Understanding the Role of Grassroots Organizations in Empowering Marginalized Communities for Political Engagement

BY

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Abstract

This is a qualitative research study using Causa Justa :: Just Cause as a case study to understand the role of grassroots organizations in the political engagement of marginalized communities. The research uses a conceptual framework focused on grassroots organizations, organizational capacity, and identity theory. The framework is used to provide understanding of the current literature that addresses the research question. Using interviews and document analyses, this research will examine the role of the organizational structure, organizing model, and the use of paid organizers as a means to politically engage marginalized communities. Collaboration and political education are common themes in the findings presented to address the research question.

Dedication Page

This thesis is dedicated to my mother Resonja Willoughby and all Black people fighting systems of oppression every day.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Occupy Movement started in New York City following one of the most dramatic economic crises in US modern history. For decades, corporations and the government had participated in giving housing loans to families that did not understand the full implications. In 2008, the US experienced the backlash of the housing and financial market crash, greatly contributing to an economic recession.   By September 2011, people mobilized in the center of New York City to protest the role of big business and government in the economic downturn (#Occupytogether). Those that organized identified themselves as the 99% and their opposition as the 1%. This distinction was used to highlight the fact that 1% of the US population has the higher concentration of wealth in the country. "America's upper-income families have a median net worth that is nearly 70 times that of the country's lower-income families, also the widest wealth gap between these families in 30 years (Fry & Kochhar, 2014)." The 99% united in encampments in most major cities by the end of the year to protest the economic inequality, and the Occupy Movement became a platform for marginalized people to become politically engaged and mobilize.

At the time of the Occupy Movement, I had already begun graduate school and had started to question how low-income people might become politically engaged. After completing my Bachelors of Science in Community and Regional Development, I moved back to my hometown, West Oakland, California. Moving back to my neighborhood, I instantly recognized the gentrification[1]. The neighborhood did not look the same as it had

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[1] Gentrification is "the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

before I left to go to school. And so following my organizing spirit, I became involved in my

neighborhood association. The most prominent neighborhood association at the time was

led by recent residents, or "gentrifiers."[2] The community meetings were well attended, but

it was difficult to get a diverse range of residents to the meetings. As a long-time resident

and member of the executive board, this puzzled me, and I battled constantly with how to

effectively engage the entire neighborhood.

In the field of community development, we are constantly reflecting on different

means for social change. As community developers, we are concerned with the social

welfare of our society. Outside of sporadic mobilizations, such as the Occupy Movement,

it's important to take a look at structures that can help to promote political engagement

and mobilization. The popularly termed "third sector" is one of those avenues. The third

sector refers to voluntary or community based organizations (Salamon, 1994). Within the

third sector are many different types of organizations, including faith-based, service-

oriented, grassroots entities. For my research, I decided to focus on grassroots

organizations (GROs) as an avenue for social change. GROs are "locally based, significantly

autonomous, volunteer-run formal nonprofit groups that manifest substantial voluntary

altruism and use the associational form of organization (Smith, 2009, p. 1)." Since all

grassroots organizations do not serve the same function, I decided to explore social change

organizations (SCOs) due to their propensity for intentionally working with the local

community to become engaged and a part of the larger efforts to overcome injustices.

Similar to the Occupy Movement, SCOs are also a strategy that is used to engage

marginalized communities and assist with the empowerment of disenfranchised groups. In

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[2] "Gentrifer" is a term coined to identify people who contribute to gentrification.

this paper, I selected a local SCO, Causa Justa :: Just Cause (CJJC). CJJC acts as a hybrid organization, which is described as "organizations that borrow self consciously from both traditional and newly emergent social movement organizational forms (Minkoff, 2002, p. 381)." CJJC uses a direct service model through its tenant rights counseling (traditional) while also using community organizing strategies (newly emergent social movement organizational forms). I will use the case study to explore the research questions: how do grassroots organizations empower and develop marginalized communities to become politically engaged? And, what challenges and opportunities do they face in this work?

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Grassroots Organizations: Origins and Purpose

During the Reagan era (1981-89), there was a shift in the political and economic structure of the US. This transition called for a decrease of government involvement in the public sphere, which would come to be known as privatization. Privatization included the privatizing of public entities such as public services and utilities (Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, & Vishny, 1997). This new market system promoted a free economy and a limited government (Eisinger, 1998). Communities had been highly affected by the withdrawal of federal government aid due to the ideology of independence promoted in a neo-liberal economy. The devolution of funds from the city by the state and federal government lead to a decline in the city's role in everyday people's freedom (Eisenger 1998). Nonprofit organizations became the agencies that carried on the role the city used to play; creating the "Third Sector." The Third Sector would provide the social welfare services for the public (Salamon, 1994).

The Third Sector is comprised of many different kinds of organizations, such as those that are faith-based, voluntary, and grassroots. For this research, I will highlight GROs and discuss different types. GROs are mission driven and tend to reflect the values and goals of its membership. Within the category of grassroots organizations, there are different types. Most grassroots organizations can fit within one of these three categories; service delivery, advocacy, or organizing. The service delivery organizations are groups that work to provide a direct service to its members (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). This can be in the form of counseling, case work, or any other direct service to meet the needs of its membership. An advocacy organization works on behalf of its membership (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Its focus is to work within the current political system to make changes to laws and policies that can change the way of life for its membership. The organizing organization works to mobilize and empower its membership to do advocacy work. One of the major differences between the advocacy and organizing organizations is the fact that advocacy organizations work mostly on behalf of the community (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Organizing organizations use social movement strategies such as protest and civil disobedience to engage community members in the issues (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007).

Another type of grassroots organizations is a social change organization. Nonprofit Enterprise and Self-sustainability Team (NESsT) defines a social change organization as "one that addresses systemic, root causes of social and economic inequalities and thus, aims to structurally transform society to achieve greater social and economic justice (NESsT Glossary of Terms, 2011)." These social change organizations (SCO) work directly with its membership to build strong support in order to address systematic issues.

Recruitment to the membership generally requires "face-to-face networking (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007: 25)." This sort of interaction is important and has been proven to be more successful than less aggressive techniques (e.g., direct mail) (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007). CJJC can be best categorized as a social change organization. CJJC works to build a membership, and collaborates with other organizations regarding political issues that pertain to housing and immigrant rights. CJJC's vision states, "We envision a future where corporate control is replaced by an economy run by the people and for the people, and political power is in the hands of those who need change the most (Causa Justa :: Just Cause)." This vision shows that CJJC is working to address systemic change. SCO is the best way to describe the case study, CJJC, for the purpose of this research.

Organizational Capacity of Social Change Organizations

I will concentrate on literature from organizational theory because it provides an analysis on how the organizational structure affects its ability to implement its purpose and sustain. The analysis reveals that the organization structure provides tools and resources which helps to sustain the organization. I will use the analysis to discuss SCOs as one type of organization to empower marginalized communities. The analysis is done by defining different forms of capacities that can be measured for sustainability and effectiveness. I will look specifically at the forms of capacity building of the SCOs to fulfill the aforementioned mission. Capacity is a very comprehensive term which I understand as the ability of SCOs to perform its goals and/or mission (Glickman & Servon, 1998, p. 498). Here I will take a moment to define different types of capacities:

Operational capacity. Operational capacity is the organization's ability to implement the tasks and duties of the organization (Weiss, 2005). This includes the day to

day functions, but here I will address the techniques used to engage and empower

marginalized groups. As it pertains to SCOs, we are looking at its ability to empower

residents through community organizing. Community organizing is "mobiliz[ing]

individuals into some form of collective action" (Miller, Rein, & Levitt, 1990, p. 357). The

community organizing strategy is also a method of outreach. Outreach is an important

element to building a strong base of support with the community members (Chetkovich &

Kunreuther, 2007). One tactic that SCOs use to implement a community organizing strategy

is its utilization of organizers. The purpose of organizers is to recruit and educate

members from the community in order to mobilize mass numbers of people around a

particular issue (Delgado, 1986). Their main strategy is canvassing the community in which

the SCO serves and speaking one-on-one with community members (Delgado, 1986). SCOs

may be selective in recruiting organizers due to the importance of organizers having

considerable experience working in impoverished communities. Cultural competency

becomes a decisively important aspect when working in disadvantaged neighborhoods

(SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004). It is possible that the SCO's staff does

not reflect the population being served, so it is important that staff and members are able

to interact and have an understanding of the social norms. Understanding the community

is vital for building networks of trust which are important in motivating individuals

(Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007). These networks of community members are needed to

transform the current political and governmental institutions relevant to achieving and

maintaining the goals of the SCOs (De Vita & Fleming, 2001). Furthermore, these

relationships that help to create trust between the organization and community are

instrumental, and so it is important to ensure a low turnover of community organizers.

