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The Scholarship and Practice of Community Organizing: An Assessment, Vision, and Call to Action

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Abstract

In this essay, we introduce *The Community Organizing Journal* (COJ) with an appreciative and critical overview of organizing practice and scholarship, a vision for greater collaboration and growth together, and a call to action. Faced with a global political, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental 'polycrisis,' more than ever we need to build on organizing's rich heritage of leadership development, expanding and projecting grassroots power, and creating diverse multicultural communities to help us achieve a vision of a just and sustainable global community. While organizing practice and scholarship have accomplished much, they face common challenges of strategy, fragmentation, and resources. We examine and suggest ways of meeting these challenges, situating COJ as part of an emerging worldwide conversation around the practice and scholarship of organizing, and calling on the organizing community to work together more intentionally and strategically.

Keywords: community organizing; engaged scholarship; social change; collective action; power

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Introduction

We are members of a team of scholar-practitioners who have collaborated since 2021 to create the new *Community Organizing Journal* (COJ). The project launched through the Brown University Community Organizing Initiative (BCOI) that aims to bring teachers, scholars, and practitioners into a global conversation about the past, present, and future of community organizing around the world.[1]

The founding members of COJ are current and former organizers, researchers, and teachers of community organizing. Our shared experience with community organizing spans over four decades. This experience has shaped our focus on field-wide issues across the three domains of teaching, research, and community organizing practice. We have used organizing principles to become a relational team of leaders and to create an Editorial Board that guides the vision, values, and processes for how we engage as a community of authors. Within the Editorial Board, six members serve as a core team, much like a founding leadership council in a community organizing effort.

Creating COJ is part of a greater whole to grow and strengthen the field of community organizing. Recognizing the diversity of histories, contexts, approaches and practices, we aim to build a supportive and vibrant ecosystem that helps make more visible and impactful the transformative and powerful work of organizing. COJ contributes to an emerging global community of people, organizations, and networks in dialogue with one another, reflecting together on the strengths, weaknesses, tensions, opportunities, and challenges of community organizing in the 21st century.

The scholarship of organizing is diverse in geographic focus, academic disciplines, and institutional positions of authors, intended audiences, formats, and goals. While much of the literature focuses on the United States, there is a growing body of work that examines organizing around the globe. Authors include organizers and leaders, academics, journalists, and others. Published works include popular and peer-reviewed scholarly books and articles. There are two excellent popular journals in the United States that focus on organizing – *Social Policy* and *The Forge* along with an expansive collection of reports, training materials, guidebooks, manuals, and podcasts on the strategy and tactics of community organizing. These diverse works on organizing vary from documenting the work, to promoting it, to providing critical analysis and insight. We see this journal as doing some of all three, by providing a forum for work that is informed, appreciative, and constructively critical. We hope that COJ will add a valuable new dimension to the field as the first peer-reviewed journal focusing exclusively on community organizing. It includes scholarly articles and reflective essays that have gone through an extensive review and feedback process, often co-written by practitioners and scholars. COJ will also include links and summaries of new reports and resources for the field, and, in the future, we hope to include interviews and books reviews.

COJ is dedicated to advancing the scholarship and practice of community organizing and expanding and supporting the intellectual, interpersonal, and institutional relationships within and between the fields. Reflecting the core commitments of community organizing at all levels, this journal has a special focus on the importance of democratic and relational work that enables leadership development, community power, and structural change. We recognize that community organizing exists in many different contexts and settings around the world, taking on a wide variety

[1] On behalf of the COJ Editorial Board, we extend gratitude to Ken Galdston and Jane Beckett, BCOI conveners, for their support of the journal.

of forms. COJ therefore prioritizes careful reflection and critical analysis, grounded in a range of traditions and approaches. COJ seeks to engage scholars and practitioners together in analyzing and reflecting on the diversity of traditions, definitions, and approaches in the field. We aim to center less prominent and non-dominant perspectives, voices, and ways of knowing, emphasizing the importance of the voices of those most affected by oppression, injustice, and inequality. We emphasize that knowledge and effective action emerge from a dialogue that includes ground-up, co-creative processes, and multidisciplinary theoretical and political perspectives.

