



## Organizer Roundtable: Leadership Development for Sustainable Organizing

At the heart of organizing is developing leadership that can guide and influence a community or organization toward accomplishing its goals. Enhancing current leadership capacity and ensuring a pipeline of future leaders is crucial to ensuring long-term organizational success.

On January 27, 2010, Chaka Mkali and Kristy Clemons of HOPE Community, Pamela Twiss of Take Action Minnesota and Maria Zavala of Family and Children’s Services spoke at an Alliance for Metropolitan Stability Organizer Roundtable about their respective work on developing sustainable leadership within their communities.

**Chaka Mkali**, director of organizing and community building, and **Kristy Clemons**, lead organizer, work for [HOPE Community](#). HOPE is an organization working to build a sustainable model in Minneapolis’ Phillips neighborhood through community organization, active education, leadership and affordable housing development.. Through HOPE’s Sustainable Progress through Engaging Active Citizens (SPEAC) program, Chaka and Kristy engage young leaders in an eight-month organizing and leadership training.

The training incorporates organizing concepts such as power-mapping, issue-cutting, self-interest and conducting one-on-ones. But more importantly, the program creates opportunities for the young leaders to build confidence in their skills and develop self-esteem through actual organizing projects.

*“People don’t come in the door wanting to organize, but leadership will rise if you have the right process.” – Chaka Mkali*

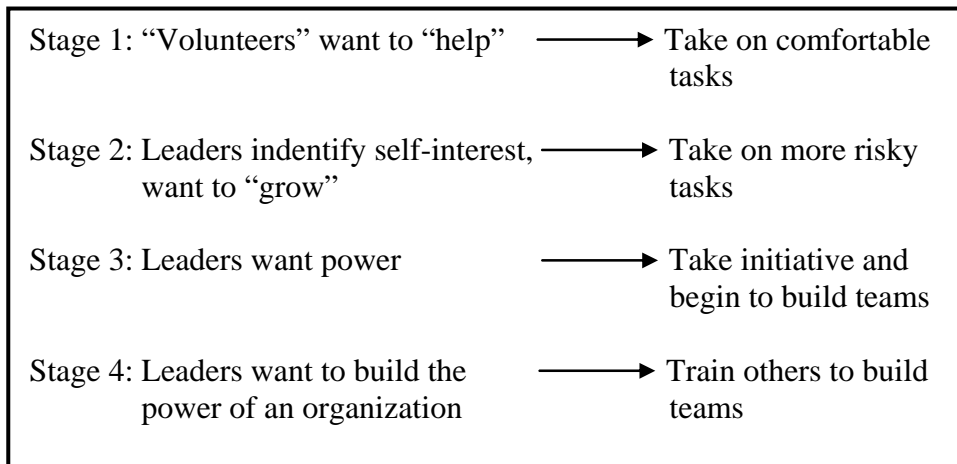
One of the projects that SPEAC leaders have been engaged in is the [Peavey Park Civic Action Project](#). The young leaders organized around the issue of improving the park as a community resource, and were successful in getting the Minneapolis Park Board to improve facilities and provide services. Through this project, the group learned what collective leadership meant and how it could lead to building more power to create the change that they wanted in their community.

*“The key is to get people involved based on what their interest is and then find ways for them to step up.” – Kristy Clemons*

Both Chaka and Kristy emphasized how it is important to start and build on the individual’s talents and capacities and provide mentorship throughout their development. It is important that emerging leaders are comfortable in the role that they are playing so they continue to build their confidence and eventually take on more responsibility.

**Pamela Twiss**, program and organizing director of [Take Action Minnesota](#), provided the group with a model of how leaders can move and develop in several stages.

At the start, there is often an initial desire “to help” an organization by volunteering. At this stage, potential leaders would be willing to do tasks that fit their skill sets and do not challenge them beyond their comfort level.



The second stage is when leaders express the desire “to grow.” This is the stage when leaders begin to explore their reasons for getting involved and the relationships they want to develop. Leaders recognize how their self-

interest matches up with those of other people. At this point, leaders are willing to take on riskier tasks.

The third stage is when leaders recognize that they want the personal power to change things. Leaders realize that they want their own stories recognized and known. At this point, leaders are ready to build teams to organize other people to effect change.

The fourth stage is when leaders recognize that they want to build power not only toward an issue they care about, but of the organization they are involved with. Leaders recognize that real power resides in groups and organizations and not in isolation. At this stage, leaders attach themselves to the organization and begin to train other leaders to build their own teams. Pamela describes how this stage in a leader’s development has led to movements that resulted in far-reaching changes. The group also discussed how this is not the end stage for the model – for example, additional stages might include building a community or a movement.

*“Organizers need to have conversations with leaders about their self-interest, finding out what they care about as individuals, not as part of a mob of people that care about an issue.”*  
 – Pamela Twiss

As an organizer for [Family and Children’s Services](#), Maria Zavala has one golden rule in organizing: do not do things for people that they can do for themselves. She described her organizing work with youth in schools, as well as residents in neighborhoods and apartment communities. Maria underscored the importance of bringing people together to prevent and solve problems, and more importantly to take action for themselves to create the changes they want.

Maria also mentioned how culture should be factored in when organizing with communities of color. For example, in her work with Latino immigrants it is important to recognize that people who don’t have documents might be afraid to take any of the steps in the above model. She echoed the previous speakers’ emphasis on starting with the current capacity of a leader and

being able to recognize where their skills and talents are. It is always a balancing act for organizers when to hold leaders accountable and when not to push too much.

Maria also added that it's important for organizers to remember that they don't need to have all the answers. Organizers should always be willing to discover new things and learn with the people they are organizing.

*“Don't do things for people, do things with people.”*  
– Maria Zavala

The roundtable wrapped up with an open discussion with the participants and presenters. Some participants raised the issue of the pitfalls of talking on behalf of the communities they work with. The panel spoke of the importance of both leaders and organizers checking in with the communities they work with to make sure they are truly representing their constituents.

### **About Organizer Roundtables**

Organizer Roundtables are one of the Alliance's strategies to build a network of organizers that work on issues related to growth and development in the Twin Cities. Roundtables are led by and for organizers and are held monthly at the Alliance's offices in Minneapolis. Please check our web site at [www.metrostability.org](http://www.metrostability.org) for upcoming roundtables.