The second half of the definition for community organizing focuses on the "collective action". For community action to occur, SCOs must evaluate what issues the community is facing. With much input from the community, SCOs make a decision on what issues they decide to take on. More support for SCOs as they address the identified issues not only increases the effectiveness of collective action, but is also pivotal in reaching the goals. Most organizing SCOs operate under a model that there is "power in numbers", which helps to support the strategy of collective action (Clemens & Minkoff, 2004). It is important that SCOs use collective action as a model for social change because it brings attention to the organization and the issues that they are working on. For organizations that may lack significant financial capital, "power in numbers" becomes a dominant resource.   The greater the "people power", the more visible the organization and its demands are to the institutions they wish to create change. Although SCOs focus a lot on building a collective identity for their members, they also rely on political allies. The more members that are involved from a political ally's district, the more likely the politicians are to stand behind an issue. Tactful SCOs work with allies who are decision-makers because they can make long-term progress towards social change. SCOs develop relationships with political allies by assisting with lobbying for certain bills and legislation (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Some SCOs may also assist in a political campaign of a political representative with the understanding that the individual will support and push forward legislation that meets their interests (Committee, 2011).

Resource capacity. Resource capacity is the organization's ability to acquire resources that can help achieve sustainability (Glickman & Servon 1998, 502). Financial resources can be a primary focus of a SCO as it pertains to longevity. Financial resources

are important to SCOs because they give the organization leverage that is necessary to accomplish the community goals (De Vita & Fleming, 2001). It has proven difficult to advocate on behalf of disadvantaged communities without access to financial capital. Financial resources can be broken up into these categories; private/individual contributions, foundations, corporate, government, and commercial (Froelich, 1999, p. 249). Private/individual contributions come from people who would like to donate money to the organization. This can be from supporters, members, etc. Foundations are philanthropic and give to many different types of organizations. Foundation funding can either be given to promote the current work that is being done or to add another layer of work. Corporate funding can be very similar to foundations. Corporate funding can also come in "in-kind" donations with the use of employee time/expertise and use of facilities. However, depending on the foundation, it could also provide some of the same resources. Government funding tends to be a more stable source of funding for nonprofit organizations (Froelich, 1999). This funding can be accessed from the local and national level. These funds are highly sought after, so there is a lot of competition for government funding. Commercial funding is when nonprofit organizations adopt a product/service in order to sell and make a profit, and it is relatively new to the nonprofit sector (Froelich, 1999). These profits are typically invested back into the organization as a funding source.

The diversification of funding is very important to make sure that the organization stays on track with its mission and goals. It is relevant to know that these funding sources can sometimes encourage or deter the work of the SCO and are not always stable. Private/individual funding can be very unstable (Froelich, 1999). These donations depend heavily on the individual willingness to give. Government, corporate, foundation funding

can also be unstable. These sources of funding depend on availability and campaign

interest at the moment. Commercial funding also varies and cannot be considered a

guaranteed source. Outside of instability, funding sources can create "goal displacement"

(Froelich, 1999).   For example, corporate and foundation funding sources can have its own

public relations campaign. In doing so, they may solicit organizations to help push forward

a particular agenda. Most of the funds require certain deliverables. These deliverables

may or may not fall in line with the organization's mission. However, the deliverables must

be met in order to meet the guidelines of the funding. Government funding comes with

similar stipulations. Most of these deliverables are related to the number of people served.

Government funding can distract the organization into accomplishing the "number" goal,

which may result in negatively affecting the quality of service provided. It also takes a lot

of staff time in order to complete the paperwork (e.g., reports for the funds). Commercial

funding "goal displacement" can come in the form of the organization being too focused on

the revenue and losing sight of the initial service it was providing (Froelich, 1999). All of

the funding sources are needed; however, a strong leadership in the nonprofit organization

is necessary to maintain awareness of the potential "goal displacement" and to ensure that

the funding is helping to achieve the mission/goal of the organization.   Because although

diversifying funding can help, it can also cause problems due to various funding criteria

(Froelich, 1999) so it takes effective leadership to make funding decisions.

Another important resource is the use of technology. In the 21st century, there is a

growing use of computer based technologies to engage all stakeholders in the organization

and to secure visibility. Having access to computer based technologies can help the

operative functions of the SCOs. It can also be really useful to maintain software that SCOs

9

can use to assist with evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies. These systems are

usually in the form of databases, where SCOs can collect quantitative and/or qualitative

data in order to track progress on issues. However, technology can also become divisive

when working with low-income populations (Raine, 2013). In the wake of the digital

divide, it is important for SCOs not to rely on computer-based technology as a means for

engagement because its members may not have access. It is still used as a tool for

organizing, but thus, it is supplemented by other.

      Leadership capacity. Leadership capacity is the "ability of the organization's

leaders to inspire, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate (Weiss,

2005)." This kind of capacity is an evaluation of the leadership capabilities to perform the

goals of the organization. Leadership capacity is important to have at all levels; including

staff members, community members and volunteers (De Vita & Fleming, 2001, p. 22). It is

important that the organization is equipped with people who have the skills to move the

agenda of the organization and the community forward. SCOs must prioritize and make

decisions on how to accomplish these goals. Also, it is highly important for any SCO's

leadership to have the ability to engage many different stakeholders and negotiate

coalitions, advance collaborations and achieve compromises (Weiss, 2005). The success of

SCOs does not just rely on their members, but also their ability to engage the "powers that

be."

      A SCO's ability to engage and develop the leadership capacity of its membership is

very important, as leadership in the community is vital for advancing the mission and

vision of the SCO. Leadership in low-income communities of color should be approached

with a specific model, one that is focused on the collective. Leadership has been historically

focused on the individual's ability to affect change, a western way of thinking (Perry, 2008). However, leadership development in low-income communities should be focused on leadership as a collective. Moving away from the individual to leadership as a collective helps to bring members together and understand the "power in numbers" (Perry, 2008). There are two dominant models for leadership development in low-income communities; the deficit model, and the asset-based model (Perry, 2008). The deficit model approach to leadership development is when an organization identifies the set of skills that the community needs to incorporate. The disadvantage of this model is that it is based on assumptions of what the community lacks. Community members may withdraw from this model with a feeling that the organization is imposing their own views. The asset-based model is more focused on the understanding that the community has historical knowledge and a more accurate understanding of their current circumstances, in addition to the ability to acknowledge issues and provide input on what is needed (Perry, 2008). This is the ideal approach for SCOs because it brings the membership into decision making processes of the organization.

SCOs are apt to experience some challenges in the leadership development of marginalized communities. SCOs may experience some apathy from community members which may stem from the lack of confidence. This lack of confidence may be the result of internalized oppression due to community members historically perceiving themselves as unable to influence change (Perry, 2008). It can also come from the economic status of the community members. Economic status can cause community members to feel inferior and as if they lack the necessary resources to influence the change (Perry, 2008). The lack of confidence can come from the limited amount of education and training that some

community members may have. It is important that SCOs have the leadership to address some of these challenges so that they may be overcome.

Organization leadership is also important in making financial resources decisions. SCOs are constantly in competition with other nonprofit organizations for funding sources. This competition poses challenges to the leadership structure when making decisions, because it can sometimes be difficult to balance needing the funds versus how the funds may negatively influence the work. While it is important for these organizations to continue to work on fundraising opportunities, it is also vital for SCOs to have a proper financial management system. Financial mismanagement can be a reason that a SCO is not successful in fulfilling its mission.   It is important to have effective leadership at the operational level of the organization, where financial management is a priority (De Vita & Fleming, 2001).

The operational, leadership, and resource capacity of the SCOs all play a major role in determining how successful the organization is with its mission. This also lends the organization with credibility to its membership and other stakeholders for sustainable engagement and making progress on its campaigns. SCOs must constantly be adaptive and reflective on how they are doing the work and the ways in which they can improve. The organizational capacity of CJJC is what I will used to analyze how they engage with their membership. I will focus on the organizational structure, which includes its formation and infrastructure. I will also analyze its operational functions which include membership meetings, political education sessions that helps to develop leadership, and knowledge in the base.

Identity Theory, Collective Identity, and Agency

Understanding how one's identity affects their ability to act is an important part of understanding how marginalized groups become invested in a social change organization (SCO). I included this section in my conceptual framework because it is important to have foundational knowledge on identity theory and how it affects one's agency. Agency is the individual's "ability to act, to choose a course of action and the capability to make a difference-exercise some extent of power (Cleaver, 2007, p. 227)." Through my research, I understand that SCOs begin with addressing the problem that the membership has identified as being the main concern. In identifying the problem, these organizations identify the particular group that it affects. They use identity to engage people on the issues. CJJC focuses on economic class and ethnicity as a means to engage its membership. The engagement of the group also entails identifying the oppressor or the oppositional group. Having the target identified can be helpful with working to channel the engagement in a productive way. I will focus on identity theory, how it relates to agency, and hone in on collective identity as a means for collective agency. I will begin with discussing identity and how it is formed. Then I will move towards how personal identity can lead towards a collective identity, using the literature to explain how the collective identity provides a greater sense of agency among marginalized groups. Lastly, I will present theory to explain how SCOs are using the collective identity to mobilize individuals.

