



Organizer Learning Project

Centering Community Organizers' Ways of Knowing

American Evaluation Association Conference
October 25, 2024

Welcome!

While we are waiting for people to arrive and settle in, feel free to download and peruse our report:



***“Tilling the Soil:
Cultivating Organizer
Learning and Growth”***

The Organizer Learning Project is:

A project of **Grassroots Solutions**

Funded by **The California Endowment**


Led by **Katie Fox, Gigi Barsoum, Margaret Post**




Organizer Learning Project

**Origin Story,
Evolution, and
Approach**





*“Organizers are **relational and visionary**.
They are **strategists and tacticians**,
dreamers and realists...Organizers believe in
worlds that seem impossible, and through
their slow, steady work, these worlds become
probable and real.”*

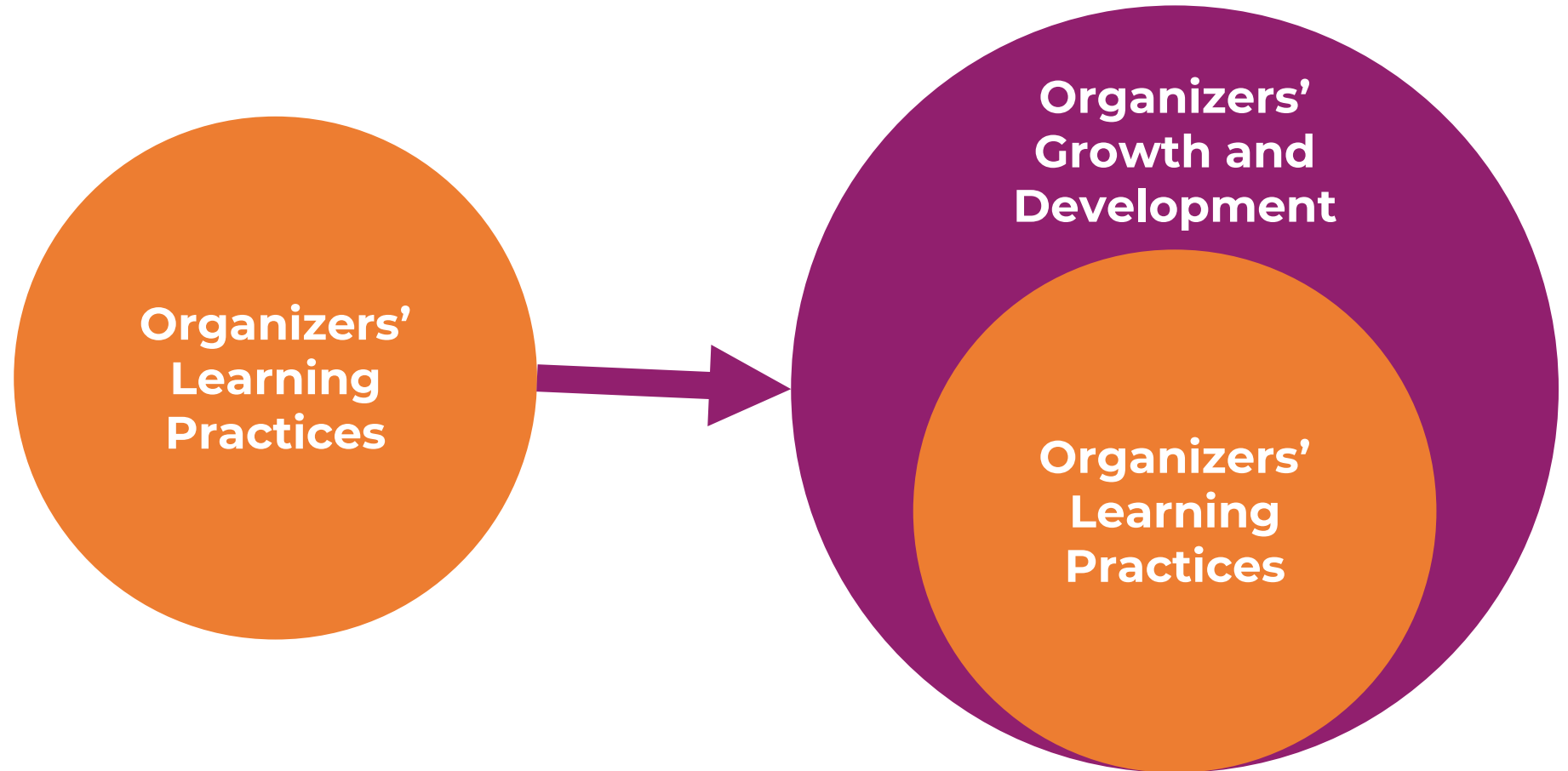


“How organizers learn is different from how funders learn...Organizing is a peculiar culture. There is a deep ambivalence among organizers around intellectual production, a resistance to intellectualizing.”



