Community Organizing: Practice, Research, and Policy Implications

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Community organizing—a field of practice in which residents collaboratively investigate and undertake sustained collective action regarding social issues of mutual concern—has often proven an effective method for achieving changes in policies and systems at local, regional, and even national scales. The field is dynamic. It has expanded and has undergone numerous changes over recent decades. Research from a variety of disciplines has documented, evaluated, and informed many of these changes. This article scrutinizes the evolving field of community organizing, with a particular focus on the current state of social and psychological research on broad-based community organizing processes and outcomes. These findings include not only the effects of community organizing efforts on policies and systems, but also the influences of community organizing on psychological changes among the people and groups who participate. These findings are incorporated into recommendations for policies, practices, and future research.

Introduction

Community organizing is an umbrella term for a field of practice in which residents collaboratively investigate and take collective action regarding social issues of mutual concern. Most often, the intent of organizing is to change policies regarding local issues, which have included, for instance: improvements in public safety (Speer et al., 2003), housing (Speer & Christens, 2012), employment conditions (Osterman, 2006), transportation (Speer, Tesdahl, & Ayers, 2014), public

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education (Mediratta, Shah, & McAllister, 2009), and public health and environ-mental issues (Brown et al., 2003). Although the term is often used in the context of shorter-term initiatives (e.g., electoral campaigns) and issue-based advocacy efforts (e.g., grassroots lobbying, direct action, civil disobedience), this review restricts the definition of community organizing to only those efforts whose issues and strategies for action are selected by local resident-leaders, and whose goal is to build power and sustain their organizing initiative over time and across multiple issues.[1] Moreover, although this review does draw on the interdisciplinary litera-ture on community organizing, the primary focus is on psychological studies of community organizing, which have been conducted from social, community, and developmental psychological perspectives.

As a phenomenon, community organizing encompasses a number of potential points of interest for social issues researchers, policymakers, and funders. These include community organizing as a topic of study, as a source of new possibil-ities for research design and methodology, and as a model for community and systems-level interventions to tackle social issues. This review addresses each of these points of interest, and consists of five main sections: (1) an introduction to community organizing processes, which features a brief example of an organizing initiative for the purpose of grounding further discussion (2) a review of research on some of the major shifts that have occurred in the field of organizing practice, in which particular attention is paid to tensions between traditional models for organizing and more recent or emerging models, as well as the most promising recent developments, (3) a review of the current state of research evidence on com-munity organizing with a particular focus on psychological studies of organizing processes and outcomes, (4) a discussion of implications and recommendations for policy makers, and (5) summary and conclusions.

Community Organizing

Community organizing processes are bound together by a set of common elements, including: (1) assessment/relationship development, (2) participatory research, (3) action or mobilization, and (4) evaluation and/or reflection. These common elements are often integrated through cycles of learning and action. An example of a community organizing initiative, summarized from a recent case study (Speer & Christens, 2012), demonstrates the integration of these common elements.

A local organizing group, CCO, in Kansas City, Missouri, is a multi-issue, congregation-based community organization and an affiliate of the PICO National Network. CCO has worked on numerous issues over the years, including crime, substance abuse, affordable housing, redevelopment, predatory lending, incarcer-ation, and health care. Congregation members work to identify and understand local issues, which are addressed in federated efforts by CCO. In the late 1990s,

one congregation in a declining inner-ring neighborhood of Kansas City conducted over 100 one-to-one conversations with members and neighbors. This process is an example of the first common element of community organizing highlighted above: assessment/relationship development. They heard repeated stories of deteriorated housing, abandonment and blight, and determined that they should address affordable housing and redevelopment in their community.

Members of this congregation worked with the city's Housing Department to rehabilitate houses in their local community. The city, at the urging of this congregation, pledged to invest in rehabilitating deteriorated housing, with the idea that when houses were sold the proceeds would go back into a revolving fund to rehabilitate additional houses and strengthen this community. After some period of time, however, it became clear that the city was not following through on their commitments. Leaders of the organizing effort then sent a small group of 13 from the congregation to meet with two city council members and the Director of Housing and Community Development to detail the shortcomings by the city. This meeting is an example of participatory research, the second common element of organizing. At this meeting, the city pledged to follow through again. Congregation leaders gave the city three months to make good on that pledge. Members evaluated their efforts—as they do after every meeting (common element four described above: evaluation and/or reflection)—and determined that their council members were overly deferential to the housing director, accepting on face value all that the director pledged to do.

Exactly three months and six days after that pledge, the organizing group within this congregation held a meeting with the Director of Housing and Community Development, their two city council representatives, and the Mayor to hold the city accountable for their broken commitments. At this public meeting, the Director of Housing asserted that his department had purchased and rehabilitated six houses in the target community. The organizing group knew this to be untrue, but followed up after the meeting, confirming that the city had, in fact, rehabilitated only one house. In evaluating this meeting, members of this congregation determined that they needed to share more of their experiences with other congregations in the city that were members of CCO. Additionally, these congregation leaders researched reports to federal agencies about how funds were expended, and found that the city agency had claimed to have rehabbed houses that, in fact, it had not. CCO leaders met with local media who reported, in print and on television, about the houses that the city had claimed had been rehabilitated, but that in fact remained in disrepair, overgrown with weeds, contributing to blight in the neighborhood.

Due to the persistent level of dysfunction and corruption, leaders in the organizing group decided that personnel changes or additional programming would not speak to the entrenched problems at this department; they instead determined that what was required was systemic change in housing policy and administration

for the city. At this point—over two years into a single congregation's organizing on housing in their neighborhood—a federated effort by all member congregations in CCO worked together to press for policy changes. Many congregations within CCO had worked on housing issues in their local communities, and they shared some of the experiences of the congregation described here. Additionally, leaders from other congregations realized the interdependent nature of housing with various other social issues they worked on—improving schools, reducing crime, access to credit. All were deeply influenced by local housing policies.

Together, the federated group of CCO congregations conducted additional research with key actors around housing policy: city council members, officials in charge of community development block grant expenditures, local housing nonprofits, the city auditor, the home builders association, the Federal National Mortgage Association, their U.S. senators, and others. Combining this research with their shared experiences working for improved housing in their local communities, the federated group of CCO congregations determined that systemic change in the city's housing policies would require greater accountability from city government, a program to rehabilitate and repair existing homes, an approach to dealing with absentee landlords, a better approach to dealing with predatory mortgage lending, and a holistic approach to strengthening neighborhoods.