The self is a very intricate idea. It includes the ascribed and prescribed characteristics of the individual (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 265). This means that we are born into certain identity attributes, and others are created by social structures/society. Most identity theory literature discusses three components of identity

and what that means for the creation of self. These three components are the individual identity, role based identity, and group membership-based identity. These three components lend themselves to the idea that "identities are elements of both the social structure and the individual self-structures that internalize them (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010, p. 480)." Identity is influenced by the self and the self interaction with others/institutions; it's multifaceted. The individual is composed of many different kinds of identities. Identity theory helps to explain how these identities are structured and how they influence agency. Stryker's identity theory is defined as "multifaceted self composed of multiple identities arranged hierarchy in an identity salience structure; the more salient the identity, the higher the probability of it being invoked in an interactional situation that allows agency or choice (482)." Stryker points out that the more noticeable one's identity is, the higher the chance of engaging an individual in action based on that identity. For example, during the civil rights movement, race and gender-based movements became popular due to the racial tensions at the time. The salience of identity is important because it can lead to an understanding of how committed one is to that identity, and therefore, lend some understanding on one's commitment to a political issue.

Collective identity is the shared identity by individuals based on their experiences which forms a sense of solidarity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). The collective brings individuals together with the same shared experience under the guise that this will promote action. Morris describes the collective identity as "mobilizing collective consciousness in response to a dominant group or oppressive understanding" which he calls oppositional consciousness (Morris & Braine, 2001). The collective identity may reveal a common oppressor. This provides an impetus for why the collective identity in SCOs is used as an

approach to getting people engaged in the movement. In discussion about collective

identity it is important to highlight the emotion that is used to form the collective. There is

an emotional connection within the group (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). As an organizer in a

SCO, it is important to hone in on the emotion. The passionate emotions can lead to

motivation and result in collective action (297). Provoking anger can be a strategy that a

lot of SCOs use in order to engage marginalized groups.

The collective identity creates a space for collective agency. The collective space

creates opportunities to act and effectively develop tactics and measures to fight against

the opposition. The way in which the SCO frames the issue is very important for getting the

collective identity to take ownership of its newfound agency (Benford & Snow, 2000). A lot

of the framing that occurs in the SCO stresses the power of individuals acting as a collective

to obtain what they feel is needed. They put importance on the agency acquired in the

collective. SCOs utilize the collective agency as "empowering and transformative (Cleaver,

2007)."

Identity theory, collective identity and agency help to give some understanding on

how the individual becomes politically engaged. These ideas help to focus on the individual

and what drives them to become involved. This provides a framework for my findings

section when looking at the role of the organizer and how the organizers' identities play a

role in their politicalization.

The conceptual framework covers the operational capacity of SCOs and focuses on

the use of identity and collective identity as a means for organizing and empowering

marginalized communities. The primary focus is the organization as a structure that is

used as a tool for engagement. The organization structure of CJJC provides the resources,

such as infrastructure and community meetings, as a means for engagement. The

importance of the merger, which highlights the need for collaboration amongst groups, is

an idea to help contribute to organizational literature. It highlights the importance of

unifying resources for the expansion of the organization, and providing the most

appropriate tools to engage with the community. The structure of the organization gives

organizers the means to recruit members, and the foundation to help educate them. This

structure is also important with looking at the operations of the organization. CJJC

functions as an organizing organization. It uses identity, ethnicity and economic status, as a

means to unite the community around housing and immigrant rights. This is the

importance of looking at identity theory and collective identity literature. The identity

literature discusses the importance of building networks in the community. In my findings,

I will look at the role of identity as it pertains to the staff organizers. I will look at how the

identity of the organizer played a role in their politicalization. I have identified the

organizer as a key tool in empowering marginalized communities. I believe that looking at

the organizer as a tool and understanding how they are politicized is important to

understanding how they engage with the population. As we will see in my findings, CJJC

uses a particular type of organizer as a tool to engage its membership. In this way, my

research contributes to the current literature by focusing on the type of organizer used.

The type of organizer is important when looking at how the organization creates a

collective identity amongst its membership. The conceptual framework above provides

some foundation in how I will analyze CJJC and helps to bring concepts that I will use to

identify common themes from my data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Data Collection

I collected my data from participant observations, participation in CJJC meetings and actions, staff interviews, and while doing some literature analysis on materials produced by CJJC. Most of my participant observations and active participation in CJJC activities began when I was a part-time employee. I was employed as the Volunteer Coordinator from June 2011 to December 2011. It was not until halfway into my tenure of this position that I approached CJJC and requested to use them as a case study for my research. As the volunteer coordinator, I had become very knowledgeable of the organization's mission and goals. While conducting training sessions for new volunteers to convey the mission, vision, and outstanding needs of the organization, I began to see a clear difference in the population that became volunteers at CJJC versus the membership. The volunteer base reflected the growing population in Oakland. They tended to be the "gentrifiers"; however, they were very conscious, and had the will to want to do something that ensured access to housing in the Bay Area. The membership was representative of low-income people of color. Because I recognized the difference between the volunteer and member populations, it greatly increased my interest in how the organization was engaging the members.

Oct. 2011 began my formal research data collection at CJJC. This was around the time when CJJC began to participate in the Occupy Movement. I started to notice what population the Occupy Movement attracted and how different populations were engaged. I took a great interest in how the organizations were involving its membership in the spontaneous movement. I started to focus my participant observations on how CJJC was mobilizing and recruiting members. I also started to look specifically at how the

organization participated in the Occupy Movement. I made sure to be available for all staff meetings. During staff meetings, I was exposed to the planning and coordinating that the organization was doing. I also made sure to attend all political education sessions while employed there. All of my observational notes and literature collection occurred as a part-time employee which ended in Dec. 2011. I spent about 20 hours a week in my position. Observational notes were taken during staff meetings and political education sessions.

I also observed and participated in several demonstrations that CJJC helped to organize in support of the Occupy Movements. During the protest, I played the role of chant leader. In this role, I had the opportunity to act as the initiator of motivational chants in order to effectively communicate the people's message as the protest moved along. These demonstrations were approximately 4-6 hours long. Following the protest, I would write down the events of the day as I recalled them.

I have done some literature analysis of the material that had been produced. I collected most of the literature that CJJC had put out during my research experience. I looked for common themes and concepts that came out of the literature. I also collected historical documents that the organization produced discussing its ideological framework. These documents include Op-Ed articles and membership newsletters. I will highlight the trends in my findings section as it pertains to my research question. The large part of my data however comes from the formal interviews that I conducted with the staff. I conducted ten recorded, 60-minute interviews with select staff members. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed the interviews. I analyzed the interviews in the same fashion of the literature, in which I looked for common trends. These trends were focused on how the staff became politicized as well as some commonalties from that experience. The interview

questions started with demographic information. I then posed questions about how they became politically engaged. The last set of questions was about their particular role, and the part that they played during the Occupy Movement. I followed this style of questioning because I believed it would give me a good overview of how the staff became politicized.

Introduction to Causa Justa :: Just Cause

Causa Justa :: Just Cause (CJJC) is a SCO that works toward building community leadership in low-income communities of color in the San Francisco Bay Area (Causa Justa :: Just Cause). CJJC organizes on a local, national and international scale for housing and immigrant rights with a staff size of 23. Working in gentrified communities in Oakland and San Francisco, CJJC works predominately to organize low-income residents of color. Housing is a big concern for low-income residents living in urban centers such as Oakland and San Francisco because of the ever increasing housing prices. CJJC also adopted a foreclosure prevention-counseling program in 2009 to address these issues (Causa Justa Just Cause). The housing crisis was one of the main reasons for the economic downturn in the US, and it is what sparked the Occupy Movement. Organizations like CJJC have historically been working with residents to engage in political topics that were the same as issues being brought out by the Occupy Movement.

CJJC has roots in organizing for the Just Cause law in Oakland. During the late 1990s, organizers worked to get a Just Cause Eviction law implemented in Oakland. At that time, Oakland had not had a policy on renting evictions. In 2002, the Just Cause law was passed and it created clauses for when a renter could be evicted. Just Cause Oakland (JCO) was born out of that movement (and other organizing efforts such as community and police relations). As the organization got larger, its leaders made a decision to merge with

St. Peter's Housing Committee. At the time, JCO was just working predominately with the

African-American community in Oakland and organizing around tenant's rights. St. Peter's

was working in the Mission District in San Francisco with predominately Latino

communities and doing tenant counseling. These two organizations came together

creating *Causa Justa :: Just Cause.* It was important for CJJC to be a hybrid organization

providing direct service and organizing. The historical influence of social movements

played a part in how CJJC structured its organization.

