

# Minnesota Active Citizenship Initiative

*The mission of the Minnesota Active Citizenship Initiative is to build a new base for policymaking in the state of Minnesota that places the obligation to govern justly and wisely in the role we all have as citizens. This obligation, democratic and human, transcends other legal and more narrow understandings of citizenship. The Initiative is composed of demonstrations representing family and neighborhood, faith, community, work, learning, and governance. Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Roger Moe and former Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Joanne Benson convened the first stage of the Initiative, from 1995 to 2001.*

*The Civic Organizing Framework guides the work. Civic organizing invests resources in organizing strategies that are consistent with our values and operating principles, using agreed upon standards of accountability to get outcomes that benefit the whole.*

*The Initiative builds a permanent, flexible, intergenerational base of leaders to carry out the mission.*



## Civic Organizing Framework

*by Peg Michels, Civic Organizing, Inc.  
and Tony Massengale, Center for Civic Capacity Building*

### Values

*Civic organizing values are in keeping with core democratic principles. Those who practice civic organizing are held accountable to the best democratic theory and practice of organizing.*

#### ■ Belief in Human Capacity

A belief in the *people*. That every individual has the capacity to know what is good, to grow in that knowledge, to produce, and to be a co-creator of common wealth and justice in the world.

#### ■ Belief in Democracy

A belief in democracy, *rule by the people*, as the best form for human governance. It requires a belief that the people have the capacity to discern, to produce and deploy resources, and to create rules—"policies"—that honor the tension between the parts and the whole.

#### ■ Belief in Active Citizenship

A belief in the role of the citizen as a governing member rather than citizen as a legal status. In a democracy, citizens are obligated to contribute to the well-being of the

whole. As a result of their contributions, citizens also share in the benefits the society has to offer. Individuals learn and practice active citizenship in institutions of family, faith, community, work, learning, and governance.

#### ■ Belief in Political Competence

Politics is the work of the citizen. In order to fulfill the obligation to govern, everyone must develop the political competence needed to take effective action.

#### ■ Belief in Institutional Efficacy

Institutions in a democracy create, organize, and distribute the complex resources that meet the human need for family, faith, work, community, learning, self-governance, and environmental sustainability. When they do not, citizens are obligated to renew the work of institutions to meet those fundamental needs.

## Operating Principles

*put values into practice in the tension between the ideal and real state*

### ■ Value-based

Values are imbedded in cultural context and openly and repeatedly contested in order to find common meaning.

### ■ Identifiable organizing agency

Has an identifiable organizing agency held publicly accountable for use, misuse, and nonuse of power.

### ■ Grounded in a power analysis

Grounded in a power analysis that holds leaders in the middle sector of society accountable for their own practice of power inside the systems where they have standing in tension with a common need for democracy. A power analysis surfaces what ought to occur in that tension, what does occur, and how the practice of power within systems can be altered to shift the balance towards the ideal. A power analysis has to be accurate within the current economic, political, social, and spiritual realities of the culture it is applied.

### ■ Builds an intergenerational base of influence

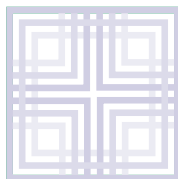
Focused on building a permanent, flexible, inter-generational base of influence as the primary structure and resource for renewing our democracy.

### ■ Draws authority from the role of citizen

Draws authority from the role of citizen, a role in which everyone shares. The role of citizen is inclusive (everyone) and is practiced in the tension between individual leadership and democracy. Leaders who act as citizens integrate the policy making and governing functions in all institutions of family, faith, community, work, learning, and governance. Civic organizing invests resources primarily in developing the political capacity of leaders (citizens), who restructure their own time, knowledge, relationship with constituencies, and budgets to renew the civic purpose of those institutions.

### ■ Furthers a civic policy agenda

Furthers a civic policy agenda that puts the power analysis on the front end of all issues and integrates civic organizing into institutional practice to realize economic, environmental, and social justice. Civic organizing differs from other organizing approaches in that its policy agenda integrates organizing practices into current systems in order to both renew their democratic mission and create a civic infrastructure that can sustain from generation to generation, a belief in democracy as the best form of governance.



## Civic Standards

*guide the practice, holding individuals accountable to each other and to the whole*

### ■ Those impacted by a problem help define the problem in light of democratic ideals and the real economic, political, social, and spiritual situation in the environment

Solutions to complex problems must come from complex resources. Civic organizing intentionally organizes resources in the tension between diverse interests and the welfare of the whole.

