



Organizer Learning Project

# **Centering Community Organizers' Ways of Knowing**

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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.”*



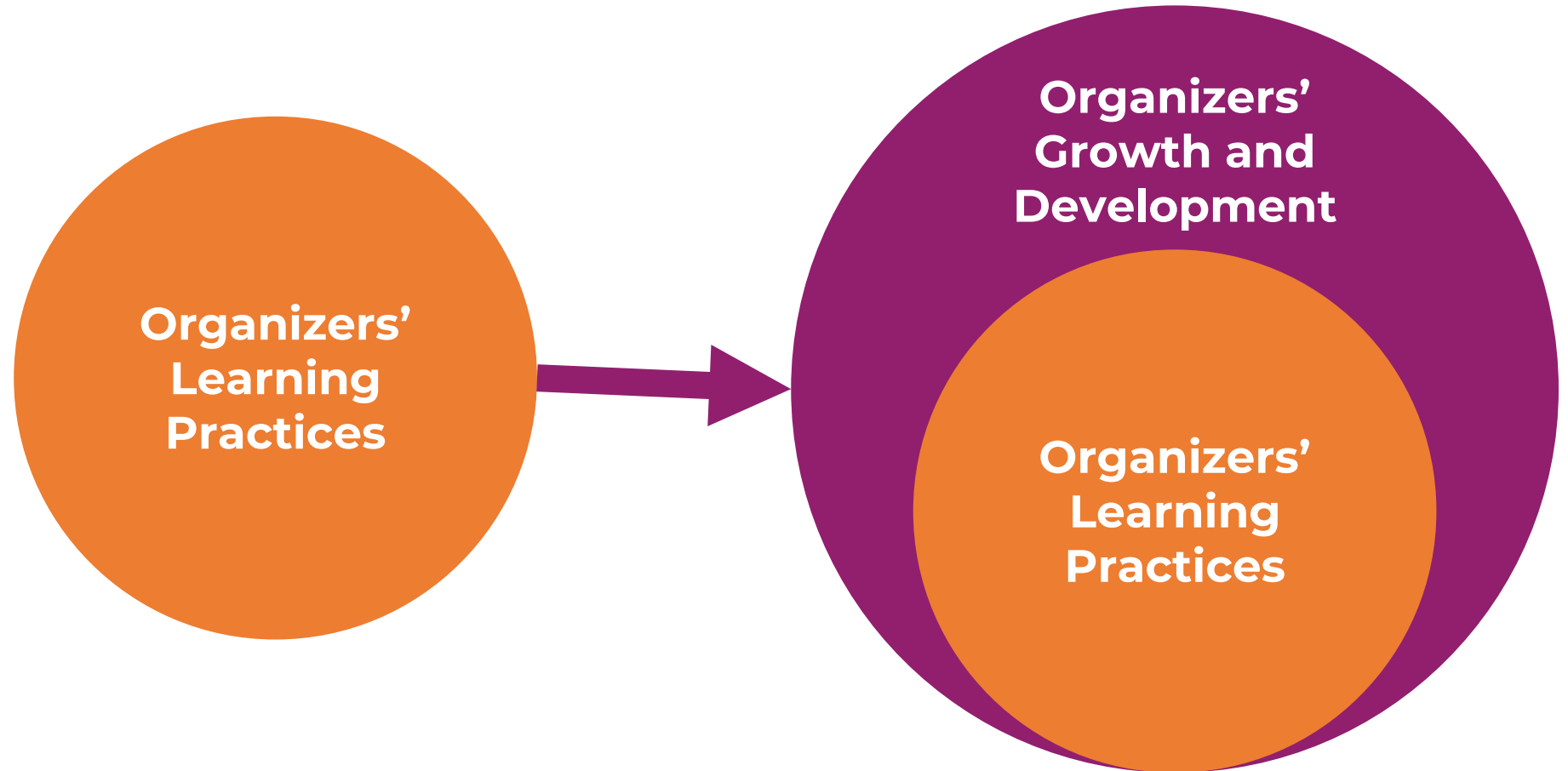
***“How organizers learn is different from how funders learn...Organizing is a peculiar culture. There is a deep ambivalence among organizers around intellectual production, a resistance to intellectualizing.”***

