

approach. Different organizing models, such as coalitions, lay health worker programs, political action groups, leadership development or grassroots organizing may incorporate needs- or strength-based approaches at different times, depending on the starting place and the ever changing social dynamic. It is important, however, that organizing efforts clarify their assumptions and make decisions about primary strategies based on skills of group members, history of the group, willingness to take risks, or comfort level with different approaches.⁵

No matter what community organizing/community building approach is used, they all incorporate some fundamental principles. These include “the principle of relevance, or starting where the people are; the principle of participation; and the importance of creating environments in which individuals and communities can become empowered as they increase their community problem-solving ability.”⁵

THE PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING/BUILDING

It is beyond the scope of this textbook to explain all the approaches to community organizing and building in detail. Instead, we will present a generic approach (see Figure 5.3) created by McKenzie, Neiger, and Thackeray that draws upon many of these other approaches.¹³ The 10 steps of this generic approach are briefly reviewed in the sections that follow.

Recognizing the Issue

The process of community organizing/building begins when someone recognizes that a problem exists in a community and decides to do something about it. This person (or persons) is referred to as the initial organizer. This individual may not be the primary organizer throughout the community organizing/building process. He or she is the one who gets things started. For the purposes of this discussion, let us assume the problem is violence. People in most communities would like to have a violence-free community, but it would be most unusual to live in a community that was without at least some level of violence. How much violence is too much? At what point is a community willing to organize to deal with the problem? In a small-town community, an acceptable level of violence would be very low, while in a large city, an acceptable level would be much higher.

The people, or organizers, who first recognize a problem in the community and decide to act can be members of the community or individuals from outside the community. If those who initiate community organization are members of the community, then the movement is

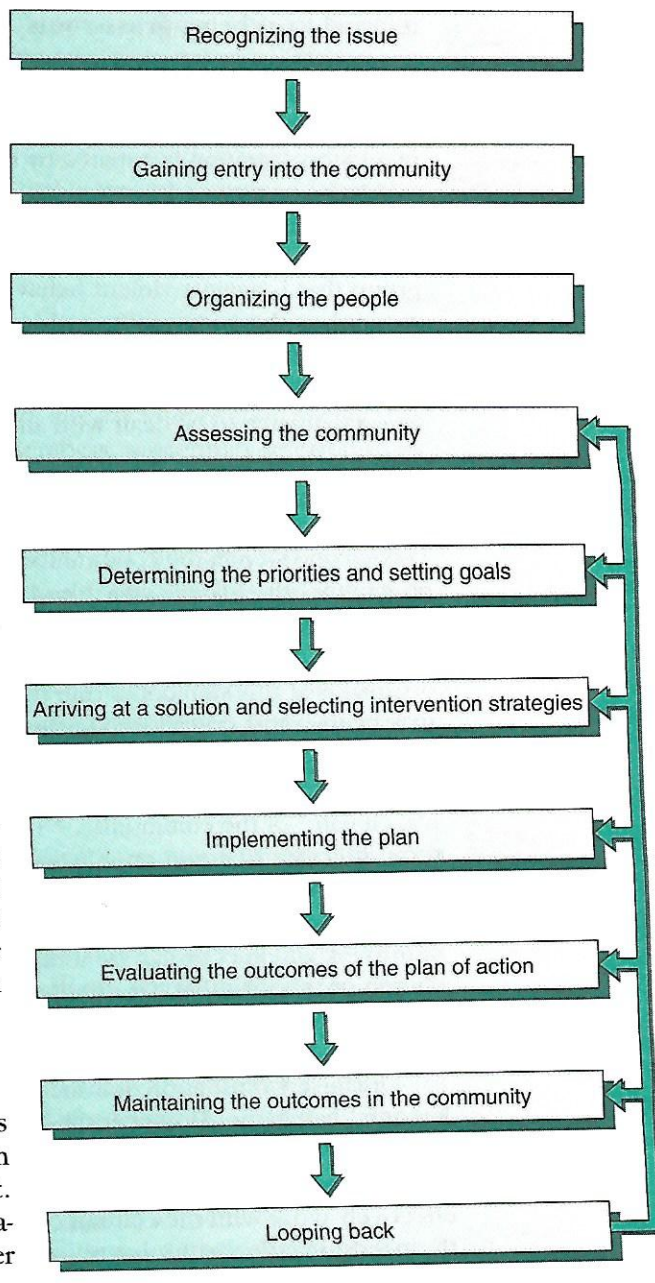


FIGURE 5.3

A summary of steps in community organizing and building.

Source: McKenzie, J. F., B. L. Neiger, and R. Thackeray (2009). *Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Health Promotion Programs: A Primer*, 5th ed. San Francisco, CA: Benjamin Cummings. Reprinted with permission from Pearson Education, Inc.