Oakland, CA has a prominent history in social movements. One movement that has

had a lot of influence on CJJC organizing model is the Black Panther movement. CJJC uses a

"Serve the People" model in their organization (CJJC n.d.) which was adopted from the

Black Panther Party[3]. This model helps to differentiate CJJC from other nonprofits because

they use direct service as a tool to organize the community. They work towards resolving

the immediate crisis of low-income people of color. The goal is to have each member

understand that their individual crisis is a part of a larger system of injustices. CJJC works

toward organizing versus just providing a short-term relief for problems faced by

disadvantaged communities (CJJC n.d.). Outside of building local support for their issues,

CJJC is also actively involved in national and international movement building. During my

research, CJJC was involved in six national/international alliances, including the US World

Social Forum, "Rights to the City" campaign, and the Occupy Movement.

I chose CJJC as my case study because as an employee, I had the opportunity to see

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[3] The Black Panther Party (BPP) was created in 1966 in Oakland, CA for the purpose of organizing African-American communities and using a "self defense" approach to protect the community against the injustices down by the government. The BPP used self defense tactics as a means to protect the low-income African-American community and promoted unity in the community (A Huey P. Newton Story: Formation).

inside the organization. I was originally attracted to CJJC because of the political

organizing work surrounding the Oscar Grant Trial[4]. CJJC has done a good job with making

themselves a household name in the field of social justice in the Bay Area. The

organization functions to provide a service; however, they are focused on movement

building. Movement building is "the long-term, coordinated effort of individuals and

organized groups of people to intentionally spark and sustain a social movement (What is

Movement Building?)." I considered this organization to be a good match in regards to

what I am seeking to understand based on my research questions. The research questions

for my case study are; how do grassroots organizations empower and develop

marginalized communities to become politically engaged? And, what challenges and

opportunities do they face in this work?

Chapter 4: Findings

From the data collection and analysis, I have determined that the main themes found in

the data can be categorized into two overarching topics:

1. The organizational structure of SCO provides resources to implement community

    organizing strategies in marginalized communities, one of the resources being the

    organization and its infrastructure. This provides space and location for

    marginalized communities to engage. Another resource is the use of education

    sessions (e.g., membership meetings, political education sessions, etc.). These

    resources help to educate and develop leadership within the membership.

2. The "Serve the People" organizing model and type of organizer are key in how SCOs

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[4] Oscar Grant trial was in 2011 about a young African-American male who was fatally shot by a BART police officer while handcuffed at the Fruitvale Bart Station platform. The incident caused many political disruptions around the city of Oakland.

empower marginalized communities. The organizing model used is called "Serve

the People" and it provides a direct service while also recruiting members into the

organization. The type of organizers that are used can be placed into one of three

categories based on how they were politicized (family influence, higher education,

and/or direct contact with an organizer.)

In the organizational structure section, I show how the structure of the organization

helps to provide staff with the resources to implement community organizing strategies for

marginalized communities. I present my findings based on the data that was collected.

First, I will discuss the merger of Just Cause Oakland and St. Peter's Housing Committee.

The merger of two organizations helps to build the capacity of the organization to better

serve the population by bringing together resources, staff, and organizing strategies. The

next section discusses the importance of infrastructure. Infrastructure is important

because it provides a physical space for the community to come together. Then, I will

discuss the community meetings and political education sessions. These gatherings are a

particularly important technique that CJJC uses to educate the community and inform them

of opportunities to become engaged. I will present some of the challenges that CJJC face in

its organizational structure.

The next findings section discusses the organizing model and the type of paid

organizer used on staff. I will explain the kind of organizing model that CJJC uses and how it

is effective in its organizing tactics. I will also highlight some of the challenges that the

organizing model, "Serve the People" is faced with. The organizing model has had some

challenges in the development of its membership. There was little evidence to show that

the model transformed its members into leaders in the organization. I measured this by

how many paid organizers were first members of the organization. I believe this to be important because it shows that the leadership in the organization is directly from the community being served. Having leadership from the community can be useful in recruiting other members in the organizations because the community will draw on their social networks.

Finding #1: Organizational Structure gives Foundation to Implement Community Organizing Strategies

      Merger of two organizations. One way that SCOs work to empower marginalized communities is to increase the capacity of the organization and its ability to influence a larger membership base. A way to increase the organization's capacity can be to collaborate with other organizations. When collaboration with another organization occurs, it engages both of the organization's membership. It also acknowledges both organizations' strengths as important to the work. CJJC is an example of how this collaboration was important for the work that they were working on. They believed a merger of two organizations, Just Cause Oakland and St. Peter's Housing committee, would help to increase how they had been serving both of the memberships. Both organizations had been working in their respective communities, Oakland and San Francisco. They were doing similar work focused on tenant and housing rights. Both organizations had organizing histories focused on housing injustices. However, the organizations had different target populations. Just Cause Oakland worked primarily with African-American low-income communities in Oakland and St. Peter's housing worked with Latino population in San Francisco. Although working with different populations, the organizations have run very similar campaigns over the years.

Each of the organizations had a different organizing model. Just Cause Oakland focused primarily on recruiting neighbors to organize on tenant rights, and did not provide a direct service to the community. St. Peter's housing committee started with organizing on tenant rights, but then adopted a hybrid organization model and starting housing counseling services for its membership. However, both of the organizations have a foundation in tenant housing rights.

St. Peter's Housing Committee, the older of the two, was created in 1984 from the St. Peter's Church parishioners who wanted to advocate on behalf of rent control laws in San Francisco and housing conditions. In the early 1990s, Just Cause Oakland and St. Peter's Housing Committee membership was experiencing a change in rent prices and landlord treatment due to the Dot.Com Boom (Kloc, 2014). The Dot.Com Boom was the flood of business professionals, middle and upper income families, to San Francisco and the East Bay because of the surge of technology jobs in Silicon Valley. These families chose these areas to live because of the low housing cost versus neighborhoods where they worked (Kloc, 2014). St. Peter's and Just Cause Oakland begin to have a membership that was negatively affected by the new population. Landlords were using different tactics to try and push out the current residents in order to cater to the new populations who could afford to pay more. Just Cause Oakland worked with community members in Oakland who were mostly affected by the pinch of the "dot.commers" and organized to create a "Just Cause Eviction Clause" in Oakland (Partnership for Immigrant Leadership Action, 2009). St. Peter's Housing Committee organized "whistleblower" campaigns in which they publically protested in front of offices of slumlords in order to shame them. In 2002, Just Cause Oakland was successful in organizing neighbors and pushing the city of Oakland to

pass the "Just Cause Eviction Clause" (Lo, 2009). St. Peter's Housing Committee set up office

space for their tenants to become educated on their housing rights. The goal was to

empower the residents to own their agency (Partnership for Immigrant Leadership Action,

2009). The counselors role was to "educate, encourage, and provide guidance"; but let the

client create the best resolution to their issues. This approach is what attracted Just Cause

Oakland to St. Peter's Housing Committee because it added an element of direct service to

their organizing model.

Both Just Cause Oakland and St. Peter's housing committee had worked over the

years on very similar campaigns. The organizations had come together on several different

organizing efforts and each membership had participated in actions together. They both

belonged to the "Right to the City" alliance[5]. The two organizations begin having

discussions among the organization leadership and its membership about the potential

merge (Partnership for Immigrant Leadership Action, 2009). Leaders of both

organizations met consistently for about year to discuss the commonalities of the

organizations, housing rights, and immigrant rights. The leaders identified that they

shared some of the same population and also shared the same issues. During the

discussions, they focused primarily on the larger mission, which is to build and contribute

to the larger movement. This was the primary decision to bring both of the organizations

together. Both organizations, including leaders and members, had the idea that

consolidating and creating one organization would be a greater contribution to the

national/international movement (Partnership for Immigrant Leadership Action, 2009).

They believed that combining the resources would help serve more people and build a

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[5] "Right to the City" is a national alliance that was started in 2007 as a response to gentrification and the displacement of marginalized communities in urban areas (Mission & History).

larger membership base (Lo, 2009). In 2009, the two organizations merged and created

Causa Justa :: Just Cause (Partnership for Immigrant Leadership Action, 2009). The name of

the organization reflects the diversity of the membership. "*Causa Justa*" is "Just Cause" in

Spanish shows the importance of acknowledging the connection between Black and Brown

membership bases. It also shows the organizations commitment to providing services in

both English and Spanish[6]. The merger created a larger organization that served more

residents in the Bay Area. Prior to the merger, each organization had about 500 members

(Partnership for Immigrant Leadership Action, 2009). Now the organization has over

2,100 members and is represented in San Francisco's Mission district, West Oakland, and

East Oakland. The two organizations also joined financial resources. CJJC currently has a

budget of $1.9 million (Causa Justa :: Just Cause, 2011). One of the largest benefits that CJJC

explains of the mergers is the "hybrid organization model" as they describe as "building a

stronger organizing model" because they provide a direct service to the community and

organize them on larger systemic issues (Causa Justa :: Just Cause).