### ■ All Stakeholders are accountable for producing resources to solve the problem

Resources are developed in the following order: self/time, others with resources, knowledge, capital/programs.

### ■ All stakeholders are part of the policy function of the work

Stakeholders at all levels are engaged in decision making; creation and distribution of resources; and rule making that holds self, others, and institutions accountable to produce democratic outcomes. All stakeholders do not, however, have the same authority in decision making.

### ■ All stakeholders are accountable for contributing to sustainability by acting within and across institutions

Stakeholders develop strategies and policies that strengthen the civic capacity of fundamental institutions—family, faith, community, work, learning, governance—for the long term.

## Civic Organizing Strategies

*are implemented in work plans that close the gap between the real state and the ideal state*

### ■ Creating a climate

Create a climate for civic renewal within and across institutions. Integrates values of a particular institution with core democratic values.

### ■ Restructuring existing resources

Restructure time, knowledge, constituencies, and money in order to achieve democratic outcomes. Integrate existing best practices with democratic practices.

### ■ Recruiting, expanding, and sustaining a base of influence

Intentionally develop civic leadership. Effective leadership is measured by the ability to express and act upon shared values, leverage resources, and participate in evaluation that increases competence.

### ■ Ensuring sustainability

Create institutional structures and systems that sustain democratic practices. Hold institutions accountable for civic capacity building. Tie mission, hiring, promotion, and development to civic outcomes.

**What is the value-added of a civic organizing approach?**

The civic organizing approach adds a new power analysis that meets the economic, political, and environmental realities of a knowledge-based global society. In the past, organizing has counted upon the working poor and the middle class to have enough common political interest to address issues of disparity. That common interest is identified around democratic values. In today's world, the interest of that political base is fragmented within current economic, environmental, and social reality: 80% of all economic activity occurs in the production of goods and services in knowledge-driven systems that employs the middle in a global economy and does not require democratic practices. These systems are so isolated and fragmented that they cannot solve the complex environmental, economic, and social issues of our time. Civic organizing applies a new power analysis to the best practices of organizing and seeks to renew the work of institutions to make democracy an authentic form of governance.

*Stages of Civic Organizing*

*Civic organizing is accomplished in stages. Its goal is a sustainable, cross-sector base.*

*Stage One:*

**Develop a Resource Base**

*Overarching Goals:*

- Recruit and sustain a base of 10-15 leaders who develop a framework for change by integrating civic organizing into the values and practices of their particular sector or region. This is called a demonstration base.

The framework for change is the foundation for achieving a new base for civic policy making within and across sector lines. It is a public document that argues the need for change in the tension between the real and the ideal state. It addresses the need for a systemic approach that holds all systems accountable to seek justice within the common good and to renew the work of systems in the intersection and common need for an accountable economic system, environmental sustainability, and social well-being. The argument poses a moral imperative that challenges leaders to produce resources and implement goals and strategies intended to bridge the gap between the real and ideal state.

- Demonstrations reflect the diversity within their sector. Leaders have the ownership and capacity necessary to garner resources and grow within their sector.
- Demonstrations partner with other demonstrations, from diverse sectors and regions. These partnerships, governed by signed agreements, make up the total resource base called an initiative that will move the work into the next stage.
- Each demonstration has a person or persons who organize the demonstration and represents the demonstration in cross-sector work.
- A work plan that includes a role for each leader and for the demonstration; is in keeping with the overarching goals for the whole initiative; has resources and a timeline; and has evaluation agreements that create accountability both within and across sector lines.

*Stage Two:*

**Develop Larger Scale Demonstrations**

*Overarching Goals:*

- Each demonstration has created an on-going structure for expanding the base within their sector and for developing civic leadership using their framework for change.
- A cross-sector base of at least 100 leaders who are governed by the mission and agreements of the larger initiative.
- The cross-sector base has created a critical mass of outcomes that test the viability of the civic organizing strategies within each sector and region, the power of the cross-sector base and the effectiveness of the statewide civic policy agenda.

*Stage Three:*

**Formulate Public Policy**

*Overarching Goals:*

- Broad recognition of the initiative's civic policy agenda that includes an autonomous and accountable membership base in the thousands.
- Publicly designated institutions in each demonstration who implement the civic policy agenda within their institution.
- Evidence that large-scale public policies impacting families/neighborhoods, faith, communities, work, learning, and governance are being impacted by the civic policy agenda.