At a big public event in 2004, which provides an example of the third common element of community organizing—action/mobilization—CCO pressed the city manager and Mayor for these policy changes. As reported in local media (Horsley, 2004a):

> More than 400 people packed the sanctuary of St. Therese Little Flower Catholic Church on Tuesday night to demand reforms to Kansas City's housing program. Saying they were fed up with bureaucratic inefficiency and indifference, participants at the meeting called on city officials to start spending the $18 million in annual housing dollars in a wiser, more strategic way. The meeting was sponsored by CCO . . .

Two weeks after this public meeting, the city manager eliminated the Housing and Community Development department. As reported in local media (Horsley, 2004b):

> In a major shake-up, Kansas City Manager Wayne Cauthen eliminated the housing department Wednesday, saying that it had suffered too long from weak leadership and haphazard spending . . . Cauthen said he had concluded that the Housing and Community Development Department was often controlled by outside special interests, that housing services were fragmented and that there was no comprehensive approach for building and selling houses.

This case study is described in more detail elsewhere (Speer & Christens, 2012) and provides an analysis to demonstrate the central role that CCO played in making this policy change. This case exhibits a successful organizing effort, but also demonstrates key features of many initiatives that take place in the larger field of community organizing.

The Dynamic Field of Organizing Practice

A pronounced period of expansion of the field of community organizing began in the mid-1980s and continues today. This expansion has not occurred simply through more widespread adoption of static, preexisting models for community organizing. Rather, it has occurred through cyclical processes of model adoption, experimentation, innovation, and broader dissemination. The result is that the field of community organizing is more eclectic in its models for practice than it has been in previous eras. Yet, there have been commonalities in these transitions across the field. These include expanding constituency groups, including congregational (Swarts, 2008), regional (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009), and intergenerational organizing (Christens & Kirshner, 2011); an expanding range of strategies (e.g., community development approaches and multisector coalitions; Green & Goetting, 2010); increasing connections and partnerships (e.g., with researchers, foundations, and public health practitioners; Shlay & Whitman, 2006); and, particularly among organizations affiliated with networks, moving beyond local work to focus on national policy advocacy and movements (Orr, 2007), and supporting international organizing work (Warren, 2009).

Many of these trends are promising in regard to organizing's potential to have positive impacts on social problems and public policy. Yet, some also introduce new dilemmas into the field of practice, as well as research. This section draws on interdisciplinary research to examine four widespread shifts that have changed the field of community organizing over the last 30 years: (1) congregation-based organizing, (2) youth organizing, (3) increasing scale of organizing efforts, and (4) strategic partnerships between organizing groups and other organizations, institutions, and actors.

Congregation-Based Organizing

Community organizing that primarily takes place through faith-based institutions (of multiple faiths) emerged in the 1980s and has steadily become more widespread, altering the practice of community organizing in the process. Religious institutions had been important partners to neighborhood organizing during earlier efforts (Horwitt, 1992), but organizing had not explicitly operated through congregations until the model that first took hold in Texas, where Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) leaders pioneered a multifaith, multiracial model for community organizing that built sustainable political power and mounted successful campaigns for improvements in neighborhood infrastructure, schools, and affordable housing (Warren, 2001). The shift to congregations was in part a response to deindustrialization and the mobility of population, and in part a move to take traditional organizing into the cultural realm and tap into theological symbols, money, and networks (Osterman, 2002; Warren, 2001). This seemingly simple adaptation of

existing models for neighborhood organizing has profoundly changed the course of contemporary community organizing.

The congregation-based community organizing model spread rapidly through the United States and is today the preferred model of organizing for several of the largest national organizing networks. Wood and Warren (2002) described congregation-based community organizing as "one of the broadest based initiatives in the American public sphere" (p. 7) and a recent field scan (Wood, Partridge, & Fulton, 2013) revealed continued growth, such that there are now nearly 300 active primarily congregation-based organizing initiatives in the United States. Importantly, congregation-based models of organizing have demonstrated that religious institutions can still be a source of progressive advocacy, despite the strength of the relationship between some religious groups and right-wing politics. Organizing efforts have also added range to their cultural repertoire through association with religious institutions. As an example, organizers often discuss charity as an essential but overrepresented component of congregational activity as opposed to justice, which, although strongly rooted in religious teaching, is often ignored by religious groups. Organizers and leaders have become adept at connecting organizing processes to religious traditions such as calls for justice (Wood, 1999).

Today's congregation-based organizing incorporates theology by linking organizing practice to religious teaching and faith traditions (Jacobsen, 2001). Congregation-based organizing has drawn on religious values and teachings to challenge the dominant market-based ideology that has driven the neoliberal policies negatively affecting local communities. The emphasis on values is now so firmly rooted in contemporary practice that some local organizing has been described as "values-based organizing" (Robinson & Hanna, 1994, p. 66). Congregation-based organizing efforts have identified and emphasized values such as community and justice (Jacobsen, 2001), and healthy communities and economic fairness (Speer et al., 2014; Warren, 2001). The emphasis on these values has led to leadership development and organizing practice that is infused with a sense of human dignity, and a commitment to a holistic approach to human development (Keddy, 2001).

Congregation-based organizing networks and the other organizing models that they have influenced have also stressed the importance of interpersonal relationships to a greater degree than other models of organizing. This focus on relationships can be contrasted with other models of organizing, which may be characterized as focusing on issues (e.g., traffic problems, environmental degradation, public safety concerns; Collura & Christens, 2014). A relational focus attends to these and similar issues but the organizing process prioritizes the connections and relationships among members of the community. Hence, despite fluctuations in the intensity of issue-based work, strong networks of interpersonal

relationships allow a group to sustain the level of activity and trust necessary to exercise the social power required to effect community change (Weymes, 2003).

Relational organizing cultivates connections among participants through the practice of one-to-one meetings (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). Participants are trained in methods for having one-to-one meetings that are intended to elicit the experiences and stories of others and to build an understanding that personal struggles and concerns are often shared with others. These connections are de-signed to make links between the personal to the collective (Christens, Inzeo, & Faust, 2014). On an aggregate level, this practice alters the social networks within and between community institutions, and opens up what some have called weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), social capital (Warren, 2001), or the social fabric (Cortes, 1996). The relationships that are built can increase the civic capacity of the organization. Relational organizing and values-based organizing are hallmarks of the congregation-based models of community organizing, which have exerted a profound influence on the field as a whole.