How would it change our approach to learning projects and partnerships with organizers if we centered and oriented to their learning processes, practices, and pace?

Evolution of the Project



Context

- **Increased philanthropic interest in organizing** → more learning projects and evaluations of organizing.
- **Evaluators centering organizer voices** and experiences to enhance relevance and use.
- **Staffing crisis in the organizing field** that is driving a reimagining of organizer development and growth.

Approach and Methods

15 Organizer Learning Conversations

- 2-hour conversations
- 75 organizers

17 Interviews with Field Sages

- 1-hour interviews

4 Sensemaking Sessions with Organizers

- 1.5-hour sessions
- 24 organizers

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**Findings about
Organizer Learning**



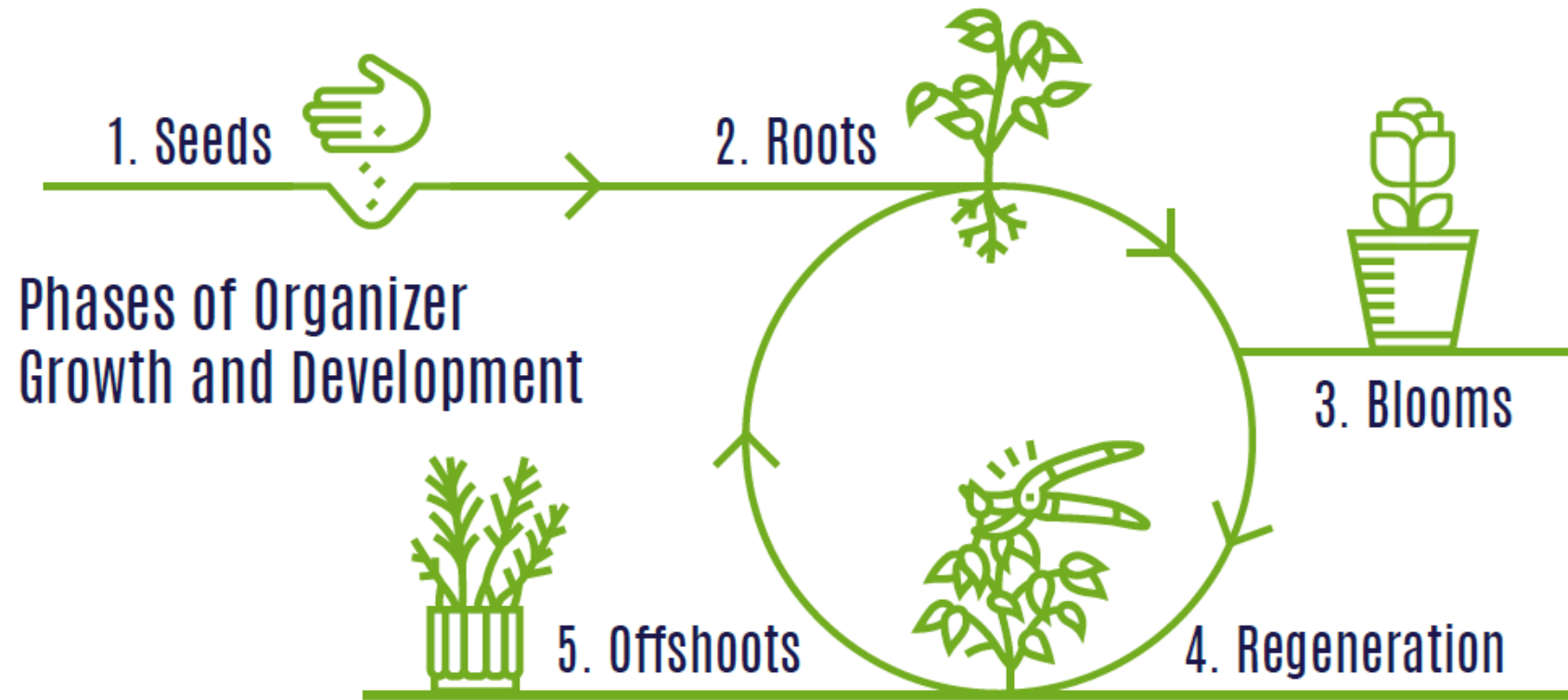
Findings: Elements of Organizer Growth and Learning