Much as we see great strengths in the practice and scholarship of organizing, our work over the last two years has pointed to three challenges to each that we discuss in this essay: strategic focus, fragmentation, and resources. After exploring the current context of community organizing in the 21st century, we discuss each of these challenges for organizing and for scholarship, suggesting ways we can address them, including what we see as the role of COJ. While we write from our perspective as two North American scholars who have worked alongside community organizing efforts in the United States, we also draw from the insights and experiences of our colleagues on the core team and Editorial Board.[2]

Community Organizing in the 21st Century

Polycrisis[3] – Understanding the Crises of our Time and Organizing's Response

Many interconnected crises fuel the urgency of our time and the context within which community organizing in the 21st century responds. Across the globe, challenges to democracy and civil liberties, rising concentrations of wealth and governing power, economic and social polarization, and climate change accelerate the continued marginalization of Indigenous communities, communities of color, and the poor. As these crises unfold, we witness violence and destruction from political instability, the erosion and decline of civil society institutions, environmental disasters, and rampant assaults on human and civil rights worldwide.

Simultaneous to these deepening crises, acts of resistance, large scale mobilizations, and direct action counteract the threats to human life and dignity, land and community, and our institutions. Community organizing grows from many traditions of social and collective action, with a lineage of people, communities, religious traditions, and civic institutions taking action in the wake of such crises. Through organizing, people contest for power in the public square and make demands for change. Community organizing can kindle the fire of participatory, multi-racial democratic action with the hope of building power and the promise of growing thriving civil societies where those at the margins are agents of transformation.

The Landscape and Lineage of Organizing Practice

Community organizing practice in the 21st century reflects the changing political, institutional and social landscape of a globalized world. It is rooted in a rich history of social action and democratic participation, and often incorporates different forms of engagement including mass mobilization,

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[2] This essay has benefited from the collective insights of the COJ Editorial Board. We especially thank core team members, Amanda Tattersall, Tobias Meier, and Sean Crossland for their comments and feedback.

[3] We use "polycrisis" throughout this essay to describe the global threats of multiple, intertwined economic, social, political, and environmental crises (Lawrence et al, 2024). First defined by Morin & Kern (1999), this concept is especially helpful for exploring the relationships, responses, and impacts of these interconnected crises.

protest, advocacy, direct confrontation, and mutual aid. At the intersections of power, politics, and policy, community organizers build lasting organizations with infrastructures for training and leadership development while developing the strategic capacity to challenge public officials, hold them accountable, and change relationships with governments and the private sector. At times, the term "organizing" has been equated with all forms of community transformation, leading to confusion not only for practitioners and organizational leaders, but also for funders and institutional partners who want to support the work and for researchers who want to contribute new knowledge to the field. A primary motivation for creating COJ has been to develop a space where scholars and practitioners can explore the dimensions and dynamics of this reality.

Most often attributed to Saul Alinsky (1909-1972), modern day community organizing practice draws from a diverse lineage of community, neighborhood, and institution-based organizing. It also emerges from other forms of civic activism, social movements, and labor organizing. The development of local leadership and the formation of locally rooted, independent organizations are central to the legacy of Alinsky's organizing practice. He and his successors argued that changing the conditions of economic inequality, oppression, and social unrest required the formation of "people powered" organizations that could hold elites accountable for their decision-making and shift relationships of governing and corporate power (Schutz & Miller 2015).