Youth Organizing

Organizing initiatives have increasingly sought to involve youth (ranging from teens to those in their mid-twenties) as participants and leaders alongside adults, and many new initiatives have been launched that are primarily dedicated to youth organizing (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). Many practitioners and scholars have concluded that youth organizing holds promise as both an effective vehicle for community and social change (e.g., Conner, Zaino, & Scarola, 2013), and as a model for promoting positive youth development (Conner, 2011; Kirshner & Gin-wright, 2012). Youth organizing typically takes place in schools, congregations, community centers, and other local institutions. The conditions faced by young people—particularly youth of color and those living in low-income households—are the central focus of youth organizing.

A 2010 scan of the field of youth organizing (Torres-Fleming, Valdes, & Pillai, 2010) identified 160 active youth organizing initiatives in the United States. That a similar count in 2004 identified only 120 active initiatives illustrates the sharply increasing prevalence of youth organizing. The Funders' Collaborative for Youth Organizing's (2009) definition of youth organizing, now widely cited, is "an innovative youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities." The focal issues of youth organizing efforts have included violence prevention, antiracism, increased employment and recreational opportunities for youth, and policies that support youth and families.

The most common issues that youth organizing efforts have sought to address have been related to education (Torres-Fleming et al., 2010). Racial segregation

in schools and education systems has increased in recent decades, and disparities in educational outcomes have been compounded by the adoption of harsh disciplinary and expulsion policies that have disproportionately been applied to minority youth (Skiba et al., 2011). Youth who are pushed out of schools are also increasingly likely to become involved in the justice system, which has simultaneously become more likely to treat juvenile offenders as adults, leading to a phenomenon that is often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline—through which youth of color are disproportionately moved out of educational systems and into correctional systems. An example of a youth organizing effort for educational improvement is Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE; see Christens, Collura, Kopish, & Varvodic, 2014). VOYCE is a collaborative effort by six Chicago community organizations that each house youth organizing efforts. The groups have collaborated on youth participatory action research projects on educational policies and practices in Chicago that have been closely integrated with an organizing campaign to solve the dropout crisis, improve relationships between school staff and students, and end zero-tolerance disciplinary policies.

Collectively, youth organizing efforts related to education have been highlighted as a valuable form of community engagement in educational decision-making (Orr & Rogers, 2011). Although youth were once somewhat marginal to community organizing—particularly among efforts affiliated with the larger and more professionalized organizing networks—youth organizing is now widely viewed as both a viable method for building power and capacity to make community change, and as an important context for youth development. Many congregation-based organizing initiatives have built youth and intergeneration organizing initiatives. In one example, an adult organizer in a congregation-based initiative wrote of his group's realization that their own organizing principle—that the people closest to community problems should be part of the solution to those problems—made involving youth an important priority (Stahlhut, 2003).

Increasing Scale of Organizing Efforts

As urban areas have faced challenges associated with globalization, many of the forces affecting local communities have been decoupled with local areas. In response, many community organizing groups have sought to recalibrate the scale at which their change efforts are targeted (Orr, 2007). Although a local focus and emphasis is a core element and enduring strength of community organizing, many local groups and networks have sought to develop structures that allow local organizing to continue while simultaneously expanding efforts into statewide, regional, and national efforts (Christens, Inzeo, & Faust, 2014; Wood, Partridge, & Fulton, 2013). These efforts can be seen as responses to the continuing challenges of deindustrialization, residential segregation, and suburban and exurban sprawl as well as the increasing scale and power of corporations. Networks have also

developed to support issue-specific work in local organizing initiatives, including reproductive justice, LGBT rights, and racial equity.

The Gamaliel Foundation provides one example. As one of the large congregation-based organizing networks, it has embraced a metropolitan or regional perspective, which seeks to link inner cities and suburbs in attempts to transcend differences of race, class, and culture (Jacobsen, 2001). This work has been influenced by the regional analysis of Orfield (1997) and Rusk (1999), who have emphasized the need to connect regional forces such as suburban sprawl to urban issues such as economic polarization (Kleidman, 2004). Similarly, other organizing efforts have developed strategies that connect low-income, multiracial constituencies together across broad geographies to address regional issues such as mass transportation and urban planning (Pastor, 2001; Rusk, 1999; Swanstrom & Banks, 2009). Proponents of these regional organizing approaches suggest that improvements in poor neighborhoods cannot have the desired effects without an overarching regional strategy for equitable distribution of resources.

The PICO Network has also achieved successes in building statewide community organizing efforts, particularly in California and Louisiana (Wood, 2007). More recently, the PICO Network has developed strategies for influencing federal policies. For example, they brought hundreds of local leaders to Washington in 2007 to advocate for a renewal of the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Initially unsuccessful, that effort ultimately paid off in terms of influencing policy priorities in 2009, and provided a model for how to mobilize a network of local groups on national issues. Local organizing groups across the country held rallies in support of children's health insurance, and volunteer leaders testified before Congress. PICO leaders and clergy held a public action meeting in the U.S. Senate, held face-to-face meetings with members of Congress and staffers, ran advertisements in national media, and were invited to attend the eventual signing of the bill into law.

Similarly, ACORN—before its collapse—integrated local protest into coordinated national campaigns that linked solid national policy research with the activism of local people (Fisher, Brooks, & Russell, 2007; Swarts, 2007). Local activists have worked through national networks such as National People's Action in mounting a campaign to change the practices of lending institutions in low-income neighborhoods, ultimately resulting in the passage of the Community Reinvestment Act, the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, and a series of successive campaigns to enforce elements of these pieces of legislation (Immergluck, 2004). More than 300 grassroots groups have formed the national Transportation Equity Network to advocate for transportation funding for central cities and inner-ring suburbs (Swanstrom & Banks, 2009). These developments have strong implications for the future of community organizing, as they seek to address issues of scale—one of the most pressing challenges facing local action groups.

Strategic Partnerships

Historically, organizing efforts have most often been wary of partnerships with other institutions and organizations. Today, it is not uncommon for organizing groups to partner with local governments, human service agencies, nonprofit organizations, universities, coalitions, and private organizations and foundations. National networks receive funding from multiple foundations at a time, and staff members of foundations often convey desired outcomes or ideas about how to improve organizing practices. Local organizing groups have also increasingly sought grants from foundations, both for special projects and for core operational expenses. Many of these grants are small, yet they represent new opportunities as well as vulnerability to outside influence (i.e., resource dependency).

