

Background

Health researchers today must understand and respond to open access (OA) issues and requirements, and librarians are a major source of necessary information about OA.

Librarians are increasingly encouraged to develop teaching and presentation skills as instructors, but approaching researchers as a community to organize around OA issues, rather than students in a class, may offer strategic benefits.

This poster considers the question of whether lessons from community organizing (CO) models can be adapted by librarians embedded within research environments, in order to effectively help transition research organizations to open communications models.

Questions

- Why consider drawing on the traditions of community organizing?
- What is the difference between “outreach” and “organizing”?
- What types of educational activities create the most “buy-in” from communities?
- How can we most effectively organize research communities to open up scholarly outputs?
- Is it appropriate to adapt organizing methods developed for disenfranchised communities for use with academics?

To explore these questions, we draw on case examples from the program of OA activities within a health research institute with an embedded librarian, and compare such activities with principles of community organizing models.

Embedded Librarianship Supporting Research Transition to an Open Era

There are multiple definitions of community organizing; some are more applicable than others to working with academic researchers.

Community organizing is a long-term approach where the people affected by an issue are supported in identifying problems and taking action to achieve solutions... Community organizing looks at collective solutions – large numbers of people who engage in solutions that impact even more people.
Marin Institute, Community Organizing Action Pack

Organizing is teaching. Not the academic type, which mostly consists of stuffing data into people’s ears. Organizing is teaching which rests on people’s life experiences.
Mike Miller, Educating and Organizing

Community organizing involves mobilizing people to work together to solve shared problems.
Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, Community Organizing and Development, Third Ed.

In general, the term community organizing refers to the process that engages people, organizations, and communities toward the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of life, and social justice.
Marion Orr, Transforming the City

CO is a values-based process by which people – most often low- and moderate-income people previously absent from decision-making tables – are brought together in organizations to jointly act in the interest of their ‘communities’ and the common good.
Neighborhood Funders Group, The Community Organizing Toolbox

Organizing tends to emphasize a process focused on engaging individuals in their own terms, in order to achieve collective goals related to a bigger picture of social justice.

What is Community Organizing?

How is Community Organizing Relevant to Open Access Outreach?

There are different approaches to organizing. The Midwest Academy identifies 5 primary methods. A varied approach can appeal to researchers’ self-interest, cultivate “homegrown” leadership potential, and reach out in multiple ways.

Method	Traditional CO Examples	OA Activity Examples
Direct service	Affordable housing development	Building an open repository
	Insulating or weatherizing homes	Mediated deposit of articles into a repository
	Shelter	Creating copyright addenda
	Soup kitchen	Providing consulting for copyright negotiations
Education	Issue research	Seminars on OA
	Teach people how to look for an apartment	Webpages with resources on OA
	Cultural events	Tailored listserv delivering OA info of interest to the particular academic discipline
Self-help	Neighborhood clean-up day	Faculty resolutions/policies
	Baby sitting co-op	Self-archiving of publications
Advocacy	Propose laws or regulations on behalf of people who don’t necessarily know that it is being done	Research collaborations to investigate disciplinary aspects of open access
		Proposing policies for research teams/departments/institutions
Direct action		Advocating for funder and/or government mandates
	The people who have the problem take action to solve it	Authors negotiate with publishers
	Make the city clean up the street or provide child care	Create/support new OA journals as alternative publishing venues, or convert TA journals

Adapted from the Midwest Academy’s table of organizing methods

OA Organizing in Practice

OA activities by librarians may not initially be conceived as community organizing campaigns; however, the characteristics of effective organizing campaigns can apply directly to OA activities:

- Assess the “community” to be organized
- Create a core committee or group
- Collaboratively develop plans of action
- Prepare well for “actions”
- Cultivate individual relationships
- Build strong communications
- Keep things moving forward

Organizing campaigns can draw upon greater resources if they are large-scale and centrally-coordinated. However, without the flexibility to adapt to the specific group or disciplinary culture, perceived needs, and self-interests, their effectiveness is jeopardized.

Embedded librarians within a research context are well-positioned to develop community, but may lack the support a central organizing institution could lend.

Reflections

While certain elements of community organizing models may be inappropriate to the academic environment, others can inform strategies to effectively help a research community transition to more openness.

Librarians embedded within research groups are ideally positioned, as conduits between the information world and health research communities, to use strategies informed by community organizing models to support research transition. Connecting embedded librarians with greater central planning and resources could strengthen this approach.

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