



V.O.I.C.E
(VIRGINIANS ORGANIZED FOR
INTERFAITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT)

Why Organize?

WHAT IS V.O.I.C.E.?

- Founded in 2008, VOICE draws together residents of four Northern Virginia jurisdictions: Prince William, Fairfax, and Arlington counties as well as the City of Alexandria. This multi-racial, multi-faith organization includes nearly 50 member institutions (churches, synagogues, mosques).
- VOICE is a broad-based, strictly non-partisan citizens' **power organization** taking action on issues that affect the most vulnerable families and communities in Northern Virginia.
- Based on the premise that **organizing begins with listening/relationship building** and acts on **collective interests**.

WHAT IS POWER?

Power is defined as:

The ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something.

Types of Power:

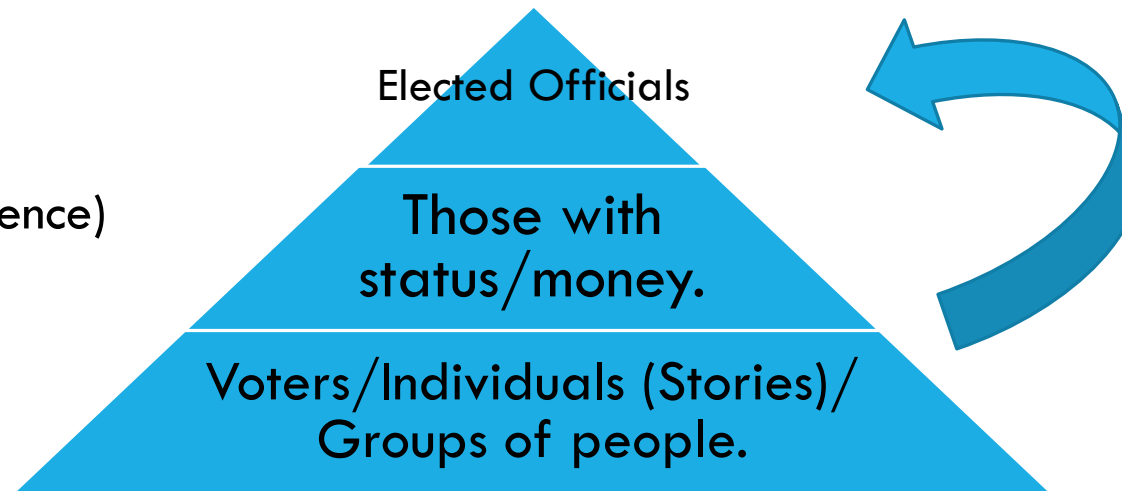
Political, Economic, Status (influence)

Voting, People Power

Who has Power:

We **organize** to expand

our power base so we can influence those who have greater influence & political and financial power.



ACTIVISM VS. ORGANIZING

ACTIVISM:

- Activism tends to be reactive. For example, when the first immigration ban was signed, activists flocked to the airports to protest (sometimes effective, sometimes not).
- Activism has a tendency to occur within an echo chamber/ does not require people to step outside their bubbles. Doesn't ask you to question your world view.
- Activism is important because it brings media attention to an issue/ raises awareness. Shows those in power that we are watching/listening.
- Individuals

ORGANIZING:

- Organizing is proactive and deliberate. The process tends to be slower but seeks to bring about longer term change.
- Organizing requires building relationships with people outside of our bubbles to create the broadest possible support base.
- Organizing seeks to move issues into actionable items from something as small as putting a new stop sign in a neighborhood to as big as influencing an election.
- Institutions

POWER THROUGH RELATIONSHIP BUILDING



Human beings do not exist in isolation. All of our interactions take place in the context of our relationships to each other.

When we strip away all of our material possessions what we really have left is each other.