Similarly, local community organizing groups have become more likely to work collaboratively with researchers. The IAF has worked with academic researchers to train organizing staff (Warren, 2001). As noted above, the Gamaliel Foundation has collaborated with researchers to develop an analysis that has altered the efforts and strategies of that network (Kleidman, 2004). ACORN developed an internal team of researchers on policy and social issues who developed analyses for their local organizing efforts (Swarts, 2007). Other organizing efforts have been developed from progressive think tanks that are directly tied to local organizing (Pastor, 2001). Across the field, there has been an increasing focus on measurable outcomes and evidence-based practice that is often driven by evaluation components of external funding sources.

The past few decades have also seen an increase in the interplay between organizing and community development practice. Whereas organizing has historically focused on building community and capacity to achieve policy concessions from corporations, and more often, from local government, community development is typically accomplished in partnership with local government to build physical structures, services, and amenities in urban areas. Lately, community development groups have explicitly sought to build community capacity (Glickman & Servon, 1998). Similarly, organizing groups have increasingly understood the importance of community development, and have sought to influence—and in some cases, implement—portions of the development process (Murphy & Cunningham, 2003). For example, BUILD, an IAF affiliate in Baltimore, has worked to blend their traditional organizing approach with a plan to develop a worker-owned economic cooperative (Graf, 1995). Blending organizing and community development presents both opportunities and risks (see Stoecker, 1995).

New partnerships are similarly emerging between community organizing efforts and the field of public health. Scholars and practitioners seeking to reduce health disparities have increasingly agreed that interventions on the social determinants of health are imperative (Hofrichter, 2006), and community organizing has frequently been identified as an effective model (Minkler, 2012). Similarly,

many community organizing groups and networks have adopted a population health frame for their work. One tangible example is the use of Health Impact Assessment (see Collins & Koplan, 2009). Organizing groups across the United States are partnering with health practitioners and scholars to conduct assessments of the likely impacts of various policy proposals on community health and health equity. Findings from these analyses that might otherwise be buried or dismissed can achieve much greater attention and political traction when they are conducted and presented as part of powerful grassroots efforts.

Summary

Community organizing remains a multiparadigmatic field (Sites, Chaskin, & Parks, 2007). Nevertheless, several trends over the last few decades have caused systemic shifts in organizing practice. The continued decline of labor organizing, and the dissolution of the largest neighborhood-based organizing network (ACORN),[2] have created voids that have been partially filled by congregation-based and youth organizing efforts. The congregation-based networks have increasingly sought to coordinate and aggregate their organizing efforts to influence regional and national policy issues. They have also formed multisector partnerships and coalitions. The years ahead will likely see a continued increase in efforts to network local organizing groups together to exert influence at national or international levels. Youth organizing will likely continue to become more commonplace. It is possible that large-scale networks will be formed specifically to support youth organizing efforts. In addition, it is likely that new networks will grow to support neighborhood-based organizing efforts, effectively filling the void left by the dissolution of ACORN. Furthermore, community organizing models are becoming increasingly influential among labor organizing efforts.

Research on Community Organizing

Research on community organizing processes and outcomes straddles several disciplines, including sociology, psychology, urban studies/affairs, social work, education, and political science. Some of this interdisciplinary research has been synthesized in the previous section. Psychological research has been conducted on community organizing from community, applied social, and developmental psychological perspectives. Much of this research has used participatory and community-based approaches (Speer & Christens, 2013; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). Hence, in addition to the roles that community organizing has played in building community capacity and achieving changes in local policies, it has also been studied as a context for positive human development, civic engagement and voluntarism, psychological empowerment, education, and democratic participation (Boyte, 2004; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Stoecker, 2009). Here, we discuss the

interdisciplinary mixed-methods research evidence on organizing, drawing conclusions about which questions have been satisfactorily addressed in the research to date, and which questions remain unresolved. The primary focus, however, is on psychological studies of community organizing processes and outcomes.

Psychologically oriented research on community organizing can be classified into five main branches. The first branch includes research that has been conducted on behavioral processes and outcomes, such as civic engagement and community participation. This branch also contains aggregate concepts that hinge on behaviors, such as social capital. The second branch concerns relational processes and outcomes, including intergroup relations and network perspectives. The third branch concerns affective and attitudinal processes and outcomes. These include the study of concepts such as social trust, values, and the emotional component of psychological empowerment. The fourth branch concerns cognitive processes and outcomes, including skill development, and gains in critical consciousness and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment that can occur through social inquiry that is part of organizing processes. Finally, a fifth branch of the psychological study of community organizing involves developmental processes and outcomes. This fifth branch has gained prominence as more research has been conducted on youth organizing processes, often by researchers employing developmental perspectives. In this section, we review each of these five branches before turning to assess the current state of psychological research (and related interdisciplinary work) on community organizing as a whole.

Behavioral Aspects

Community organizing initiatives create settings that are focused on increasing community involvement and engagement with civic affairs among local residents. The growth of the field therefore represents a countervailing force to the societal trends toward isolation, civic disengagement and the more individualistically oriented forms of participation (e.g., political consumerism) prevalent in contemporary Western societies. Documentation of these declines in community participation and civic engagement have been the source of concerns (e.g., Putnam, 1995; Skocpol, 2003), since civically and politically focused activities are not only a cornerstone of functional democratic systems (Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005), but has also been linked to a range of beneficial outcomes for individuals, including psychological well-being and mental health (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007), social trust (Flanagan, Gill, & Gallay, 2005), social capital (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005) psychological sense of community (Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2013), and collective efficacy (Ohmer, 2007). Moreover, living in communities with high levels of engagement and social capital can have beneficial effects on health and well-being (De Clercq et al., 2012).

A study by Speer, Peterson, Zippay, & Christens (2010) reports results from a mixed-methods study of civic engagement in a single community organizing initiative over a five-year period. The initiative, Congregations Building Community (CBC), was organizing through congregations in Northern Colorado. During the five-year study period, 10 congregations were consistently active in organizing efforts, and another 22 congregations were active at some point during the five years. The initiative held 724 meetings of various types (e.g., planning meetings, research meetings, action meetings), and average attendance at these meetings was 9.4 people. A total of 1,919 uniquely identified individuals participated in meetings organized by the initiative, each attending an average of 3.5 meetings over five years. On an annual basis, between 400 and 600 unique individuals participated in organizing activities, with an average annual participation rate that varied between two and four meeting attendances per year. Larger action meetings drew up to 356 attendees. It is estimated that there are more than 200 congregation-based initiatives like CBC that are active in the United States, some of which involve as many as 80–100 congregations (Swarts, 2011; Wood, Partridge, & Fulton, 2013). In fact, during the years of the study by Speer and colleagues, CBC was likely at the smaller end of the spectrum of such initiatives, and it has since ceased organizing activities. Nevertheless, the fine-grained study of participation in CBC gives a sense of the depth and breadth of civic engagement that such initiatives tend to produce.