This foundational idea endures today. However, no one description or definition adequately fits the various traditions and practices that encompass the field of "community organizing." Part of this diversity comes from the divergent schools of community organizing practice and citizen action that arose following Alinsky. Alinsky's death in 1972—in the midst of the American movements for racial equality, women's rights, and opposing the war in Vietnam—marked the emergence of several community organizing networks in the United States that grew from Alinsky's core approach, including the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Pacific Institute of Community Organizing (now Faith in Action), and Gamaliel, each with roots in faith-based organizing. Other neighborhood and tenant-based organizing groups also emerged, such as the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now and National People's Action. Along with training offered by these networks, training institutes like the Midwest Academy, the Center for Third World Organizing and the Highlander School nurtured the growth and development of organizers and community leaders. These training centers also challenged and reshaped some of Alinsky's fundamental assumptions. They pushed the field to consider other approaches to grassroots organizing including adopting feminist and racial justice principles and incorporating multi-issue and electoral strategies. At the same time, groups focused on issue advocacy, worker and labor rights, electoral and policy campaigns, and mass mobilization began to flourish, occasionally incorporating community organizing strategies in their approaches. Likewise, diverse approaches to community organizing and collective action emerged in parts of Europe, Latin America, South Africa, Asia, and Australia, alongside the changing political regimes, economic and social crises, and social movements of the 1980s and 1990s (Beck & Purcell 2013).

Since the early 2000s, the community organizing field across the world has experienced significant change - both in its growth and diversity of practice as well as in fragmentation and competition for resources. There has been an increase in centralized organizing networks and intermediary organizations that offer training and technical assistance to affiliated and federated organizations, shifts in strategy and practices that incorporate new technologies, innovative approaches to leadership recruitment and development, expanding types of campaigns and coalition partnerships

that incorporate electoral organizing, and expansion to new regions and geographies. In addition to the pioneering training groups in the United States that have continued to foster organizer growth and development for over forty years, new groups emerged after 2000. The New Organizing Institute, Momentum and the Ayni Institute, the Leading Change Network, Citizens UK, and the European Community Organizing Network each have developed curriculum, training modules, and learning cohorts in which organizers learn the craft, find support and mentorship, and build community across networks, organizations, and approaches to organizing.

The professionalization of the role of community organizer has had its benefits, such as improvements in training, salary, and working conditions. Some suggest, though, that the essentials of organizing have been watered-down, a reality that older generations of organizers bemoan as a weakening of the field with a growing lack of strategy and deep leadership development. On the other hand, the diversification of the organizing field may be its greatest strength - with broader inclusion of traditions and approaches to collective action, across more diverse communities, countries, and issues, and within different arenas for social change.

Organizing in the United States has garnered increased attention and investment from philanthropy in the last twenty-five years with more philanthropic institutions investing in grassroots organizing, leadership development and community-driven policy campaigns. In the United Kingdom, Europe, Asia, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, there have been growing institutional partnerships that catalyze and sustain community organizing as new windows of opportunity for collective action arise. These trends have improved resource flows into the organizing field for sustained capacity and infrastructure to build people power organizations. Alongside this increased flow of resources, there also has been a trend towards documenting the state of the community organizing field and identifying the substantial challenges that organizers and grassroots organizations face. These efforts have notably aimed to clarify what organizing is, how it is a strategy for building community power, and where there are gaps in staffing, training, wages and working conditions, strategic capacity, and sustained funding streams. Eager to identify how and why organizing works, funders, institutional partners, and scholars have saturated the field with a growing interest in understanding the impact organizing has on democratic and governing change and how to sustain it, yet these efforts tend to be episodic and siloed, rather than integrative and field wide.

Challenges and Opportunities

Community organizing in the 21st century has been shaped by the changing institutional, structural, and geographic boundaries along with shifts in approaches to organization building and collective power. It is often brilliant tactically in developing leaders, establishing lasting and vibrant local and regional organizations, and winning important changes in local government policy, corporate practice, in getting resources to communities, and, at times, gaining 'a seat at the table' – becoming part of local power structures. However, as a field it has had less direct and sustained impact on national politics, policies, and political culture in the United States or elsewhere than one would hope, given its longstanding ability to build grassroots power at local and regional levels (Dreier, 2007; Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015). Likewise, Christens et al. (2021) observe "the broadening realization across multiple sectors that grassroots organizing is an indispensable technique for addressing social problems and inequities has not yet been matched by a truly vibrant field of organizing research," (12). Three characteristics of both organizing and scholarship present challenges individually and together in this current context: strategy, fragmentation, and resources.

In looking at each, we will suggest ways in which scholarship can help address the challenges, and how COJ may play a role.