5 Phases: Seeds, Roots, Blooms, Regeneration, Offshoots

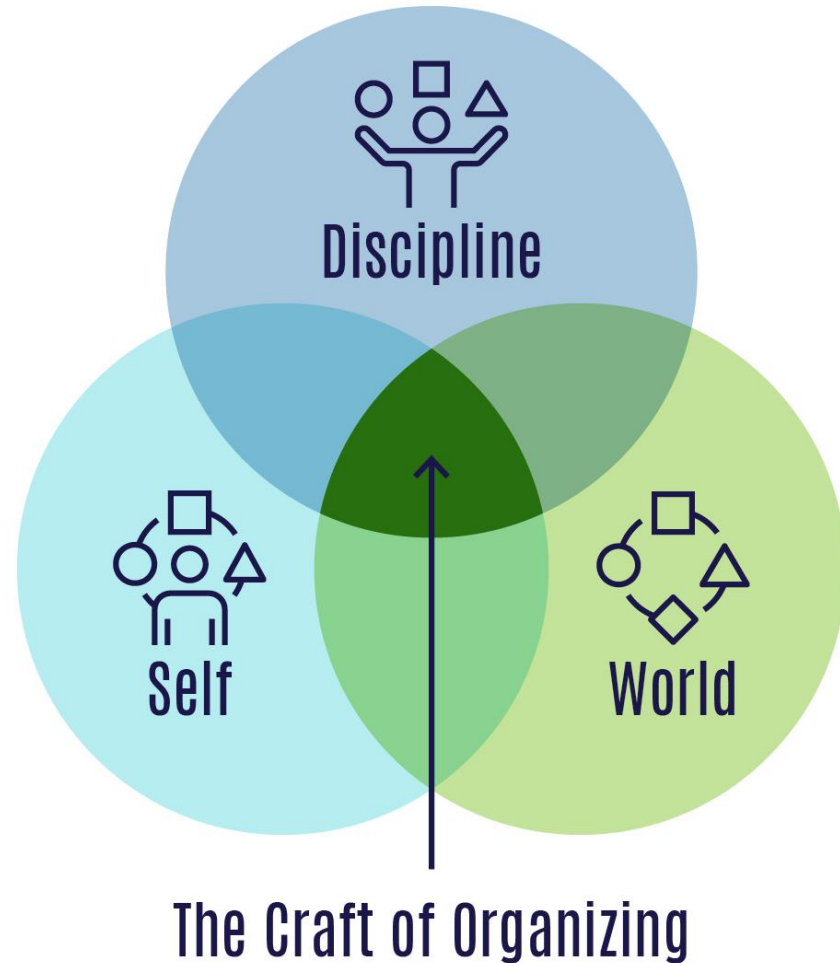
3 Dimensions: Discipline, Self, and World

2 Nutrients: Experiences and Relationships

1. Learning is ongoing, decentralized, and integrated in organizing practice.



2. The aims of organizing are multi-dimensional and so is organizer learning.



“The point of organizing is to make communities the protagonist of their politics.”

3. Relationships and experiences are the nutrients of organizer learning. Reflective practice is the bridge.



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Implications for Evaluators



1. Ground in the full complexity of organizing.

- Build in space and time to learn about community organizing - what it is, what it is not.
- Deep listening
- Partner with an organizing translator/navigator

2. Align with organizers' learning processes, practices, and pace.

- Understand the learning cultures and practices of organizing groups you work with.
- Learn with and from, instead of acting upon.
- Be flexible in approach and pace.

3. Be in relationship with organizers.

- Be honest and authentic about your self-interest and the organizational/collective interests behind the projects.
- Build trust - show up and follow through.
- Be expansive in what roles you can play to support organizer learning and growth.

Roles for Evaluators

- **Documentarians:** Recording what organizers are doing, achieving, and learning.
- **Weavers:** Finding patterns across organizing efforts and groups.
- **Translators and Amplifiers:** Making organizing visible and legible.
- **Mirrors:** Facilitating high-level reflection.

Questions?

For more information about this project,
please contact: Katie at

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Thank you!

