

# Building Community

## Three (not so) Easy Pieces

Lesson: We build healthy, resilient communities by employing *all* of these strategies – and not by relying on any one of them alone.



### COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

**DEFINITION:** the process of developing a politically powerful constituency of resident participants to effect social change in their own communities. The “real deal” of grassroots organizing activities.

**GENERAL APPROACH:** Conflict 🗣️ Bottom Up

- **STRENGTH:** Builds strength and power through the real world political process. Before you can work on your agenda, you need the power to get your agenda on the table and move it through the system.
- **WEAKNESS:** Can foster a culture of difference, mistrust and indifference. Builds communities of interest and need, but not necessarily a community of shared concern and purpose.



### COMMUNITY BUILDING

**DEFINITION:** Developing community assets already in place – experienced leaders, skills, knowledge, infrastructure – to leverage the capacity of citizens to address common issues.

**GENERAL APPROACH:** Collaboration 🤝 Across

- **STRENGTH:** Gets people, communities and interests to sit around a common table. They pledge their attention, commitment and resources to address common issues.
- **WEAKNESS:** Not all the stakeholders are on the same page in terms of resources, skills and political power. By itself, collaboration can gloss over these differences and often falls apart when they surface – as they ultimately do.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**DEFINITION:** Similar to community building in its emphasis on collaboration, but has a heavier emphasis on planning, especially where applied to capital and resource development. This planning involves community leaders with access to resources; government and other public officials, and experts in various areas.

**GENERAL APPROACH:** Planning 📏 Top Down

- **STRENGTH:** Expertise, resources, credible data and skills are available to communities to inform their organized response to systemic health and social problems.
- **WEAKNESS:** Can foster a client-expert relationship and a culture of dependency on outside assistance and services to “solve” problems. Can weaken community resilience over time.