Strategy

The pressing nature of the polycrisis strongly suggests the need to explore how community organizing can play a greater and more immediate role in establishing and defending democracy, increasing economic opportunity, and addressing the myriad issues related to racial and gender injustice, climate change, and more through strategies that build people power. Expansive research, analysis, and reflection is needed on whether and how there have been more subtle and substantial impacts, and how these changes can be adapted and brought to scale across the world.[4]

To what extent, if any, does this require organizing groups individually and collectively to develop a more robust long-term strategy? The traditional Alinsky view is that strategy emerges organically through the organizing process. In *Rules for Radicals* (1971), he says,

> *"If we think of the struggle as a climb up a mountain, then we must visualize a mountain with no top. We see a top, but when we finally reach it, the overcast rises and we find ourselves merely on a bluff. The mountain continues on up. Now we see the "real" top ahead of us, and strive for it, only to find we've reached another bluff, the top still above us. And so it goes on, interminably,"* (21).

Critics of this approach would say that real mountain ranges have multiple peaks, and successful climbs require an initial decision of which peak to climb and a preliminary mapping of a route there that includes specific goals along the way.

In more straightforward terms, this is the longstanding debate (described in more detail in Kleidman 2004), between a populist approach that underlies Alinsky and neo-Alinsky organizing, and a more "ideological" approach. While populism provides a broad front door for recruiting and can generate great energy by tapping into people's felt needs, critics argue that without the three elements of ideology - 1) a relatively clear vision of a better society, 2) specific analysis of the present centered on race, class, gender, and intersectionality and 3) long-term strategy that includes working with other forms of organizing, social movements, and electoral politics - organizing will not transcend its current limits. They see Alinsky's dictum of "no permanent friends, no permanent enemies," still frequently heard in neo-Alinsky's organizing, as a tactical strength and a strategic liability.

This dictum has less of a hold on organizing than it has in the past. Many organizing groups, including local, regional, and state affiliates of neo-Alinsky networks, have been creating or participating in relatively enduring coalitions that include other forms of organizing including labor, social movements, and electoral politics. As various grassroots-led organizations evolved from the divergent schools of community organizing practice over the last 50 years, these groups adapted and innovated organizing's foundational elements. They have expanded to new constituencies and geographies, experimenting with new approaches to relationship building, new modes of leadership development and engagement, and new forms of strategic action. While the blurred

[4] See Han, McKenna, & Oyakawa 2021 and Tattersall & Iveson 2023 for examples of "people powered" campaigns from the United States, Spain, and South Africa that utilize community organizing approaches, especially in developing local leadership and formulating community-designed strategies that win policy change and catalyze shifts in political influence.

lines between organizing, community building, mass protest, and mobilization have created some confusion, these intersections also offer fertile ground for evaluation, rich description, and empirical analysis about the kinds of strategies that will yield both long-term, durable organizations and sustainable political change.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether organizing as a whole, and specific organizing groups and networks, can and should place long-term strategy more in the foreground of their work. We see scholarship, including this Journal, as addressing these issues in two ways. First, we encourage researchers to participate in ongoing dialogues with organizers around the basic premises of organizing. This would enable and require us to build on the strong relationships we have developed with organizers. Second, by encouraging and conducting more scholarship directly or indirectly addressing questions of organizing, strategy, and long-term large-scale impact, we can learn more about the causes, forms, and outcomes of incorporating varying amounts and types of ideology in different organizing contexts.

We can also do more to understand what, no doubt, is a wide range of positive indirect effects of organizing. Above all else, organizing prides itself on developing leaders. How much do we know about what leaders trained in organizing, whether in one-off workshops, or through sustained participation in organizing campaigns, accomplish in other venues because of what they learned in organizing? This learning includes not just specific methods such as one-to-one conversations and power analysis, but also an optimistic yet realistic approach to building organizations capable of sustaining challenges to established power over decades, and towards winning important victories. Whatever one thinks of organizing's long-term strategy, its tactical brilliance is enviable, intentional, teachable, and transferable to other realms.