The organization also believes that this is a model that should be adopted across all

others grassroots organizations. Three leaders in the organizations discussed the

importance of cross collaboration of organizations in the interviews that were conducted.

One of the organizers mentions "I think the strengths, capacity, power of this organization

is the relationships between this organization and other organizations that do similar

work, so we are in relationships and coalitions with other organizations." Because the

organization is "movement building" it believes building up current organizations to

support each other is more effective than creating new organizations duplicating and

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[6] CJJC also provides all written materials from the organization in English and Spanish. Meetings hosted for the membership is also translated.

competing with the same work.

Although the merger helps to create a larger organization to help better serve the community, it also brought some challenges. The primary challenge that the new organization faced was how to successfully unite the African-American and Latino populations. During my research, I watched as the leaders in the organizations worked to unite both of the communities. This happened primarily during the membership meetings, protests and demonstrations. In addition to the housing rights work that CJJC worked on, they also had a staff member designated to Immigrants Rights campaigns. I observed the staff member work very successfully with pulling in the Latino population for those actions; however, there was not much success with recruiting the African-American members to those activities. I believe that this was related to the organization attempt to effectively translate the issues of immigration and make it relevant to the African-American community. Although African-American and Latino communities have very similar issues that they face, both communities have had some traditional separation in their concerns. CJJC has worked to address these challenges, but they continue to work to find ways to build unity between both of the populations. They do this by ensuring that they address issues that affect both of the communities clearly, such as economic justice.

Infrastructure. SCOs provide a physical space for low-income people of color to become politically engaged (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007). The physical infrastructure of the organization provides a place where people can gather to plan and coordinate ideas. It provides a common ground for people to come together, and helps to promote social interaction. It also provides space where ideas can be exchanged and challenged. More so, the organization and how it is organized provides opportunities for these ideas to be

developed. To make the organization accessible to community members, CJJC has office

space in three neighborhoods; San Francisco, East Oakland, and West Oakland. These three

offices cover the neighborhoods in which CJJC provides member support. While conducting

my research, CJJC had opened the additional office in East Oakland. Although, this office did

not provide all of the organizing work that was done at the other two offices, it did have

counseling services. The idea was to have services that CJJC provides in neighborhoods in

which the membership lives, so as to make the services accessible. In order for the

infrastructure to be of use by the community, accessibility is of paramount importance.

Through observation, I witnessed their office locations identified by staff as "community

space" in which they allow the community to come in freely. In the back of the West

Oakland office was another nonprofit organization, a community based food garden. While

I was present conducting research, I witnessed community members coming into the office

and having conversations with staff members that did not pertain to the office work.

 However, CJJC staff did not remove community members, but would engage them. Because

CJJC does work for the community, they treated their infrastructure as if it was owned by

the community. They also saw these moments of random interactions as an opportunity to

engage with the membership base and potentially recruit for the organization. On one

occasion during my shift, I witnessed a gentleman come into the office that appeared to

have mental illness. The guy walked into the office almost 3 times a week and would just

speak out loud but not to anyone in particular. On this occasion, one of the staff members

greeted him and asked if he wanted any help. The gentlemen did not respond in a coherent

manner and started to just rumble on. The staff member picked up one of the current

Causa Justa newsletter and handed it to the man and said, "Here is our latest newsletter,

please take a look at it and let us know what you think." This interaction shows that CJJC

wants the community to feel as if they belong in the space that is being provided to them.

 The infrastructure as community space does give a since of ownership for

community members, but can also raise some safety concerns to the members and staff.

During the time I was conducting my research, I witnessed a couple of incidents in which

the community space became threatened because of the "community space" idea. I

watched one incident where the gentlemen from the example above came into the office

space and began yelling obscenities. I watched as one of the clients who was receiving

counseling services pulled her young child closer to her as the man continued to yell out.

Eventually, one of the staff asked the gentleman to leave for the day. Also, during my time

there, I had property stolen from the bike storage room. It is important that the community

has ownership of the space, but it is something that CJJC has to balance in regards to how

they are allowing the community to use the space.

 Community meetings, political education sessions, and universidad. SCOs help

to empower and develop the political consciousness of low-income people through

membership meetings and political education sessions. The membership meetings and

political education sessions are used to bring members into the organization, come

together and share the organization infrastructure collectively. The membership meetings

happen on a monthly basis. The political education sessions are used to engage members

into deeper topics. These are typically held once every quarter. The next level to the

political education sessions is the "Universidad." The "Universidad" (which translate to

university in English) serves as an extended political education session. They run over a 2

to 3 day period and are usually for the most active members. It is use as a tool for

education and also training in the organizing model that CJJC uses. All three of these education tools are ways to help the membership become empowered to get more politically involved.

Membership meetings at CJJC are used to have all members come and engage with the organization. The purpose of the membership meetings is to hold the organization accountable to its membership (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007). They want to update the members on what the organization is doing by giving a lot of details about the current campaigns, and the successes and challenges that they face in the work. During my research, I attended several membership meetings. The membership meetings are usually well attended with at least 20-25 members. The meetings are very family friendly, which means that children are also present. CJJC ensures that members have transportation and childcare for the meetings by recruiting volunteers for those roles. The membership meetings usually start with an update on the current campaigns. They also have a particular political topic that is used to educate and engage community members. The meetings are primarily facilitated by staff; however members have many opportunities to engage in dialogue. Members tend to enjoy the meeting space and like to participate very actively in discussion. For accessibility purposes, CJJC hosts the membership meetings at their West Oakland and San Francisco locations. Once a quarter, they have joint membership meetings. This is to make sure that the members in San Francisco and Oakland are interacting with one another. The structure of the membership meetings and how they get members is important to their "Serve the People" organizing approach (which will be explained in detail within the next findings topic). Members are sent mailings with the upcoming membership meetings on the calendar. There is also phonebanking that

occurs and an email blast. CJJC uses multiple avenues for communication in order to make sure that the membership is aware of the meetings. CJJC also wants to make sure that the membership does not have road-blocks that could be preventing them from attending the meetings. One of the main resources that CJJC provides during these meetings are translation services. These services are for their Spanish speaking population. This helps to alleviate language barriers. The organization also offers rides to get to the membership meetings. CJJC has identified transportation as being a road-block for the population that they serve. At the meetings, CJJC offers food and childcare. These types of services help to make the membership meetings more inviting for the population.   It helps to address some of the factors that may prevent the community from engaging in these activities.

One way that SCOs help to empower and engage marginalized groups is through the political education sessions. SCOs use the political education sessions as a tool to educate the community on the current climate of politics. In this particular case, they used the political education sessions to speak directly to the economic system in the United States. It is used to educate the community on what the capitalist system is and how low-income people of color benefit the least from this economic structure.   During the time that I was conducting my research, CJJC hosted one political education session. This political education session was focused on movement building. CJJC hosted the movement building session in Nov. 2010, following the Occupy encampment in Oakland and San Francisco. The executive director had expressed to the staff that "it was important that our membership understand what is happening at this time, and the political climate, and how we can use this spontaneous movement to help elevate our concerns (Political Education Session-Movement Buiding, 2011)." The political education session was complete with about forty

31

people. However, only about ten were actual members of the organization. The rest of the

people were staff, allies and volunteers. This was a challenge that I realized about the

political education sessions. CJJC struggled to get more of the membership base to

participate.

During the political education session, it started with a review of movement building

terminology. The facilitator turned this into an activity for the group and started with

blank definitions. They wanted to give the participants opportunities to define and also

acknowledge the present knowledge on movement building in the room. The facilitator

called on people for responses to questions such as "What is a movement?" After this initial

activity, the facilitator then reviewed other words that are associated with movements.

After each of the definitions was read aloud, the facilitator then performed a check for

understanding. These checks for understanding were to make sure that the audience

understood the points being made. The facilitator also checked with the audience to see if

they were in agreement with the points being made. This was also a time in which CJJC

used their "Serve the People" approach. They want to ensure members an opportunity to

contribute to the definitions themselves. The political education sessions also have a lot of

hands on activities. This helps with moving the time along accordingly and also getting the

members actively involved. These political education sessions are a way to empower

because it helps to bring out what current knowledge the members have and also expands

on their knowledge. During one of the political education sessions, I watched as a member

showed the staff clear admiration for being able to engage in the topic of movement

building. At the end of the session, the member raised their hand to say, "I just want to say

thank you to CJJC for hosting this because I never get to talk about these things, you know

you just kind of live life and I am not in school, so no one around me really talks like this, I

just want to say thank you because it has me thinking a lot." It leaves the membership

more quipped with tools to help situate their issues in the current political climate.

