

ECON Website
What Community Organizing is Not
August, 2010

- **Community Organizing is Not Social Work**

Social work involves doing things for people. Community organizing involves doing things with people. Saul Alinsky, the founder of community organizing, often said that the golden rule of Jesus is “do for others as they would do for you,” but that the iron rule of community organizing is “never do for others what they can do for themselves.” While social work is valuable when people are in a crisis, doing for others often creates dependency and does not develop peoples’ skills and talents. Community organizing is about teaching people the skills of successful and powerful citizens’ participation.

- **Community Organizing is Not a Political Party**

Community organizing seeks to involve all people of good will in a neighborhood, regardless of their political party. It listens to residents’ concerns and seeks to bring all these people together to solve these concerns. It seeks to work with and hold accountable all government officials, regardless of their political party affiliation.

- **Community Organizing is Not a Movement**

Movements tend to focus on a single theme and are often dependent upon one or a few charismatic leaders. Community organizing seeks to solve many issues and has many volunteer leaders. Community organizing can cooperate with movements, but after the movement is over, community organizing continues its work in the local community.

- **Community Organizing is Not a “Bürger Initiative”/Citizens’ Initiative**

Citizen initiatives are similar to movements, often focused on a single theme, lead by one or two volunteers, and lacking an organizational structure. When the theme has been solved, everyone goes home. Community organizing builds long-term and multi-theme organizations, and is lead by many volunteers. When a set of themes have been solved, the community organization goes back to the residents, listening for the next step of problems to be solved or visions to be achieved.