Scholars can do more to identify and analyze indirect mutual effects of organizing on major social change efforts including social movements and electoral politics. We already know some important elements of these relationships, including in the United States the profound impacts of organizing on the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the important role played in community organizing by veterans of these movements. Aldon Morris (1986) calls organizing-based groups such as the Highlander School "movement halfway houses" providing skilled activists, tactical knowledge and other resources and ideas critical in the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Many of today's organizer training programs, institutes, and networks play similar roles as activists and organizers move in and between political and social movements for resistance and change today. Overall, there is much to learn by further exploration of the relationships between party structure, political culture, and organizing around the world. Is it possible that documenting and understanding long-term and indirect effects of organizing will help organizers make a stronger case to funders and institutional partners to provide support not tied to specific, short-term, measurable outcomes? We believe this is worth exploring.

The scholarship of organizing needs to be more strategic in order to encourage and support organizing to be more strategic in its main work and more aware and intentional about its positive indirect impacts. More than in many related fields, organizing scholars tend to be connected to and highly engaged with community organizers and community organizing campaigns. Some scholars began or have spent much of their careers as organizers, and are now teaching, researching and writing about the practice. Others who followed a more traditional academic path have encountered organizing, seen its relevance and significance within their disciplinary context, and

worked to document and understand its lessons. We have succeeded in building strong relationships with individual organizers, organizations, and networks, and can see ways in which our work has influenced their thinking and practice. Similarly, many organizing scholars, because of our history and experience with organizing, are influenced in how we approach research questions and research design, specifically incorporating organizing principles of relationships of trust, shared interest, and accountability. As with organizing, however, our field has not built on these connections to develop a vibrant global dialogue about how to do our work – how we build strong relationships of mutual benefit with organizers and leaders, how scholarship can have a greater impact on organizing practice and how organizing practice can influence research.

Our career challenges mirror those of organizing. For those doing publicly engaged scholarship, the central work of building relationships with, studying, and writing and speaking about the core work of organizing takes time, energy, and intentionality. Although institutional roles and rewards favor traditional academic products rather than engaged scholarship, we have seen the benefits of building bridges between scholars and organizing practitioners. Thankfully, in both research and practice this is also highly rewarding for most of us most of the time. As an international community of scholars and practitioners have come together through COJ, we see new opportunities for exploring larger questions of strategy and long-term change in a systematic and ongoing way. With the increasing severity and salience of the polycrisis, organizers and scholars may be more willing to work together to create a more strategic practice. Doing so requires both fields to address challenges of fragmentation and scarce resources.

Fragmentation

Organizing is a very diverse field. In some ways this is a strength. The range of models provides a deep repertoire of practices from which organizers and leaders can draw, adapting their work to specific times, places, and socio-political contexts. Even within traditions and individual networks, the relative autonomy of local and regional organizations allows for flexibility and innovation in tactics while taking advantage of the resources and support provided by the networks. Some of the US-based organizing networks have created international affiliates with local organizations in Europe, the United Kingdom, Asia, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand that build upon and reflect national and local cultures and political economies.

Diversity at times, however, can be seen and experienced as fragmentation – such as a lack of communication and coordination, in circumstances where cooperation, collaboration, and shared learning are likely to produce clear benefits. One of the most striking examples is within the field of institution-based community organizing (IBCO) in the United States. Despite common origins and similar, some would say almost identical, organizing models, the major IBCO networks have been fierce rivals for 'turf,' funding, and visibility. There are several states that have affiliates from different networks in different cities. Given our federal system, a clear and obvious way for community organizing to scale up its impact is to focus on state-level policy and create specific campaigns, perhaps joining or leading coalitions that include these local groups, partners from the labor movement, and other advocacy and movement organizations. The fact that this rarely happens indicates that while the historic rivalry among IBCO networks has lessened as new leadership emerges, even this specific field of organizing is still fragmented in damaging ways.

Organizations and networks outside of IBCO groups have created powerful alliances, and in some instances won major statewide campaigns and policy victories and serve as a source of inspiration

and agitation to the IBCO networks and other organizing groups. While the benefits would be less clear and immediate, we believe that greater cooperation and coordination within the organizing field and within and across nations, will increase its impact, by taking advantage of specific opportunities for relatively traditional campaigns, and by encouraging and enabling a greater focus on long-term strategy and major transformational changes.