*Stage Four:*

**Transform Institutions**

*Overarching Goals:*

- Civic organizing as a practice is carried into the next generation.
- The civic policy agenda and the initiative create a sustainable base for ensuring the institutional infrastructure necessary to be a free and just society with an accountable economy, sustainable environment, and recognition of the value of human life.

## Political Concepts

*Civic organizing draws from the meaning and practice of time-honored political concepts*

**Life Work** • Individuals have a life long purpose and calling. Institutions are settings where purpose defined and developed. In order to fulfill life work must be conceived in connection with political vision, analysis, and efficacy.

**Public** • *A mature people with the capacity to govern for the good of the whole.*

**Public Deliberation** • Ability to engage diverse stakeholders in determining what is good for the whole; assessing current strengths and barriers to achieving the common good; and defining the complex wealth, partnerships, and incentives for bridging the gap between the common good and the current state

**Public Problem Solving** • Organizing the necessary complex resources and incentives needed over time so that the work we all do within our families, faith, community, work, learning, and governance adds up to bridge the gap between our need for democracy and the current fragmentation of resources.

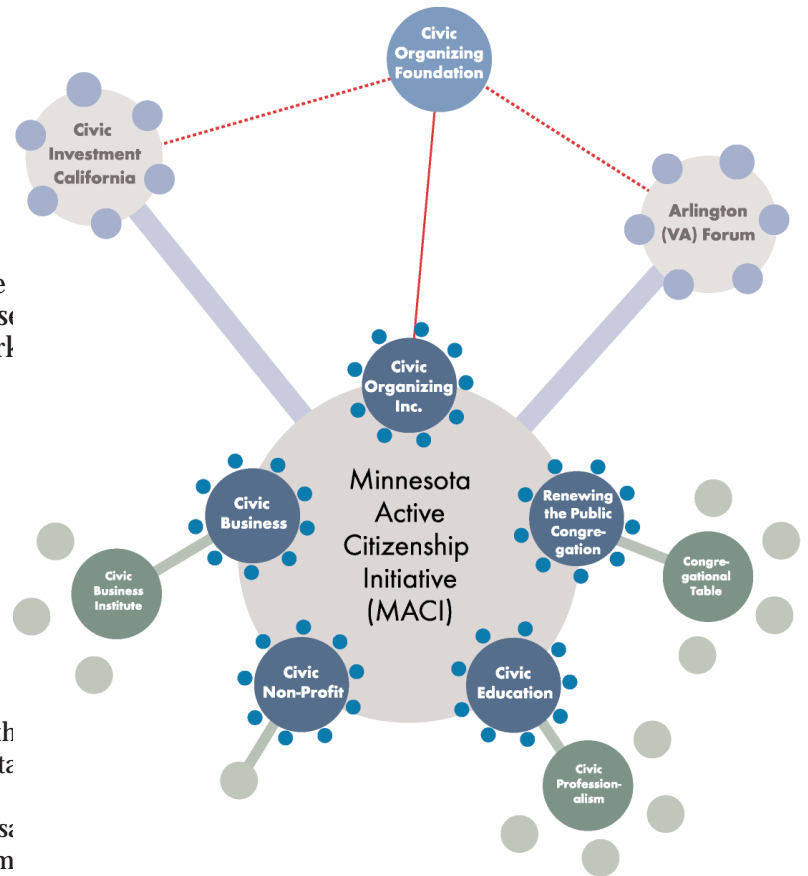
**Civic Policy Making** • A civic policy agenda requires citizens to formulate a course of action that balances individual good with common good and work within institutions to accomplish its goals.

**Public Accountability** • The obligation of all citizens to produce the meaning and practice of democracy within institutions of family, faith, work, community, learning, governance.

**Self-interest** • *Inter esse* meaning literally self amongst others. Recognizes the necessary tension between the self and the whole.

**Justice** • The right relationship among us.

**Diversity** • A means to deeper understanding and respect for our own and others' self-interest and a bridge to acquiring the power needed to act.



**Power** • To be able. Allows us to act collectively upon the values we hold.

**Active Citizen** • An obligated member who contributes, and therefore receives, and is capable of governing. It is this concept that holds individuals accountable for the ethical use of power.

**Politics** • The work of the citizen.

**Civic Organizing** • The means for developing the intentional public relationships, among individuals and across institutions, required to establish a base of citizen leaders powerful enough to create ideas, wealth, and justice.

For further information contact the Minnesota Active Citizenship Initiative at 651-645-7292. Or visit us on the Internet at [www.activecitizen.org](http://www.activecitizen.org).

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