The Universidad are longer political education sessions for the most active

members. These are also tools that are used to help to expand the knowledge in the

membership. It is a time that the organization goes into deeper about the current

campaigns, their goals, and the key activities that fall in line with them. Unfortunately,

during my research, I did not have an opportunity to observe any of the Universidad series.

Finding #2: "Serve the People" Organizing Model and Type of Organizer are Essential

Elements

Organizing model. SCOs help to empower and politically engage marginalized

communities through organizing. Organizing is an approach used to outreach and engage

the community in the organization (Bettencourt, 1996). Organizing has several different

models. These models are used as ways to capture the attention of the community. Some

models incorporate the use of anger and frustration that a community may have with an

issue as a way to encourage them to work collectively to resolve whatever the concern is

(De Vita & Fleming, 2001). The model that CJJC uses was adopted from the Black Panther

Movement. The Black Panther Party was a significant social movement in Oakland, CA.

They worked in a lot of facets to help support and organize the Black community (it is

important to note here that CJJC chose a model that is historic to the area in which they

currently serve). During one of the political education sessions, CJJC provided its

membership with information on the background of the Black Panther Movement and the

importance of their organizing model. In this literature, it discusses how the model was

used to engage the community.

CJJC refers to this model as the "Serve the People" model. CJJC staff explains to its membership that the history of the "Serve the People" model was to address the basic immediate needs of the Black community.   Here in Oakland, the Black Panther Party set up several different programs to address some of the systematic oppressions that these communities were facing. The Black Panther Party established food distribution programs, clothing drives, free health clinics, etc (Community Survival Programs, 2002). The concept behind this model is that in order to get the community actively engaged in the issues, it is important that they are in overall good health and possess the means to become completely engaged. CJJC explains this model as "taking concrete actions to deal with oppressions as a means to reach self-determination (Serve the People vs Service the People, 2010)." Working within this framework, CJJC is knowledgeable of the systematic oppressions concerning the community the serve. The immediate issue that has taken decades for many SCOs to address is housing. Housing being one of the most foundational needs in the society, CJJC addresses this concern through their Tenant's Rights Clinic. In the Tenants' Rights Clinic, CJJC uses organizers/counselors to assist clients with a variety of housing issues. Primarily, the organizers/counselors are dealing with unfair treatment from their landlord.   The organizers/counselors use the "Serve the People" model in order to assist the clients with their issues. CJJC Tenant's Rights Clinic "Serve the People" document goes into great detail about how this model is used. It shows a comparison of this model to compare other nonprofit organizations and how some of them function.

Here is the table below:

Serve the People	vs.	Service the People
Rights Based ● Identify, defend and expand people rights	vs.	Charity ● Organizations have the power & resources to help people ● Help in the form of a "hand-out"
Strengths-based & Capacity-building ● Build on strengths and knowledge people already have ● Support people in making their own decisions ● Winning the case is not the only goal	vs.	Paternalistic ● Skilled professionals know how to resolve the problem ● People don't know how and/or don't have the skills to solve their own problems ● Winning is the goal
Vision-based: Long Term Change ● Tie people's issues to the bigger picture & build collective consciousness ● Legal system exists to serve capitalism ● Legal system can be used for our goals but is not the answer	vs.	Reform only: Short Term Change ● No political analysis ● Focus on problem as particular to an individual situation ● No relation to other people in the community facing the issue
Organization building ● Tie people's issues to the bigger picture & build collective consciousness ● Clarifying our role and their role ● Supporting tenants in taking responsibility & leadership in their case ● Use grants & contracts to meet our organizations goals, not to set them for us	vs.	Bureaucratic ● Resolve issues on a case by case basis ● Organization takes on the role as the solution-solver ● Funding drives the goals of the organization; interested in meeting certain quantity to satisfy funding requirements

(Document produced by CJJC, and given out during a political education session Oct. 2010)

The table above shows the different elements in how CJJC is using the "Serve the People" model to engage marginalized communities. It also shows a comparison of their approach with other and somewhat similar organizations. In the above table, it makes the assumption that this is the better model to use when working to empower and develop the political engagement of marginalized communities. During an observation of a counseling

session, I was able to witness each of the buckets and how the organizer/counselor used the model to work with the client.

Once the client sat down with the organizer/counselor, they were greeted and started with brief introductions. The organizer/counselor is the client's first contact with the CJJC and the work that they do. Typically, the client's intention is to receive help and support with a particular problem. In this session, the client had a landlord that was nonresponsive regarding some of their complaints. The client was quite frustrated and did not know what to do. The client expressed to the organizer/counselor that she had just looked into her options and decided to come to CJJC to get help. She explained to the counselor that maybe she could have CJJC write the landlord a letter, with a "threatening tone" that would result in the landlord resolving the problem. The counselor took an active listening approach and let the client get all the information out. Once it was the counselor's turn to speak, she began to explain how CJJC worked and gave her the full picture of how she could help. The counselor started with detailing how the organization functions and in what ways they could assist.   She started with handing the tenant a copy of the "Know Your Rights" booklet. The "Know Your Rights" booklet is a part of the membership training and falls under the "rights-based" descriptor in the "Serve the People" model. It is important to CJJC that they educate the clients on their rights as an initial first step.

After the organizer/counselor conducted the "Know Your Rights" training with the client, the organizer/counselor then gave the client a few options of how the counselor could assist her. However, in all of the options, it removed the counselor as the person to resolve the issue. The counselor explained to the client that the power to change her circumstances was within herself. The counselor explained that if she wanted a letter to be

sent, that she could assist her with writing the letter, but the letter would ultimately come from the client. This step falls under the "strengths-based & capacity building" descriptor of the "Serve the People" model. Here, the counselor worked with the client to acknowledge her inherit ability, and encouraged her to make her own decision about how to resolve her issue. After that conversation, the client was a bit taken back by that approach (as shown in her disgruntled-like facial expression). So the organizer/counselor had to discuss more about why it was important for her to act on her own behalf. She also explained very clearly that the organizer/counselor did not have any real power to make the landlord respond because she was not a part of any overseeing agency. She explained to the client that she had the power because she paid the landlord wages via rent. After that explanation, the client agreed to produce the letter with the support of the organizer/counselor.

Once that step was completed, the organizer/counselor started to discuss more about the organization and the goals. She went into detail about the current campaigns they were working on. She related the client's issue directly to what other people in the community had been facing. She explained to the client that it was important to understand the issue that the client was facing in context of the larger systematic issues that many people similar to her were faced with. This part of the conversation between the client and the organizer/counselor falls under the "vision-based" descriptor. CJJC feels that it is very important that the client understands that they are a part of a larger system of oppression. It is also important that they express how they are working to build campaigns to help to combat some of the issues that are occurring.

The final part of the conversation was the counselor sharing the information about

membership meetings that the client was invited to attend. She handed her some information about the upcoming membership meetings, and also information about the upcoming political education session. She invited the client to become a member of the organization and shares the membership fees. She explained that the membership fees act as an initial step of donating to grassroots fundraising efforts, and that the funds are used to support the work of the organization, and allow them to assist more clients. The client sat and listened. The client then spoke up, saying that she was willing to donate to the organization because she believed in the work being done; however, she could not commit at the time to become a member. The organizer/counselor thanked the client for the donation and strongly encouraged that the client came out to a membership meeting. This part of the conversation falls under the "organization building" descriptor in the "Serve the People" approach. Clearly, the organizer/counselor wants to show that it is important that the organization grows its membership in order to be successful in the campaign work.

This initial intake is the first step in the CJJC "path of a member." This intake process is how the organization introduces the member to the organizer. It is the first step of recruiting a member, which leads to the goal of developing an active member into being a leader in the organization. The story above is just one example of the "Serve the People" model.

Type of paid organizer. SCO engages marginalized communities through the use of paid organizers. The role of the organizer/counselors at CJJC is a key component in the organizing strategy. The role of the organizer at CJJC is to engage and recruit members from the community to be a part of the organization. One of the tactics used in the organization is to "increase the membership base (*Causa Justa :: Just Cause*)." The

organizers at CJJC are the face of the organization because they are typically the first

contact that members have with the organization. Because the organizer is the first

contact, CJJC has been very strategic about what kind of organizers they have on staff.

