faith and community-based organizations. It has affiliates in more than sixty cities.
- The IAF partners with religious congregations and civic organizations at the local level to build broad-based organizing projects, which create new capacity in a community for leadership development, citizen-led action and relationships across the lines that often divide our communities. For more information, see [www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org).
- Saul Alinsky, often called the father of community organizing, was a social activist who founded the IAF and led it from 1940 until his death in 1972. Before his work with the IAF, Alinsky co-founded the Back-of-the-Yards Neighborhood Council in Chicago, one of the oldest community organizations in the country still in operation. With the IAF he also co-founded the Woodlawn Organization, one of the first successful efforts in the country to organize black inner-city residents.
- Alinsky's organizing methods set the pattern for what became known as the "Alinsky school of organizing." He built on a neighborhood's existing social institutions, and membership in a newly formed council was based on institutions rather than individuals.
- Some enduring organizing principles instituted by Alinsky include the following:
  - no ideology, just issues
  - no electoral politics

- build organizations, not movements
  - focus on neighborhoods and concrete, winnable goals
- Alinsky is a controversial figure because of his use of confrontational tactics and the alliances he built with the Communist Party in the 1930s. While he was never a member of the party, he worked with Communist activists in Chicago (along with Roman Catholic bishop Bernard Sheil) in organizing the unemployed and protesting evictions and cuts in relief. Alinsky's confrontational methods involved heightening conflict between a community and an adversary (often a politician or agency) in order to unify the community and clarify its goals. Early on, Alinsky also used tactics from labor organizing such as sit-down strikes and walkouts.
  - When Edward Chambers took over the IAF leadership along with Richard Harmon in 1972, he shifted the IAF's primary organizing method to the relational meeting. As Chambers writes in *Roots for Radicals*, "Under Alinsky, organizing meant 'pick a target, mobilize, and hit it.' In the modern IAF, it's 'connect and relate to others.' Issues follow relationships. . . . you connect people in and around their interests" (37). Chambers emphasized the importance of meeting with "people in the 'moderate middle' of the political spectrum, who must be found in large numbers to form the core of an effective broad-based organization." In Chambers' words, "Face-to-face meetings that lead to the development of an ongoing public relationship form the core of collective action for the common good" (*Roots for Radicals* 42).
  - Chambers also professionalized the role of organizers and created a formal training program for both lead/regional organizers and key volunteer leaders.

### **How does the organization choose issues to address?**

- The organization will pursue multiple issues that are identified through hundreds of one-on-one and small group conversations about the concerns and pressures facing individuals in our community.

- Representatives from each participating institution will bring a list of top issues to a delegates' assembly for a vote.
- Chosen issues are explored in depth by investigative issue teams who research the facts and develop solutions to concrete problems.
- The organization then brings the power of organized people to decision makers to implement the proposed solutions. Through this process, hundreds of people enter public life and build the capacity to act against inequality and injustice.

### **What is the leadership structure of the organization?**

- The affiliate will be governed by a leadership team comprised of voting members from each of its member organizations. It is a volunteer, leader-led organization. It is locally controlled and owned and operated by its members. For more information on structure and decision making, see appendix.

### **Does the organization plan to endorse and/or financially support political candidates?**

- Broad-based organizing is issue-driven and strictly nonpartisan. The organization will not endorse any candidate or party for elected office, and it will not pursue or accept government funding.

### **Does advocacy undertaken by the organization constitute lobbying? Would that compromise our church's 501(c)3 status?**

- The IRS prohibits a tax-exempt organization from devoting a “substantial part of its activities” to “attempting to influence legislation” ([www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying](http://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying)). Our broad-based organization would limit contact with elected officials to advocating for community improvements not tied to specific legislation. Examples include advocating for affordable housing, better educational opportunities, job training, and better access to health care.

- According to the IRS, “[501(c)3] Organizations may.... involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered as lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status” ([www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying](http://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying)).

**What does Westminster’s involvement in broad-based organizing mean for individual church members who do not wish to participate?**

- Affiliation with the IAF is established by institution. Individual members of institutions are not counted as members of the IAF and participation with the local broad-based organization is entirely voluntary.
- Each institution builds a core team of volunteer leaders responsible for organizing within their institution and representing their institution at meetings of the broader organization.

**What are the other local institutions currently committed to the broad-based organization?**

- Access of West Michigan
- The Cathedral of St. Andrew
- Classis Grand Rapids East of the CRCNA
- En Vivo Church
- First Community AME
- Fountain Street Church
- Grand Rapids Food Co-op

- Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders'
- Holy Name of Jesus
- I Matter We Matter
- Momma D's Kitchen
- New Life Church of God in Christ
- Oakdale Park Church
- Parents for Healthy Homes
- Plymouth United Church of Christ
- Restorative Justice Coalition of West Michigan
- Rockford Congregational Church
- Seeds of Promise
- St. Joseph the Worker
- St. Mark's Episcopal Church
- The Edge Urban Ministries
- Trinity Reformed Church
- Temple Emanuel
- United Church Outreach Ministry

**What are some of the projects and issues other IAF affiliates have undertaken?**

Community organizations affiliated with the IAF in other cities have created successful campaigns in the following areas:

**BUILD Baltimore:**

- Created a program to prepare “‘returning’ citizens and unemployed citizens to reenter the workforce and to lead in creating job opportunities in Baltimore”;
- Partnered with a construction and development organization to create affordable housing on vacant and abandoned properties in the city