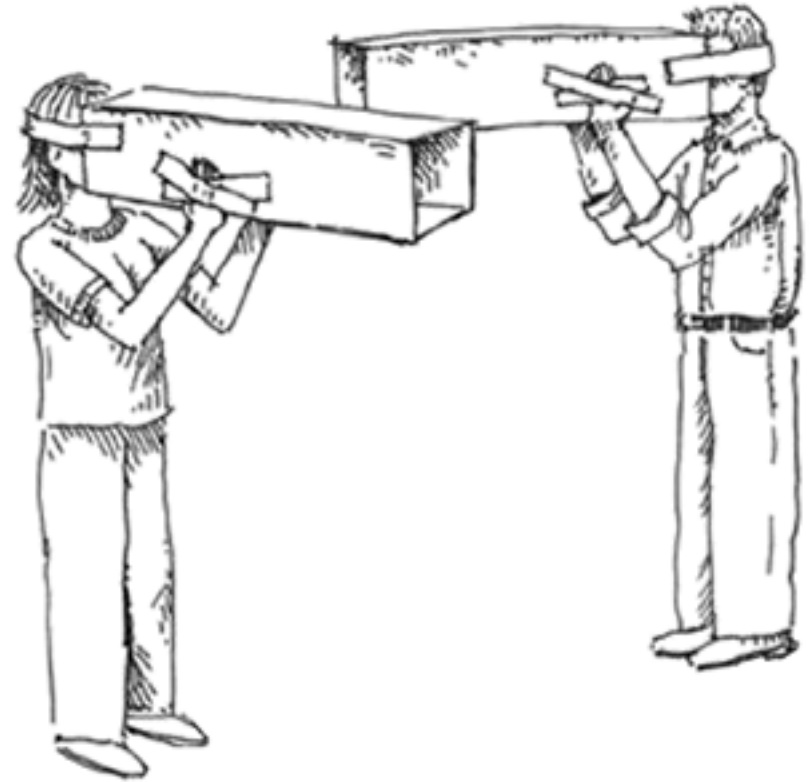
Our external lives might look different but our universal experiences as human beings are the same. We all know what it means to struggle in some way. We have all experienced fear, sadness, anger, grief, and joy.

Through relationship building we can connect to each other on a human level and see ourselves in each other.

Ubuntu: African concept that means: 'I am what I am because of who we all are'.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE OF OUR BUBBLE

- There is nothing wrong with wanting to be a member of a community where you feel a sense of belonging.
- However, people see the world through a filter or personal bias which means by ourselves, we never really see the “whole picture.”
- By building relationships with people who are different from ourselves and hearing their stories, it allows us to see a bigger piece of the picture and develop a better understanding of how other people see the world.



WHY DOES ORGANIZING BEGIN WITH LISTENING?

- We cannot assume that we know what other people have experienced or how they feel.
- Listening to the stories of others helps us to connect with others on a human level and understand issues from a broader perspective.
- When we listen to others tell their stories we can find areas of common interest and common concern that we didn't know existed previously.
- We listen to identify leaders who are willing and able to take action on the issues that have been identified.

AFTER LISTENING SESSIONS:

- Compare and compile data from listening sessions.
- What are common issues or problems that show up on the list?
- Was there anyone who seemed passionate enough about an issue to want to take a leadership role?
- Did we hear any stories during the listening sessions related to our priority areas that might help sway people?
- Which issues have actionable solutions?
- What have other communities done to solve this problem?



RESEARCH

WHAT GOES INTO MAKING THIS CHANGE?

- What have other communities done to solve this problem?
- What are the resources needed?

