Collaborate and Learn

Tech Universe is the philanthropic arm of a Hi tech venture capitalist firm who wants to enter into working with not profits. It is interested in community organizing as a vehicle for building stronger neighborhoods, but has neither the experience working with community organizers nor understands the process. In the interest of educating themselves about the process they have invited a group of experts on the subject to their facility and have broken them up into groups. Their task will be to answer a series of prepared questions for which the answers will give the potential funders a better understanding of both the process and potential challenges organizers face. Each member in the group should fully discuss and share his or her views on each question. Note: a natural byproduct of this exercise is sharing of ideas.

Each group should identify a note taker and a reporter. The note taker will write all the group’s responses to each question. At the end of the discussion each group's reporter will share their results with the larger group.

Questions

1. Why organize. What is your reason for being? What are the set of circumstances that led your organization to becoming an advocacy group? What is your being a solution to? Why are you a part of the group?

2. One of the most important decisions the group will make is hiring a lead organizer. Talk about why this role is important and the value he or she brings to your group. What skills, qualities, and attributes must this person possess to be successful and why? What are some of the challenges both internal and external that the lead organizer may have to contend with?

3. A critical element of any community organizing effort is a needs assessment. What are the needs of the community? How does the community view itself? What changes would the community like to see? What defines improved quality of life for the community? These are very important questions. How one chooses to answer them is vital. How do you determine the needs of the community?

4. It is extremely important to have an established and official governance body for the group with bylaws and decision making authority. Talk about your decision making body. How did it get formed? Who is it comprised of? What is it called? Are there an established system of checks and balances? How effective is it? Are there lower or subordinate decision making bodies such as sub groups or action groups and what are their roles?

5. How does the group deal with conflict when it arises? Are there standards in place that serve to reduce conflict or to address it when it occurs? How does the group deal with
disrespect if it occurs or members who may not be a good fit?

6. It is important that skills and expertise that are needed to be successful are accessed early in the process. How did the group acquire the necessary skills and training that an effective community organizing effort requires and what skills are important to have?

7. The single most challenging part of organizing is probably outreach. Why is it so challenging and how do you get people to want to participate? What strategies have you utilized to expand your outreach and how effective has it been?

8. Once you have organized around action strategies the next step is to move towards advocacy. This requires building relationships; building partnerships. Talk about the importance of building partnerships, some of your partners, and the impact/result of these partnerships on your goals.

9. A large part of advocacy is having a voice: having access, having influence. Talk about the importance of having a voice, keeping and maintaining open lines of communication, and who you should be communicating with regularly.

10. Talk about power. Is it manifested in the community? If not how could that change and what would having power look like?

11. What are the biggest challenges that currently face the group and what are the potential solutions?