

Community Mobilizing -- What It Is and Isn't

Community mobilizing is a strategy for involving community members in the process of defining and transforming social problems. The term also refers to the process of moving a group of people from a state of inaction (or ineffective action) toward effective action, on issues of real concern to them. This action builds a sense of collective *empowerment* and *efficacy* (the expectation and belief that the community has the knowledge and ability to get the job done). Community mobilizing can take several different forms, depending on the extent to which “grassroots” community members (neighborhood residents or local group members) versus official community and government leaders and organizations are actively involved in defining the problems and deciding on solutions. Community mobilizing efforts can involve both confrontational and consensus-seeking methods of creating change.

Mobilizing is accomplished through a sequential process that involves linking **Awareness** (of the problem and its causes, consequences, costs, etc.) to **Action** (the community taking steps to remedy the problem or prevent it from happening again) in order to bring about **Change**.

This process is expressed as: **AWARENESS + COMMUNITY ACTION = CHANGE**

Characteristics of Community Mobilizing	
What It Is	What It Isn't
A process, a way of getting to a goal.	A goal in itself.
Brings together groups of people affected by an issue to decide on a course of action.	One person deciding on an issue.
Allows people to act collectively in order to build and maximize the experience of collective power.	Allows one or two people to assume all leadership and decision-making roles.
Actions are based on achieving goals consistent with a larger vision of social change.	Actions are based solely on the potential for victory or short-term gains.
Involves ongoing efforts to broaden the base of community support and develop new leadership.	Allows for little reaching out to new members; only a few people work on the effort or maintain leadership roles now and forever.
Allows people to develop a sense of power and control over their lives; the experience of shared power coupled with vision, create the sense the “We have a right to...”	Involves just changing people’s minds about a situation or condition, with limited or no sense of additional “capability” or “capacity.”
May be a long, involved process requiring patience, perseverance, and respect for individuals and the process itself.	A magical solution leading to quick victories or immediate resolution of problems.



This table was adapted from descriptions created by Rachel Sierra of the Center for Community Change (see www.communitychange.org).