The same study of CBC (Speer et al., 2010) used a quasi-experimental design to assess overall levels of self-reported civic engagement (i.e., including civic participation outside of organizing) of CBC attendees at two time points, compared with a geographically balanced random sample of their neighbors at the same two time points. The non-CBC members identified the type of organizational setting in which they were most active (e.g., church/synagogue, neighborhood group, no group, etc.). Approximately half of the non-CBC sample indicated that their primary setting for involvement was a religious institution, making this by far the largest category. Compared with non-CBC members across these other categories, members of CBC were significantly more civically engaged than non-CBC members at baseline. In addition, during the second wave of data, CBC members were significantly more civically engaged than they had been during the first wave, while no such difference was detected among non-CBC members, many of whom were active participants in other organizational settings. These results support the hypothesis that the civic focus of community organizing efforts is likely to influence participants to become more active in community and civic affairs.

Research has indicated that in addition to their focus on civic and community issues, many organizing models encourage the development of specific organizational and setting-level features that may be particularly effective at cultivating civic activity and engagement (Maton, 2008; Speer & Hughey, 1995). In a study

using multilevel longitudinal modeling to analyze engagement and participation across five organizing initiatives (Christens & Speer, 2011) (including the CBC and CCO initiatives described earlier), we found that participants who had attended certain types of meetings in previous years were more likely to remain involved over successive years, controlling for many other individual- and neighborhood-level factors, including individuals' overall levels of participation. In particular, two types of meetings were significantly predictive of sustained involvement. The first influential meeting type is the research action, which involves groups of around 10 participants meeting with one local decision-maker (e.g., school board member, local business leader) to strategically gather information on the local issues that are at the forefront of organizing activities. By design, every participant in a research action is an active participant, and interacts directly with the decision-maker. Research actions therefore exemplify effective organizational opportunity role structure (Maton & Salem, 1995) for encouraging participant engagement. The second type of meeting that proved influential in our 2011 study are the one-to-one meetings that have been the bedrock of the relational models of community organizing.

Relational Aspects

As described earlier in this article, many organizing models have emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships for building sustainable local power. In these organizing models, members of local groups are trained to act as re-flective listeners, and are encouraged to adopt the practice of regularly soliciting one-to-one meetings with neighbors and fellow organizational members. In the Christens and Speer (2011) study, we reported that during the five-year study of five organizing initiatives, 15,043 one-to-one meetings were held, suggesting that a typical organizing initiative might catalyze more than 50 such meetings each month. These one-to-one meetings are geared toward the establishment of trusting relationships, which are often formed across lines of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, religious, and ideological differences. In some cases, one-to-one meetings do lead to the identification of new potential volunteer leaders for the organizing effort. Yet, trainings on one-to-one meetings tend to emphasize that the goal is not recruitment, but to create venues for valuing and understanding other peoples' stories.

Establishing a breadth of interpersonal relationships often gives organizational members greater clarity about the most pressing issues facing their communities. In addition, these relationships serve to personalize the issues, bringing a greater sense of urgency and resiliency of commitment to efforts to improve community conditions. Hence, the finding in our 2011 study that participation in one-to-one meetings was significantly predictive of future involvement (controlling for over-all levels of prior involvement, among other factors) lends support to the emphasis

on this particular meeting type in relational organizing models. In a qualitative analysis of one-to-one meetings in organizing, Christens (2010) found evidence suggesting that the networks built through one-to-ones were critical to strengthening commitments to civic involvement and building collective capacity for action and mobilization. Moreover, interpersonal relationships were found to contribute to a shared organizational identity and set of values that aids volunteer leaders in effectively building relationships with local institutional decision-makers and, when necessary, holding them accountable to their commitments to community improvements.

Scholars have noted that community organizing efforts are unusual in their ability to forge unity among diverse groups according to class, race and ethnicity, religion, and political ideology (e.g., Wood & Warren, 2002). In particular, it is unusual to see voluntary organizations with memberships that contain as much racial and socioeconomic diversity as do many community organizing initiatives. In a qualitative study of congregation-based organizing efforts in San Francisco and St. Louis, Swarts (2011) identifies many of the strategies that these organizing efforts use to build shared identity and unity among diverse constituencies. Often, these strategies involve redrawing "symbolic boundaries" (p. 454) to create new in-groups and out-groups. The methods for creating perceived commonalities within diverse organizing initiatives include emphases on a common value base (e.g., those rooted in faith traditions) among those involved in organizing, contrasts between participants in organizing (in-group) and activists and social movements (out-groups), contrasts between leaders in organizing efforts and professional politicians (another out-group), and contrasts between organizing's self-help and social justice approaches to local issues, and those advocating for approaches to social issues that hinge on social services (yet another out-group). These contrasts are critical to building a sense of shared identity that can supersede differences that might make relationship development less likely in other contexts. It should be noted that these contrasts are rarely so rigid as to prevent collaborations from forming with, for instance, more traditional charitable or advocacy-oriented organizations. They do, however, offer clear points of differentiation and shared identity for those involved in more power-focused voluntary activities.

Affective Aspects

Involvement in community organizing also influences affective and emotional dynamics, particularly those that relate to one's sense of membership and connection to their community, one's civic identity, and one's sense of belonging to a larger civic or social whole. Regarding a sense of membership or connection to a community, studies have shown that participants in community organizing tend to perceive greater levels of connection. Much of this research has focused on the psychological sense of community, which has been theorized as the

understanding that one belongs to a collectivity. McMillan and Chavis (1986) conceptualized the construct according to four dimensions: membership—the sense of belonging in a community, influence—the sense of mattering in that community, need fulfillment—the sense that community members' needs will be met, and shared emotional connection—the sense of shared history and common bond. This conceptualization has informed the study of sense of community in organizing contexts, which has often also used a framework and measure developed specifically to assess sense of community for community organizations (Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999). Studies have consistently found that people's sense of community in community organizations is positively associated with their levels of community participation, and that it is also positively associated with their levels of psychological empowerment (Hughey et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2008; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011).