During my research, I found that there are certain types of organizers that are employed by

CJJC. These types of organizer can primarily be categorized into topics based on how the

staff themselves became politicized. This politicalization experience of the staff is

important to how they use their acquired skills to recruit members. I believe that these

types of organizers have a significant role in the successes and challenges that CJJC has in

recruiting members and sustaining the political climate of the organization.   Of the ten

organizers that were interviewed, seven of the organizers fit within the profile of having

political background dating back to family and higher education. Typically these organizers

have some formal training, and or extensive experience with engaging people in political

action. These experiences contribute to the skill level of the organizer. It allows them to

draw on different methods and strategies from their past to proactively contribute to the

mission of the organization. The other three organizers are examples of success from the

use of the "Serve the People" organizing model. These three organizers of CJJC started off as

members of CJJC. They had been working with CJJC in different capacities in order to get

their issues addressed. After working on their issues, the members eventually developed to

be hired as paid organizers.

Here is background information on the staff members that were interviewed. For

the sake of anonymity, I have changed the names and withheld the job title of all

participants. I will refer to all participants as organizers. Below is a table displaying

participants along with how they self-identify based on demographic categories:

Name	Age Range	Ethnicity	Gender
Lee	28-30	Black	Male
Marie	24-26	Black	Female
Ana	36-38	Latino	Female
Robin	26-28	White	Female
Brian	38-40	White	Male
Paula	22-24	Black	Female
Mai	28-30	Chinese	Female
Gloria	44-46	Black	Female
Debra	48-50	Black	Female
Jackie	48-50	Black	Female

Below I will discuss the similar trends in the politicalization of the staff profiles. Here are

the two types of profiles discovered based on the interviews that were conducted:

a. Staff who became politicized and developed as organizers through familial ties,

higher education, and/or training.

b. Staff who had initial contact with an organizer via personal issues and was recruited

through the organization.

Staff who became politicized and developed as organizers through familial ties,

higher education, and/or training. From the ten organizers that were interviewed, I

would categorize seven of the organizers as having this type of politicalization. These

organizers where introduced to political engagement through family exposure or early

experiences which lead to an early acknowledgement of systematic inequalities. For the

reasons above, it led each of the organizers to seek more opportunities to become engaged.

40

Most of them became more engaged through institutions of higher education and others

reached out directly to an organization that was doing work on political issues that they

related to most. This type of organizer has a firm foundation in political involvement and

tends to not only be involved in CJJC as a paid organizer, but also involved in other political

work outside of the organization. This is important because it shows the level of

commitment that the organizer has in political engagement and it gives them a solid

foundation regarding mobilizing individuals into political action.

A few of the organizers shared the fact that they had early exposure to political

engagement through their family . In two of the cases, the organizers family was directly

responsible for showing the organizers, as children, the injustices in the world. Either

directly or indirectly, these experiences helped to shape the organizers' political

engagement. One of the staff members, Lee discusses how their family participated in the

Garveyites[7] and Black Panther Movement. Both of these social movements concerned

African-Americans and addressed the systems of inequalities that plague the community.

This socialization helped to exposed Lee to systematic issues. It shaped Lee's world view as

he explains "the struggle that we were born into because the way the system was

structured. So I was raised to fight the system". Lee was brought up to see how he was

situated within the system and understood that it would take a "fight" in order to break

down the injustices that he faced in his community. Another one of the staff, Marie, talks

about growing up in the military. Although very different from Lee's upbringing, there are

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[7] The Garveyites were followers of the famed Marcus Garvey who organized a movement in 1916 to recruit free slaves to move back to Africa in order to gain complete independence from the Europeans. This movement continued on for decades, resulting in (number) of freed slaves traveling back to Africa.

similarities in how both of these staff members were exposed to systematic inequalities at a very early age. Marie talks about traveling around as a military brat. She describes seeing her dad work as a dentist. This encouraged her interest in assisting and helping others. She watched how the military personnel would travel the world and assist others that were living differently. Although she explained the structure of the military as a top/down approach to helping people less fortunate, she clarifies that the traveling "brought [her] attention to injustice in the world, and [she] just kind of like got really sensitive. [She] gets really moved by people struggle and people's pain." Because Marie was able to question the structure of the system by examining those who have and those who do not; it led her to become more involved once she got to college. Marie and Lee had an early exposure to being engaged with helping the community and it prompted their further exploration and involvement in political engagement.

Two other organizers became aware through personal circumstances that exposed them to injustices early on. Seeing and being affected by systematic injustices helped these organizers become more aware and sparked their interest in becoming a part of the change. Both of the organizers acknowledge the disadvantages that marginalized groups faced primarily because of their socioeconomic status. Ana talks about growing up in South America. She discusses the militarization of her home country and how her family discussed the political climate at the time with her. She explains that "[she] grew up with a great sense of injustice around [her]." She talks about her perception of the United States and the reality of East LA once she moved there. She acknowledges early on what privileges were not available to her Mexican side of her family. She explains:

I just saw that this country is filled with people of color and they don't have that

42

experience of privilege. And that awakened me. Because I thought I would come to

the US and it would be like Disneyland and it wasn't. And I developed a strong sense

that it was wrong and that I had a responsibility to make it better.

Another staff member, Robin, discusses how her socioeconomic status helped to raise

awareness of the political climate in which she was living. She talks about growing up in a

single parent home, and watching as her mom struggled to make ends meet. She

acknowledges that she recognized patriarchy at an early age, and began to question how it

would affect her as a female. This is what led her to a "self-discovery journey" as she

entered college. Robin and Ana personal circumstances raised awareness of the systems of

injustices they experienced while growing up, and promoted their need to become

involved.

These experiences affected how each of the organizers positions themselves in the

system. They started with a foundation to create a consciousness about the system of

inequalities which directly affected them, and they believed that they had power to do

something that would make a change. For most of the organizers, the next step in their

politicalization was higher education or a community based organization doing organizing

work. Higher education for a lot of young adults becomes a place where one can get

involved in many different issues. The university and college campuses have historically

been a place where students gathered and addressed many different issues (Scotch, 1989).

During the Vietnam War, it was on college campuses that many of the peaceful protests

were organized (Scotch, 1989, p. 386). The university setting allows and encourages

mobilization of the student population. As shown in my interviews, the higher education

setting became a place where six of the seven organizers became more involved in political

action.

Robin explains that for a young person, college is a great place for self-discovery. As she was trying to make sense of the patriarchal environment that she had grown up in, she used college as a place to explore that. She explains college as being a "privilege" in which she had education and resources at her disposal to explore feminist ideas, activism, etc. Robin says she "like every young person trying to make sense of the world was looking for tools to help [her] do that, and that's when [she] really got politicized and got a consciousness of what [she] had experienced before that." Robin explains that in college she was able to learn how to address the issues that she had experienced growing up. Three other organizers discussed how coping with the oppressive systems of the university is what helped to elevate their political involvement. Two of the three organizers discussed the role of fee hikes in the public higher education system as reasons to why they got involved in political organizing on their campuses. Two different organizers mentioned getting involved with political actions on college campuses that directly affected their identity.

Brian, Marie and Ana discuss the role of higher education in their politicalization experience. Brian discusses the climate of the public higher education school systems. He talks about the student movements that occurred on college campuses across the country. At the university he attended, there were a lot of students organizing about student fees and tuition increases. Brian decided to get involved in the student movements because he had been directly affected. After meeting other people who were involved in political action, he started to become more interested in being a part of the solution. Brian then began to question the nature of the capitalist society. Once Brian graduated from college,

he got his first job as a community organizer and "kind of fell in love with that kind of work." Marie, on the other hand, had her first experience with political action inside the classroom. She had taken a course that was led by another student who had experience with the labor movement. The course helped to educate Marie about political movements. Marie then decided to expand her interest and joined a student group called "Stand for Labor." The group worked to organize a living wage campaign with the dining hall workers. Through connecting with the labor movement on campus, Marie then became exposed to the immigrants' rights movement. Ana talks also about taking a class that excited her about political action work. Ana had taken a writing course at a university and the professor used the creative writing experiences as a way of discussing "social justice and revolutionary ideas." Engaging in this type of dialogue sparked interest in Ana and she wanted to seek out other opportunities to get involved. Having an early understanding of the injustices that people faced, Ana "wanted to do something useful in the community [...] [she] just knew [she] wanted some political change." Ana begin to collaborate with other people who had been working in political movements. She was then informed about an organization who was seeking a housing counselor that was bilingual. She believes this was a great opportunity for her to lend her skills to help others. Ana explains, "As someone with some privileges, a college education, having learned English in Latin America and speaking Spanish [in the US] [she] was like that there's something [she] can contribute, and that's how it started." Higher education played a significant role in how these organizers were introduced and developed their political engagement experiences.