#### **AMOS Iowa:**

- Secured access to free prenatal care for uninsured pregnant women;
- Expanded the number of affordable housing units to be developed in Ames through proposals to the City Council;
- Initiated a conflict resolution program for city middle school students;
- Established a restorative justice diversion program with the city police department;
- Created a job training and placement program for impoverished central Iowans;
- Expanded transit access to low income and refugee families

#### **Coloradans for the Common Good:**

- engaged with Comcast to broaden access to high-speed internet for undocumented and low-income families in order to bridge the digital divide in online education;
- developed a “Landlord/Tenant Housing Recovery Plan” through a proposal to the city to create a fund backed by local governments and private donors to support both landlords and tenants

#### **The W/SWIAF includes 29 organizations throughout California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska and Iowa**

- Helped create “Recognizing the Stranger,” a new multi-year regional approach to immigration, working with local parishes to identify, train, and mentor immigrant leaders to build connections among themselves and with nonimmigrant allies in their parishes and the broader community. With support from Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the strategy has expanded from 7 to 19 dioceses across the West and Southwest US.

#### **Does Grand Rapids really need another organization?**

- Grand Rapids has a broad array of excellent nonprofit agencies working to aid those in need. But meeting immediate needs does not address the roots of systemic injustice. With broad-based organizing, we have the opportunity to shift



the paradigm and walk alongside those struggling to be heard rather than doing things for them. The “Iron Rule” of organizing puts it this way: “Never do for others what they can do for themselves.” Through the process of partnering with institutions across the city and sharing our interests and needs, we can collectively create a community we all want to live in.

- As we join other groups in our city over common interests, we are investing in a process more than an organization. Through these relational practices, we sense the Spirit leading us into new ways of being community and of being the church. This may push us out of our comfort zone, but that is exactly where spiritual growth and renewal happens!

**For more information:**

[www.facebook.com/WestMichiganCommunityOrganizing](https://www.facebook.com/WestMichiganCommunityOrganizing)

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

[www.swiaf.org](http://www.swiaf.org) (West/Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation)

Edward T. Chambers, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*

Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*

Mary Beth Rogers, *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics*

Michael Gecan, *Going Public: An Organizer’s Guide to Citizen Action*

## **Appendix**

### **DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE OF BROAD-BASED ORGANIZING**

## **A. FOUNDATION**

Broad base of organization made up of member institutions

(churches, neighborhood organizations, labor unions, nonprofits,

foundations, both secular and religious) which typically reflect the community.

West Michigan Community Organizing's goal: minimum 20 institutions as members

## **B. CORE TEAMS**

Organizing team within each institution

1. Organize their institutions, recruit annual dues, run listening campaigns in institution, and represent their institution to the broad-based organization
2. Attend Delegates Assembly (comprised of core teams from all institutions, meets twice a year)
3. Along with other core teams at Delegates Assemblies, establish budget, fundraising, and major decisions for broad based organization

## **C. STEERING COMMITTEE**

1. Two voting members from each institution
2. Meets monthly
3. Any institution members interested in coming to meetings should be invited to give opportunity to see how it works
4. Institutions should rotate attendance among core team members.
5. Culture should be easy-in, easy-out, participate when you can to spread out responsibility. New people bring energy and vibrancy.

## **D. STRATEGY TEAM**

### Plans Steering Committee meetings

1. Usually veteran leaders, smaller and more select. Meets 1-2 weeks before Steering Committee meetings to develop agenda, attend to details, make sure meeting is productive.
2. Creates an agenda reflecting which decisions need to be made by Steering Committee.
  - a. Does not make the decisions
  - b. Should reflect the larger body, be in relation with it
  - c. Anyone from an institution can volunteer to serve on the team
  - d. Team should announce time and location of its meetings (Zoom or member institution meeting room, etc.) so institution members can attend and offer suggestions.

## **E. FINANCE TEAM**

1. Typically includes a CPA, CFO, etc.
2. Responsibilities:
  - a. Collect dues
  - b. Send invoices
  - c. Create monthly reports for the Steering Committee including income/expense statements
  - d. Assist in raising money
  - e. Provide accountability for all things related to fiscal responsibility.

## **F. PROCESS FOR CHOOSING ISSUES:**

1. Comprehensive house meeting campaign, 6-10 weeks after launch, involving small groups within member institutions.
  - a. Meeting topics: What pressures are you and those you love facing? What do you want to see different regarding those pressures? What would that take?
  - b. House meetings can be improved by planning activities to identify needs/issues in community, such as “walkabouts” to listen to community members and identify potential leaders, visiting art festivals, neighborhood parks, food pantries, etc.
2. Issues Conference:

Reviews information gathered from house meetings, determines top 3 issues that have a preponderance of support across institutions.

  - a. Consensus must be reached on which issues to commit to
  - b. If no consensus is reached, an issue will be dropped.
3. Top issues brought to Delegates Assembly
4. Issue teams created to research chosen issues and potential actions. Team made up of people affected by those issues

## **G. STANDARDS FOR LEADERSHIP**

Participants wanting to play an active leadership role should:

1. Be a member of a dues- paying institution in good standing
2. Have a demonstrated commitment to principles and practices of broad-based organizing
3. Have attended a national meeting or regional training within past year or be planning to attend in the next year
4. Have influence among members of your institution
5. Have trust and confidence of fellow leaders

6. Typically be nominated or suggested by someone in the organization