The scholarship of organizing is also diverse in ways that provide both opportunities and challenges. Like organizing, this scholarship is fragmented. There is an impressive amount of scholarship on organizing, produced by scholars in a range of social science and social work fields. We draw from many academic disciplines including political science, sociology, education, social work, theology, community psychology, and public health. There is no established orthodoxy in theoretical or methodological approach, so this scholarship benefits from drawing on different literatures, concepts, and approaches. At the same time, there is no common venue in which organizing scholars gather, exchange ideas, and explore fieldwide trends and issues. This fragmentation has meant that organizing scholars often operate in silos without benefiting from opportunities for connection, dialogue, and shared learning across different viewpoints.

Organizing scholarship can be described as multidisciplinary. Yet, can and should it aspire to be interdisciplinary, and more deeply collaborative? How could the study of community organizing be strengthened if scholars and practitioners together worked toward greater integration and understanding of the definition, forms, opportunities, and challenges of community organizing, along with establishing some common core of scholarship that includes critical perspectives? We believe that we can and should move in this direction, for intellectual and institutional reasons.

As with organizing practice, greater cooperation and collaboration would encourage scholars to identify and address key issues and questions. We could do more to build an institutional presence, either within or outside disciplinary institutions. The American Sociological Association, for example, has sections on Urban and Community and on Collective Behavior and Social Movements. These sections hold paper and roundtable sessions at the ASA annual meetings, publish journals, and provide other resources to scholars, including scholars in related fields such as Political Science and Urban Studies. The American Political Science Association similarly has a Civic Engagement section and the related group, Civil Society, Policy, and Power. Neither association has a section dedicated solely to the global study and teaching of Community Organizing. Various colleges and universities in the U.S. and Europe host programs, institutes, and certificates aimed at training young people in skills for democratic participation and civic engagement. With the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, there has been greater investment in infrastructure and staffing for these programs. A handful of institutions also offer programs that provide opportunities to explore the fields of community and labor organizing. While these initiatives are not typically well-funded and they operate almost entirely disconnected from one another and from direct engagement with community organizing groups, we can find more ways to draw upon their resources and move community organizing more fully into their awareness and work.[5]

[5] In the last 25 years, various events, workshops, and conferences have convened traditional academic audiences with leaders in community organizing and civic engagement funding to find points of synergy and opportunities for working together more effectively. Disseminating, evaluating, and reflecting on the content, successes, and challenges of these discussions would be a worthwhile step in this direction.

To address this fragmentation, we believe we should look for more opportunities to build an institutional presence within colleges and universities, as well as national and international disciplinary and interdisciplinary membership organizations. At the same time, we should also work to strengthen the connections between existing initiatives, so as to maximize the possibilities for stronger connections and relevance to the field. These and other institutions could provide greater opportunity for collaboration, for example creating more scholar-in-residence programs for organizers, giving them the opportunity to pull back from the daily demands of the work and reflect more on the big picture of organizing. It would also help recruit the next generation of organizers. Without such formal institutions, scholars and organizers have created important conversations and collaborations. With them, there will be more.

Resources

While community organizing has grown considerably, the field throughout the world still receives little funding and institutional support. Two recent major reports on the state of organizing in the United States (Friedman and Noor, 2024; Razza et al., 2024) cite lack of resources as a major obstacle to the maintenance and growth of organizing. They make a strong argument that organizing needs more funding that comes with fewer strings, such as general operating support versus funding to support a particular campaign and short-term outcome. These concerns are also not new, and they echo well-documented trends in the field as rates of institutional and individual membership dues falter (Fulton, 2011; Warren & Wood, 2001; Wood et al., 2012).