Similar to higher education experiences is formal organizing training. Organizing training has been a way that the organizers have developed their skills and also exposed

them to political movements that eventually lead them to CJJC. Two of the organizers, Lee

and Paula, discuss their involvement with organizing training centers and the role it had in

their political engagement. Lee, who had an early exposure to political action from family

naturally decided to seek out more opportunities to get involved as he became of age. Lee

received formal education and training in organizing through a labor community strategy

center. From there, he graduated and joined the bus riders union in his hometown.   After

working with the labor movement for a while, Lee then came to CJJC because of the

similarities in "worldview, and their organizing strategies were something that [he] was

familiar with." Paula explains that she was first introduced to formal organizing while in

college. She was involved with an LGBTQ organization that helped to train her and also got

her involved in the LGBTQ movement for youth. She was also able to connect with youth

and help with their leadership development. These two organizers share the experience of

receiving formal training for their organizing background.

The profile of organizer described above helps to give an understanding of how the

organizers ended at CJJC. This type of organizer is the dominant profile that can be found

at CJJC. These organizers are useful in recruiting and engaging the membership because of

the wealth of knowledge and experience with organizing that they bring collectively to the

organization.

Staff who had initial contact with an organizer via personal issues and were

recruited through the organization.   From the ten organizers that were interviewed, I

have categorized three of the organizers that fit within this category. The three organizers

all share the fact that they became mostly politically engaged through the recruitment of

another trained organizer. One of the things that they all share in common is that they

mostly became politicized at a later part of their life. They are all Black females who are

over the age of 40.

Both Debra and Gloria had been having housing problems and that led them to seek

assistance through a community based organization. Debra had been homeless for a period

and went to an organization called BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self Sufficiency) in

order to get help with finding housing. Debra began to get involved with the programming

of BOSS. She started to receive their services and also became a part of their housing

program. The housing program was able to contribute to a portion of her rent which

helped to ease the financial costs for Debra. Because BOSS had served to meet her

immediate need, she then became more involved with the organizing. BOSS had just

started a community organizing team and Debra decided to intern with them. She says "I

wasn't politically inclined at all at the time, but as I was receiving services, I wanted to give

back to my community." She talks about how as an intern with BOSS, she was able to learn

organizing strategies that included research, letter writing, and rallies/protests. Gloria has

a very similar experience also. She had been living in public housing at the time when she

got a knock at her door. It was an organizer from CJJC that had been working with tenants

in her housing development. They were organizing residents to face the owners of the

public housing apartments in regards to the complex's issues. Gloria decided to sign up and

participate because she had also been experiencing some issues with her particular unit.

Gloria talks about going to apartment meetings with her neighbors. She says,

 So I decided to come out to the meeting and see what was going on. And that's

history, I continued to come back. I came back to the meetings, and I like the work

47

that they were doing. I had decided that change was not going to happen overnight,

and it made me feel real welcomed that my voice was worth hearing.

Gloria and Debra both had the experience of dealing with an immediate crisis with the SCO.

They talked about how this experience was what got them involved politically.

Jackie, who is demographically similar to Gloria and Debra talks about how the

organization helped to construct the political analysis that she had developed as a young

adult. Jackie discusses the tragic death of her brother at a young age. She talks about this

death as it relates to the drug war in inner city neighborhoods. She says that this event had

helped to promote her thinking about the system of oppression. She says that her interest

in political action work "is not a linear kind of thing. It took until [she] was way grown up

to find a political analysis that talks about racism, classism, and the system of oppression

that we are in and the tactic that they use."   Jackie then goes on and talks about her formal

and informal interactions with organizations and organizing groups as she got older.

Unlike those organizers who received introduction through training institutions and higher

education, Jackie was politicized through informal means. She addresses the fact that the

organizations provided her with the resources in order to become more engaged, and

eventually end up working with CJJC, because like Debra and Gloria, she had also dealt with

housing issues. Jackie also discusses facing foreclosure on her home and wanting to do

something to save her home. She reaches out to CJJC in order to get assistance and then she

joins the foreclosure prevention group. Jackie believed it was important to get involved

because she understood that it was not only her that had been dealing with foreclosure.

Jackie says "that the collective is much stronger than the individual."

The profile of the organizer above shows how successful SCOs like CJJC are in the leadership development of its membership based. Although CJJC has a large membership base, they have had some difficulty in developing the membership to reach the point of a paid organizer. Here I have identified one of the challenges that CJJC is faced with. Debra, Gloria and Jackie are success stories for CJJC. Their experience shows the evolution of a CJJC member into become a paid organizer. However, they are the only staff members in this study that share that experience. It shows that CJJC is engaging its members in political action, but has room for improvement in regards to the leadership development of its membership. If the goal of the organization is to build a movement, then it is important that the movement consists of leaders from the community. Although the organization may continue to be effective in its day to day operations, greater efforts are required to produce the larger movement that they seek to build.

Chapter 5: Discussion

CJJC is the case study that helped to address the role of grassroots organizations in empowering and engaging marginalized communities. The organizational structure provides the staff with the necessary tools to address challenges in engaging these communities. This research focused mainly on the organizational structure. The structure of the SCOs is important because it is the hub of the leadership, community gatherings and organizing model. The data showed some common themes that can be found in both of the findings presented in this research. The common themes are cross collaboration and the importance of political knowledge[8].

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[8] Political knowledge is typically used to understand how much the public knows about the current political state of affairs.

In the research, we see strong examples of how collaboration is beneficial. It was important for the two organizations to collaborate, and eventually merge. This helped to build the capacity of the organization, brought together resources, and built a greater membership. The merge of the two organizations also turned it into a "hybrid organization" model. This helped the organization to provide a direct service that could immediately benefit the community. The organization then adopted a "Serve the People" organizing model. This enhanced the organizing approach because of the addressing an immediate need component. These types of services give the community an instant "win" with the organization because it alleviates them on a personal issue. CJJC understands that movements can last a long time and that the "wins" can happen slowly. In order to "save face" in the community, it is important to provide something that the community can benefit from immediately. Collaboration helped CJJC create an organizing model that would directly affect the community. Collaboration is also seen in the use of the infrastructure. We had seen the collaboration happening with the physical space of the organization. It was mentioned in the findings that CJJC shared an office space with another nonprofit organization. This helps to conserve resources by reducing the operational costs shared by the two organizations.

The importance of collaboration was also discovered in the interviews that were conducted. Organizers talked about collaboration as a part of their politicalization experiences. It was important for them to collaborate with other like-minded people and organizations in order to get more exposed. They also talked a lot about the collaboration with different organizations. We heard of collaboration between labor and racial/ethnic

50

movements. This also is seen in cross-collaborations involving CJJC and other organizations during their political education sessions.

Another common theme that was found across the data was the importance of political education and knowledge. Political knowledge is very evident as a key strategy to empower the community. CJJC uses knowledge as a tool for empowerment. CJJC works from the belief that if the community is educated on their rights, and on systems of inequalities, then it will in turn get them to act on their behalf. We see education being transferred through the Tenants' Rights Housing clinic. While tenants are receiving assistance on their immediate crisis, the organizer/counselor provides them with a booklet titled "Know Your Rights." This is the first step in educating the community about the resources they have to resolve their issues.

Political education and knowledge is also shown in the use of membership meetings and political education sessions. CJJC provides these pretty regularly in order to make them accessible to its membership. CJJC has identified a need to provide a community space to advance the education on important topics related to the social justice work. Community members enhance their knowledge by attending these sessions. CJJC wants to ensure that community members have the same opportunities to get educated on important topics as their paid organizers had. We also have seen the importance of political education and knowledge amongst the paid organizers. The paid organizers that had some formal introduction to organizing, via higher education or training had a very deep analysis on the system of inequalities. These types of organizers made up the majority of the organizers that were interviewed.

Collaboration and political knowledge are common themes that were presented in the findings. These are important in addressing the research questions. It shows that collaboration and political knowledge are important elements when working towards political engagement of low-income communities of color.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

My case study, CJJC, helped to address the research question; however, there are some limitations to my research. One of the limitations is the lack of interviews with the membership base. During my research, I did not have the opportunity to work directly with members. I was unable to organize and schedule interviews. This hindered the data because it does not reflect information directly from the membership. Data from the members could have addressed how members understood their political engagement. Another limitation was the missed opportunity to collect data from the Occupy Movement. My initial interest was in how grassroots organizations politically engage marginalized communities, and how their efforts differed from social movements. Because CJJC became directly involved with the Occupy encampments during my research period, it would have been ideal to conduct a compare-and-contrast study. It would have been interesting to see what tools both of these avenues use to engage marginalized communities.

This research study is important to me because I seek to make a meaningful impact on my community. From a young age, I had a desire to help my community. At that age, I simplified my opportunities to the medical profession because I could easily connect that to helping others. As I have gotten older, I have learned that there are many ways that you can help improve the lives of others. I believe very strongly in providing people with the tools and resources that they need in order to help themselves. This research was

important for my personal and career journey. It helped me to examine the field of

community development as a practitioner, and work within an organization that directly

affects the lives of marginalized communities. It also challenged me academically.

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