

Vermont Workers' Center – Anatomy of an Organizing Conversation

Part I – Issues	
Why?	To identify the person's issues. People get involved because of self-interest. It's the organizer's job to find out how to connect people to the campaign through their issue.
How?	Listen. Ask specific questions. Don't make assumptions. Drill down until you fully understand the issue. It's the organizer's job to speak less and let the person talk.
What to say?	Is affordable, quality healthcare a challenge for you and your family? What about our system isn't working for you? What would you like to see changed?
Part II – Orientation to Organizing	
Why?	To align the person's issue with the idea of Organizing. It's important for people to understand why organizing matters. It's the organizer's job to excite people about a vision for change through organizing and collective action.
How?	Agitate. Move from "I" to "We." Use their specific issue as an example. Explain the teeter-totter (i.e. balance of power).
What to say?	Who makes the decisions about how (their issue) works? If you and I were involved in making these decisions, would it look differently? What could you do right now to change it? What if 4,000 Vermonters did the same thing?
Part III – Innoculation	
Why?	To prepare people for the opposition. People hear the dominant message all the time (i.e. media, decision-makers, ruling class). It's the organizer's job to prepare people for what they will likely hear from those invested in the status quo or are obstacles to change.
How?	Refer back to the teeter-totter (i.e. people on the other side of the teeter-totter want us to believe...)
What to say?	You are going to hear (A,B,C) from people who don't want the system to change (i.e. insurance companies). A = "We're tied too much to the federal system and won't get the federal waivers." B = "We can't afford it; people will use the system too much." C = "The quality of care won't be as good. We'll have waiting lines or death panels."
Part IV – Ask	
Why?	To move people towards action. People will build their commitment by participating in the campaign. It's the organizer's job to ask people to do things, otherwise it's not an organizing conversation!
How?	Asks should be appropriate to their level of involvement, but push them to do more. Remember that asking people to do things is not only OK, but it's the only way to fix their situation and it is in their own self-interest.
What to say?	Right now, this is what VWC members are doing: * Will you get two friends to do the photo petition? * Can you get one of your neighbors to come to the statehouse with us next week? * Will you write a letter to the editor?
Part V – Follow-up	
Why?	To establish accountability and make sure people have the tools to accomplish their tasks. People need to set goals and deadlines. It's the organizer's job to check back in and make sure people followed through.
How?	Be specific about what the assignment is (names, numbers, etc.) and when it should be completed. Set up a time to follow-up on the specific assignment.
What to say?	Great, so you're going to do (X). How about I check in with you next Wednesday at 3PM to see how it went. I'll give you a call, what's your number?