Frey (2021) provides a very useful comparative perspective on community organizing and resources. He first notes the heavy dependence of community organizing in the United States on funding from foundations and other philanthropic sources, citing a 2014 survey of several of the largest community organizing groups, which found they depend on such external funding for anywhere from 50% to 90% of their budgets. He then cites several studies of foundation and other philanthropic spending and finds that even including support for 'civic participation,' which received more funding than did community organizing, the two overlapping fields together received less than one-tenth of one percent of overall giving. Finally, he cautions that, as organizers are well aware, major foundations and other large funders tend to see organizing as relatively radical, and can use funding as a means to coopt them.

A related resource challenge is the scarcity of skilled organizers at all levels who are appropriately trained, supported, and compensated. Organizations and networks have limited ability to fund sufficiently organizer recruitment and development and to fully staff organizations so that experienced organizers do not default to becoming full-time managers and administrators. For example, the All Due Respect Project has documented organizer workforce issues since 2020 including the high rates of burnout among organizers and the extensive issues related to labor standards, working conditions, and salary disparities in the field, especially among organizers of color and women (All Due Respect 2022).

For organizing scholars, support for research and learning in collaboration with organizers has been episodic and limited. Occasionally, scholars will benefit from significant institutional or philanthropic funding to conduct major empirical projects, large-scale surveys, or in-depth ethnographic studies. These studies have produced high quality and important findings about the process and impact of community organizing, especially related to building power and influencing democratic action and change. However, the fact that up until now there has been no journal devoted to organizing

publishing peer-reviewed articles is another indication that that field is still relatively small, isolated, and does not yet have the resources of more established interdisciplinary fields. We see the COJ as one step in growing the field by expanding the number and visibility of peer-reviewed articles on organizing. We expect COJ will be a space for generating new research agendas aligned with pressing issues in the field of practice. We intentionally work to encourage new scholars and those outside of academia to submit articles and we will be expanding the types of works we will publish.

We believe that organizing practice and scholarship can be more successful together than separate in mobilizing more resources and building the field. Scholarship, both independent of and in collaboration with organizers, funders, and others, has documented in convincing ways the value and potential of the field. We believe we can do so more intentionally, while maintaining independence. This also would stimulate a more consistent and informed dialogue among all parties on building the field and its impacts. The challenges and opportunities are intimately related. We hope to continue working with the growing community of scholars and organizers working to make our field more strategic, less fragmented, and greater in size and scope.

Call to Action

Community organizing has accomplished a great deal, and we believe its full promise to contribute to social transformation has not yet been realized. To that end, we see the journal serving several purposes. We hope that COJ will create more mutual support for critical analysis and self-reflection about organizing practice and scholarship. COJ was founded as a place for individual and shared reflection on community organizing by scholars and practitioners, finding more effective ways to identify and help organizing meet its major tensions and challenges. We invite readers to submit ideas for future issues, articles, reflections, and resources. We also invite ideas for creating online forums, in-person conferences, archives, teaching ideas and syllabi.

For those in traditional academic roles, we envision COJ as a forum for developing research agendas and gaining support for engaged scholarship. This includes examining our own challenges, opportunities, strategies, successes, and failures. As a community, we should revisit and revitalize past organized efforts to provide more opportunities and rewards for engaged scholarship about organizing and democratic renewal (Boyer, 1990, 1996; Glassick, 1997; Sandmann, Saltmarsh, & O'Meara 2008). We also envision the COJ community as a bridge for generating more material support for international exchanges, campus-based community organizing institutes, organizer sabbaticals, and scholar-in-residence positions, including outside of one's home country. Finally, we hope COJ sparks new global opportunities for organizing practitioners to analyze, reflect, write, and agitate scholars to address the most pressing issues faced by the field. We believe these goals are best served by creating more sustained conversations both within and between communities of scholars and practitioners.

In a larger sense we invite our readers to become a more connected community. Our experience in building COJ's core team and editorial board has been rewarding and demonstrates for us the value of building relationships of understanding and trust with a diverse group of scholars and practitioners. We have enacted processes of a relational culture that is emergent and iterative, and grounded in an ethic of care and accountability for each other and for the work we do together. We hope COJ plays some part in providing this opportunity for our writers and readers as we learn from one another and grow our shared knowledge of community organizing.

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