Psychological empowerment has been theorized as the psychological aspects of the mechanisms by which people and groups gain control over their affairs (Zimmerman, 1995). The emotional/affective component of psychological empowerment has been studied using a framework and a measure of people's self-perceptions of sociopolitical control (Peterson et al., 2006) according to two dimensions: leadership competence and perceived policy control. Sociopolitical control therefore captures one's beliefs about one's own skills and abilities for exercising agency and making concrete changes in the civic arena. It is increasingly clear from research on community organizing processes that increases in sociopolitical control are an outgrowth of increased community participation (Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011; Ohmer, 2007). Moreover, results from studies using structural equations modeling have found that this relationship is mediated by psychological sense of community (e.g., Hughey et al., 2008). Increasing participation in community organizing is therefore a leverage point for enhancing both affective connections to community and perceptions of agency in the civic arena, both of which have been empirically linked to elements of psychosocial well-being at the individual level.

Cognitive Aspects

Participation in community organizing involves many opportunities for skill development and learning. Many of these opportunities are distributed intentionally as more seasoned leaders in organizing efforts train newcomers or delegate tasks with an eye toward leadership development. For example, most organizing models deliberately impart perspectives on power, social issues, and social change strategies through trainings. Moreover, they cultivate skills in new participants, including meeting facilitation, public speaking, and, often, action research skills through trainings and practical experience. Newcomers are particularly likely to readily obtain these skills due to the fact that many organizing efforts regularly

rotate important roles and responsibilities among members (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). In addition to the skills and perspectives that are deliberately cultivated among participants in organizing initiatives, learning occurs through groups' efforts to create change in real-world settings, and the group-based reflections and participatory evaluations that often occur alongside these efforts (Speer & Hughey, 1995). Leaders in organizing efforts often become savvy policy analysts, action researchers, and political actors. For these reasons, educational research has increasingly identified organizing as a fertile context for civic learning and civic development (Rogers, Mediratta, & Shah, 2012).

Civic learning taking place in community organizing settings is typically distinguished by a critical social analysis that seeks to identify the structural aspects of social problems, and connect them to personal experiences of those problems (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). In this way, civic learning that occurs through community organizing is often similar to Freire's (1973) concept of education for critical consciousness, in which people learn to uncover structural roots of inequality and engage in reflective action to bring about change toward greater social justice (see Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Importantly, this form of reflective action in community organizing does not involve only collaboration and democratic deliberation intended to bring about consensus, but also the strategic use of power and public conflict to hold decision-makers to account (Schutz, 2011). The learning that takes place through organizing is therefore not only about understanding complex systems and identifying possible points of intervention to bring about desired changes, but is also about improvisation on a core set of principles that are employed adaptively as necessitated by local power dynamics.

Studies of the cognitive component of psychological empowerment have assessed the understanding of complex processes through which effective and powerful action can be taken. This set of understandings—that conflict is often a part of social change processes, that organized groups are more effective in this arena than are individuals, and keen awareness of the many ways that social power can be used to the advantage of those who possess it (Gaventa, 1980)—have been assessed alongside the behavioral and emotional components of psychological empowerment. The cognitive component of psychological empowerment has consistently shown complicated relationships with the other components of psychological empowerment, including a lack of covariance (Christens, Collura, & Tahir, 2013; Speer et al., 2013). Some of the divergence of the cognitive component appears to be related to demographic characteristics of participants, including race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Christens, Speer, & Peterson, 2011; Peterson, Hamme, & Speer, 2002). In general, those with less relative privilege tend to score higher on measures of cognitive empowerment, while those with more relative privilege tend to score higher on measures of emotional empowerment, suggesting the usefulness of tailored strategies in community organizing settings (Christens, Speer, & Peterson, 2011; Peterson & Hughey, 2002).

Developmental Perspectives

Organizing has long been studied as a developmental context for adult participants. For instance, a study by Kieffer (1984) takes an explicitly developmental perspective on citizen empowerment through community organizing. Kieffer's study identifies different eras in the development of a citizen leader—an era of entry into sociopolitical involvement, an era of advancement through supportive peer and mentored relationships, an era of incorporation during which leadership skills are honed, and an era of commitment which entails a fully realized competence yet continued commitment to struggles in the sociopolitical arena. A number of other studies of empowerment among adults in organizing have taken a developmental perspective. These studies have focused on organizing as a context for developing a greater understanding of social power dynamics (e.g., Speer & Hughey, 1995), and for increasing involvement in civic affairs (e.g., Christens & Speer, 2011). These studies have identified particular organizational characteristics and processes (e.g., cycling of roles, one-to-one meetings) that are particularly influential in the development of participants.

As it has become more common for young people to be involved in community organizing initiatives, developmental psychologists, educational researchers, and other scholars of youth development have become increasingly interested in understanding the effects of involvement on young people. As a result, youth organizing has been identified as a catalyst for change at multiple levels of analysis (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Christens & Kirshner, 2011). At a systemic level, it facilitates changes in communities and schools (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Mediratta et al., 2009; Orr & Rogers, 2011). At an individual level, it facilitates civic identity development and, more broadly, positive youth development (Rogers et al., 2012). This understanding has brought a more prominent focus on community organizing as a developmental context, particularly for marginalized or disadvantaged young people. A recent review by Kirshner and Ginwright (2012) delineates the different domains in which researchers have identified positive developmental outcomes associated with participation in youth organizing among African-American and Latino adolescents: enhanced civic development, academic engagement, and psychological wellness.

In many communities, youth organizing initiatives provide venues in which young people can gain experiential education about social systems and social change processes, as well as the participatory competencies associated with empowerment and critical consciousness (Rogers, Morrell, & Enyedy, 2007; Watts et al., 2011). It has therefore been noted as an extracurricular setting that can attract and engage youth who might not be attracted to more mainstream extracurricular activities that do not foster concern or take action to address societal injustices. Once they are engaged in organizing, youth often find a supportive community of peers and adult mentors who provide social support, guidance, and links to

resources beyond the organizing initiative itself (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). As research has demonstrated, these youth organizers are much more likely than their peers to achieve desirable personal outcomes (Conner, 2011). A report by Terriquez and Rogers (2012) provides preliminary results from a large-scale study of alumni of youth organizing (ages 18–26) showing that, when compared with randomly selected youth from similar backgrounds, those who had been involved in organizing were more than twice as likely to be registered to vote, more than 2.5 times more likely to have volunteered within the last year, and five times more likely to have worked on an issue that affects their community. Moreover, those who had been involved in organizing were more than 2.5 times more likely to pursue a postsecondary education than similar peers, over three times more likely to enroll in a four-year university, and less likely, by about a third, to be both out of school and out of work.