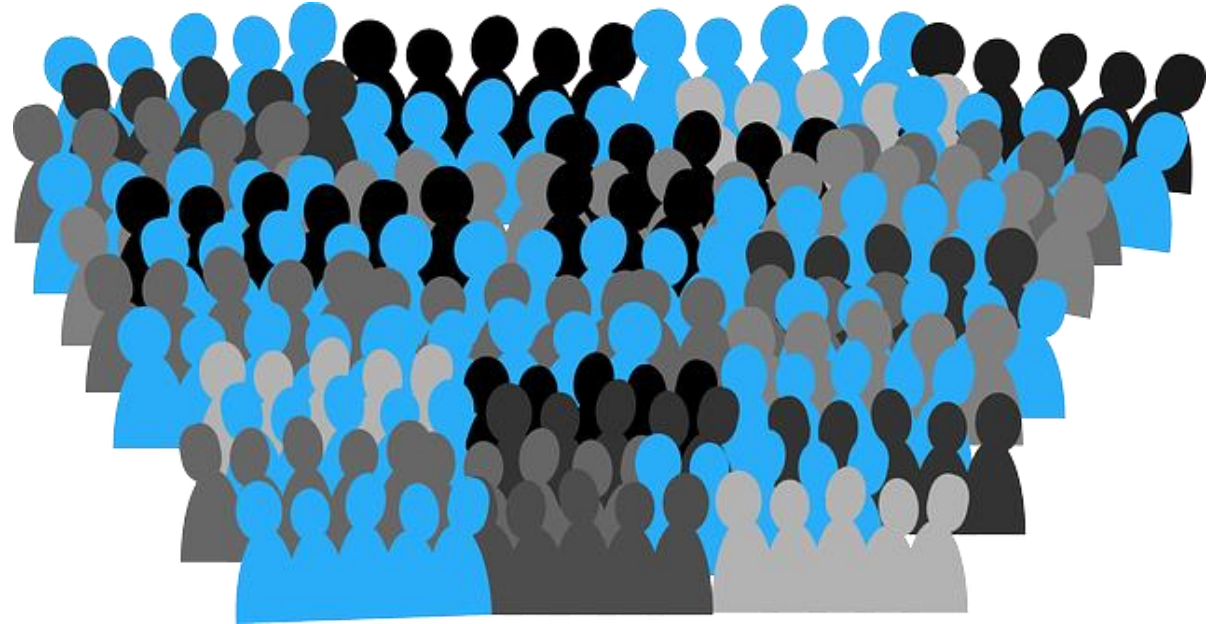


WHO HAS THE POWER TO MAKE THIS CHANGE?

- Relationship building with people in power.
- Areas of common interest/ Mutual Benefit.
- Are they willing to work with us on our issues?
- Invite them to public action.

PUBLIC ACTION

- A large public action meeting is scheduled.
- People in power are invited to make a public show of support regarding our issues.
- People in power are prepped before hand so they know what will happen.
- Stories that were discovered in listening sessions are shared.
- Public Accountability.



WHAT MIGHT THIS LOOK LIKE WITH A REAL ISSUE?

EXAMPLE:

Problem: Listening sessions turn up stories about Muslim students who are fasting for Ramadan and must remain in the cafeteria for their lunch period.

Story/Speaker: Identify a leader or student who would be willing to share about this challenge in a public forum in the presence of someone who has the power to implement change.

Research: What have other communities done to solve this problem? What are the resources needed? Who has the power to help us? Meet with people in power who have something to gain and are willing to work with us on this issue.

Actionable Solution: Other schools allow fasting students to sit in the library instead of the cafeteria. We get the person with power on board to help us implement change.

Public Action Held: Prep person with power, Invite person with power to public action event. Hold person in power publicly accountable.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

SHOW UP: We need people to attend big “action” meetings like the one coming up on May 21st. It is very important and impactful for public officials and people in power to see a diverse but unified group of concerned citizens. We make a statement that these are issues that are important to all of us even if we are not directly impacted by them ourselves. We are a coalition of institutions- we have consistency.

BRING A FRIEND: See above.

MAKE AN INTRODUCTION: Who do you know that may be interested in working with us (ex. Teachers, administrators) that you would be willing to connect us with.

LISTEN: What groups are you a part of that may be willing to do a listening session? We will help you.

DEEPER INVOLVEMENT: Come to smaller meetings and trainings, meet folks from other institutions, share what you have heard while listening, research possible solutions, etc.