

referred to as being **grass-roots**, *grass-roots*, *grassroots organizing*, *grassroots organizing*, or organized from the *bottom up*. "In opened where none existed before."¹⁴ Community members who might recognize that violence is a problem could include teachers, police officers, or other concerned citizens. When community organization is initiated by individuals from outside of the community, the problem is said to be organized from the *top down* or *outside in*. Individuals from outside the community who might initiate organization could include a judge who presides over cases involving violence, a state social worker who handles cases of family violence, or a politically active group that is against violent behavior wherever it happens. In cases where the person who recognizes the community problem is not a community member, great care must be taken when notifying those in the community that a problem exists. "It is difficult for someone from the outside coming in and telling community members that they have problems or issues that have to be dealt with and they need to organize to take care of them."¹³

grass-roots
a process that begins with those who are affected by the problem/concern

Gaining Entry into the Community

This second step in the community organizing process may or may not be needed, depending on whether the issue in step 1 was identified by someone from within the community or outside. If the issue is identified by someone outside the community, this step becomes a critical step in the process.¹³ Gaining entry may seem like a relatively easy matter, but an error by organizers at this step could ruin the chances of successfully organizing the community. This may be the most crucial step in the whole process.

Brathwaite and colleagues have stressed the importance of tactfully negotiating entry into a community with the individuals who control, both formally and informally, the "political climate" of the community.¹⁵ These people are referred to as the **gatekeepers**. Thus the term indicates that you must pass through this "gate" to get to your priority population.¹⁶ These "power brokers" know their community, how it functions, and how to accomplish tasks within it. Long-time residents are usually able to identify the gatekeepers of their community. A gatekeeper can be a representative of an intermediary organization—such as a church or school—that has direct contact with your priority population.¹⁶ Examples include politicians, leaders of activist groups, business and education leaders, and clergy, to name a few.

gatekeepers
those who control both formally and informally, the political climate of the community

Organizers must approach such figures on the gatekeepers' own terms and play the gatekeepers' ball game. However, before approaching these important individuals, organizers must study the community well. They must be *culturally sensitive* and work toward *cultural competence*. That is, they must be aware of the cultural differences within a community and effectively work with the cultural context of the community. Tervalon and Garcia have stated the need for *cultural humility*—openness to others' culture.¹⁷ Organizers need to know where the power lies, the community power dynamics, what type of politics must be used to solve a problem, and whether the particular problem they wish to solve has ever been dealt with before in the community.¹⁸ In the violence example, organizers need to know (1) who is causing the violence and why, (2) how the violence has been addressed in the past, (3) who supports and who opposes the idea of addressing the problem, and (4) who could provide more insight into the problem. This is a critical step in the community organization process because failure to study the community carefully in the beginning may lead to a delay in organizing it later, a subsequent waste of time and resources, and possibly the inability to approach the gatekeepers. In keeping with the violence example, the gatekeepers would probably include the police department, elected officials, school board members, social ser-