Summary

Research on community organizing points to multiple avenues, at multiple levels of analysis, through which community organizing is a mechanism for enhancing well-being. In many social scientific accounts, community organizing is studied as a macro- or mesolevel intervention seeking to create changes in policies, systems, and environments that will have beneficial effects on residents. As case studies of successful organizing efforts demonstrate, this is an important avenue through which community organizing can exert positive influences on the wellness of populations at various scales. Yet, psychological research on community organizing demonstrates that organizing can also represent a multifaceted context for promoting civic engagement, capacity, social capital, psychological sense of community, and psychological empowerment. Through these pathways, and perhaps others, participation in community organizing is exerting beneficial influences on participants. At the macro level, we therefore consider the presence of strong community organizing groups in towns, cities, and regions to be one very promising indicator (among others, for instance, high-quality schools) of a community's resilience, adaptability to the challenges of the postindustrial era, and ongoing capacity to foster well-being for its residents.

Alongside the changes in policies, systems, and environments that it produces, community organizing can be hypothesized to have ripple effects on community well-being as participants radiate its influences through their institutions and networks (Hughey & Speer, 2002), but this has yet to be demonstrated empirically. Similarly, despite the promising findings on beneficial effects of organizing on individual participants, research has not yet adequately specified the mechanisms of influence or the ways they are mediated by contextual and personal characteristics. Nor has research provided many insights into the varying utility of different approaches to organizing in different contexts, the effectiveness of organizing

around different issues, or the best ways to sustain and deepen participants' involvement in organizing over time (Collura & Christens, 2014). In short, research using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods has convincingly shown that participating in organizing tends to be beneficial for participants; yet, it has not yet demonstrated that benefits accrue to nonparticipating residents. Furthermore, relatively few research findings have been published that can effectively guide decision-making in organizing practice.

Many gaps in knowledge remain, and major hurdles exist for those seeking to fill these gaps. The complexity and fluidity of the phenomenon of community organizing is a point of interest for many researchers, but presents numerous challenges to systematic and comparative study. Furthermore, although there are strengths to the interdisciplinarity of the research literature on community organizing, there is a tendency for research not to build on the work that is done from other disciplinary perspectives. Additionally, many types of organizing exist, and it can be difficult to discern whether findings from one context, issue area, or model are likely to be translatable to others.

Particularly promising directions for future research on community organizing include multilevel approaches that link psychological and developmental changes in participants with the development of community capacity and outcomes at a community level. Future research should harness technological innovations to obtain richer longitudinal data sets on organizing processes, participation patterns, social networks, and psychosocial dynamics, so that more specific mechanisms of influence can be more effectively discerned. Organizing also provides an important context for researchers engaged in community-based and action-oriented approaches (see Speer & Christens, 2013). Yet more comparative, systematic, multisite research, utilizing experimental and quasi-experimental methods, will be needed to achieve a more detailed understanding of the psychology and multilevel impacts of community organizing.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

We now discuss recommendations for policy based on the current field of practice and the body of empirical evidence that exists on community organizing.

First, policy at all levels of government should seek to rebuild or maintain the viability of local community institutions (e.g., community and neighborhood centers, public schools, voluntary associations), which can act as social and institutional anchors for organizing initiatives, and serve other beneficial functions in their communities. The decline of such institutions and settings has been noted, for example, in the work of Putnam (1995), as a decline in social capital that has negative ramifications for democratic society. With long-term trends toward decline in labor union membership and attendance at religious institutions, gaps in access to attractive social anchors have emerged for large portions of the

population. These declines have been accompanied by increases in social and ideological segmentation in involvement through, for instance, online activities, political consumerism, and checkbook-style memberships in organizations that support professional advocacy and lobbying around particular issues. Although these new forms of engagement are each promising for some purposes, there are also many ways in which these sorts of activities are poor substitutes for regular attendance in local physical spaces that include a diverse representation of community members. There is therefore a need for local community centers and neighborhood houses that can offer programs for youth, families, and the elderly, that provide volunteer opportunities, cross-cultural experiences, and weave local social fabrics more tightly. In particular, however, there is a need for more community institutions that do not simply fulfill associational needs that skew toward expressive interests, but institutions that also serve instrumental needs—the exercise of collective will to shape the environment rather than simply accommodate to it.

In addition to the need for social anchor institutions to build social networks and social capital for participants (see Small, 2009), then, there is a need to invest in such institutions to provide community infrastructure for mobilization. Community organizing initiatives can aid in the generation of social capital, but they also depend on preexisting stores of social capital for sustainability and success (Wood, 1997). If they are to serve as viable social anchors for organizing, local institutions must not depend solely on public funding, since these resource dependencies could hamper their ability to exercise power in local systems. Growing the number and capacity of such social anchors should be a priority for philanthropic giving as well as for governmental funding at all levels. A concrete example would be for public and/or nonprofit organizations to work with community groups on the acquisition of a building (house, apartment, warehouse, etc.) in a neighborhood that is facing challenging social issues, and to transform the space to serve as an inclusive community center to accommodate the interests and needs of residents in the surrounding area.

We recommend greater consideration of community organizing as a model not only for the pursuit of community and system-level changes, but also as a model for building civic capacity at multiple levels. Longitudinal psychological research among participants in community organizing has shown that participation is more likely to lead to changes in levels of psychological empowerment than vice versa (Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011). These findings run contrary to frameworks such as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which broadly view behavior as an outgrowth of attitudes and perceptions, and associated models for intervention that target beliefs and self-perceptions in order to influence behaviors. Findings from organizing research suggest an alternative: policies and programs that seek to increase civic and community vibrancy should target greater engagement of residents in civic activities like community organizing, and

their skills, beliefs, and self-perceptions are likely to change as a result of their involvement in systems change efforts. We therefore recommend that decision-makers scrutinize whether resources for education-oriented prevention programs might be better allocated toward funding more widespread opportunities for meaningful engagement and grassroots leadership in work to address social issues.

At the local, state, or regional levels, we encourage organizers and decision-makers to continue to connect and align community organizing initiatives with public and nonprofit efforts to improve social welfare, urban planning and public and environmental health. As discussed in our review of practice, shared concerns exist between many organizing initiatives and public health professionals around increasing disparities in health outcomes between rich and poor populations and different racial/ethnic groups. These shared concerns provide opportunities for greater synergy between targeted health services and grassroots action on policies, systems, and environments. We do not believe that these synergies have yet been fully realized, and promising new models for alignment and integration of efforts should be tried and evaluated systematically when possible (see Speer et al., 2014). Yet we also encourage greater strategic attention to the difficulties of aligning the goals of grassroots organizing groups and public agencies. There is a need for policies, programs, and funding mechanisms that creatively connect and align the strengths of community organizing with those of other public and nonprofit agencies working to improve community well-being. A simple first step toward such alignment is to ensure that leaders of grassroots organizing initiatives are included on the task forces, councils, boards, and other decision-making bodies that determine strategies and approaches to addressing social issues.

With these recommendations, we must caution against neoliberal appropriations of community organizing, which might view organizing and associated community-based activities as possible substitutes for the provision of basic services by state and nonprofit agencies. Community organizing initiatives themselves generally shy away from the direct provision of services—not because organizers view such services as unnecessary—but because of a clear understanding of organizing's role as building power for more marginal groups to assert themselves in decision-making processes. This power is used, in some cases, to secure resources and services that are needed to improve quality of life in these communities. The purpose of organizing is to alter community environments and contexts so they are more responsive to the needs and values of people, whereas the purpose of service provision is to accommodate individuals to better function in and adapt to the circumstances they are confronting. Hence, community organizing cannot serve as a substitute for services and programs.

At the national and international levels, we echo calls for policies that create more "receptive social environments" (Campbell, Cornish, Gibbs, & Scott, 2010, p. 964) for community voices to be considered by powerful decision-makers. In many places around the world, the political system does not guarantee sufficient

freedoms (e.g., the freedom to publicly challenge political leaders) for the models of community organizing that have been described in this review to be effective vehicles for changing systems. Even in places where such freedoms are guaranteed, there is typically a lack of access to decision-making venues for people with fewer resources. Similarly, in nongovernmental efforts to encourage participation, those with greater power are often overrepresented in decision-making processes. A principle of community organizing (mentioned earlier in this article) that policy makers and practitioners would do well to keep in mind is that the people closest to the problem should be a part of the solution to that problem. Discussions about potential solutions to community issues should, whenever possible, involve the grassroots community organizing initiatives that are seeking to build power to address these issues. We therefore recommend incorporation of organizing initiatives and organizing perspectives into attempts to achieve collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011), and other issue-focused problem solving and advocacy efforts.

For foundations and NGOs interested in supporting social change and community development, community organizing represents a promising model. There are, however, many differences between supporting grassroots organizing initiatives and more traditional models of service or program delivery. For one thing, organizing initiatives often fluctuate in terms of the pace and scale of activities, so deliverables associated with more programmatic activities may be inappropriate. It is particularly critical to tailor evaluation efforts specifically to organizing initiatives in ways that provide useful information to the leaders of the initiative and have the potential to contribute to and advance the current state of research evidence on community organizing (see Speer & Christens, 2013). Our recommendations for funders include increasing the timelines of funding commitments to community organizing groups, while simultaneously carefully considering the processes and outcomes to be assessed in evaluating organizing initiatives. As described in the review of organizing research, data are needed to understand the links between specific organizing processes and positive outcomes at the individual, organizational, and community levels. More systematic research and evaluation are needed on organizing to account for differences in organizing processes and outcomes, and to translate these findings for practice.

Community organizing involving young people is making tremendous strides as a field of practice, and early research on the topic demonstrates very promising influences on individual young people who participate. Moreover, case studies indicate that youth organizing initiatives have the potential to become sustainable, powerful community actors that are capable of altering policies and systems so that they are more responsive to youth and community needs. Policy makers, funders, educators, and youth workers should therefore carefully explore youth organizing as an underutilized strategy for addressing both positive youth development and positive community change. The existing evidence is extremely promising. Yet, it

is nevertheless very preliminary when compared with the data available on other models for youth development and prevention of risk behavior. There is therefore a particular need for investments in rigorous research on youth organizing in multiple locations and at multiple levels of analysis.

Finally, the types of grassroots community organizing reviewed in this article should be studied more closely by leaders of organizations seeking to produce large-scale changes in sociopolitical systems (e.g., reducing inequality or responding to global climate change). Many large, advocacy-oriented organizations have models for public engagement that are more top-down and campaign-style. Although they may invoke the rhetoric of community organizing, they often offer few opportunities for members or volunteers to play meaningful roles. Community organizing groups have been able, in many cases, to achieve more effective and sustainable mobilization with far fewer resources than large nonprofit and political action organizations. We suggest that this is largely due to the ways in which community organizing engages people as potential leaders, rather than simply as supporters. Organizations interested in producing social and policy change should learn from and adapt strategies from community organizing to practice deeper forms of public engagement.

Summary and Conclusions

Community organizing continues to evolve as a field of practice. Prominent changes in the recent past include the widespread shift to congregation-based organizing, the continuing movement toward inclusion of youth in organizing efforts, the increasing scale of state-wide, regional, and nationally networked efforts, and the increasing propensity of organizing groups to engage in strategic partnerships with other entities in their communities. Many of these trends are promising for enhancing organizing's impact on policies and practices that promote community well-being, yet there are numerous and increasing challenges to building sustainable local power in a globalizing, neoliberal political and economic context.

Social scientific research has shed light on the effects of organizing processes at multiple levels of analysis. Psychological research has demonstrated that organizing is a contributor to well-being through mechanisms that include enhancing psychological empowerment and psychological sense of community. Yet there are many remaining needs for insights and evidence that interdisciplinary work can produce. Very little empirical work has compared the effects of organizing practices across contexts, or over time. Larger-scale and longitudinal studies can provide greater insights into the mechanisms and cross-level transactions through which organizing simultaneously influences psychosocial well-being and drives community change. Applied and action-oriented research can also provide valuable insights for organizing practice.

Finally, for those engaged in policy-oriented work, there is much that can be learned from grassroots organizing, and much that can be done to support the field of practice. Public-sector entities can sometimes find shared purposes with grassroots organizing groups. More generally, they can design policy-making processes that allow for increased engagement with grassroots groups. In addition, they can often support the local community institutions on which organizing depends. For nongovernmental organizations, community organizing groups should be considered as promising partners for community-driven health promotion and community development efforts. Community organizing also serves as a model for deeply democratic work oriented toward change in policies and systems.

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