*-Seth Borgos*



**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**



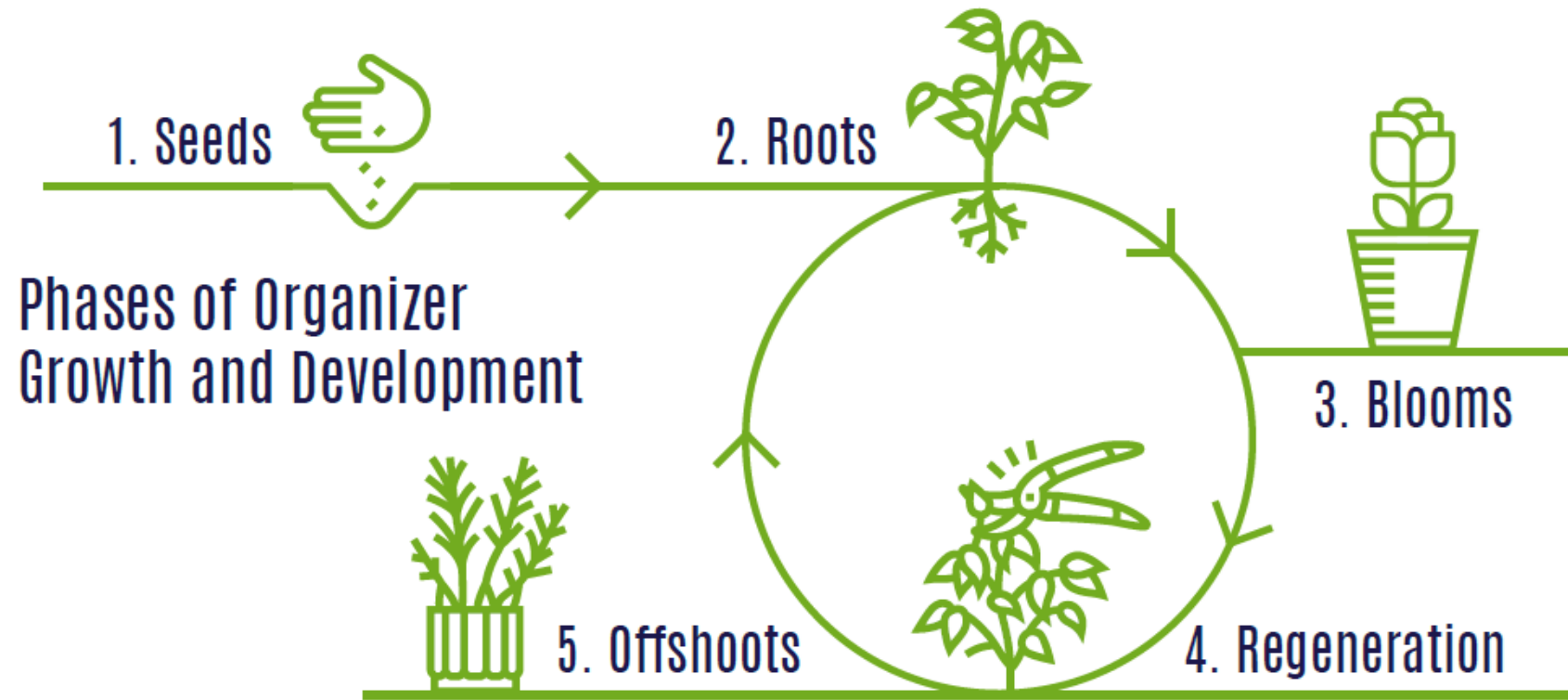
# Findings: Elements of Organizer Growth and Learning

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

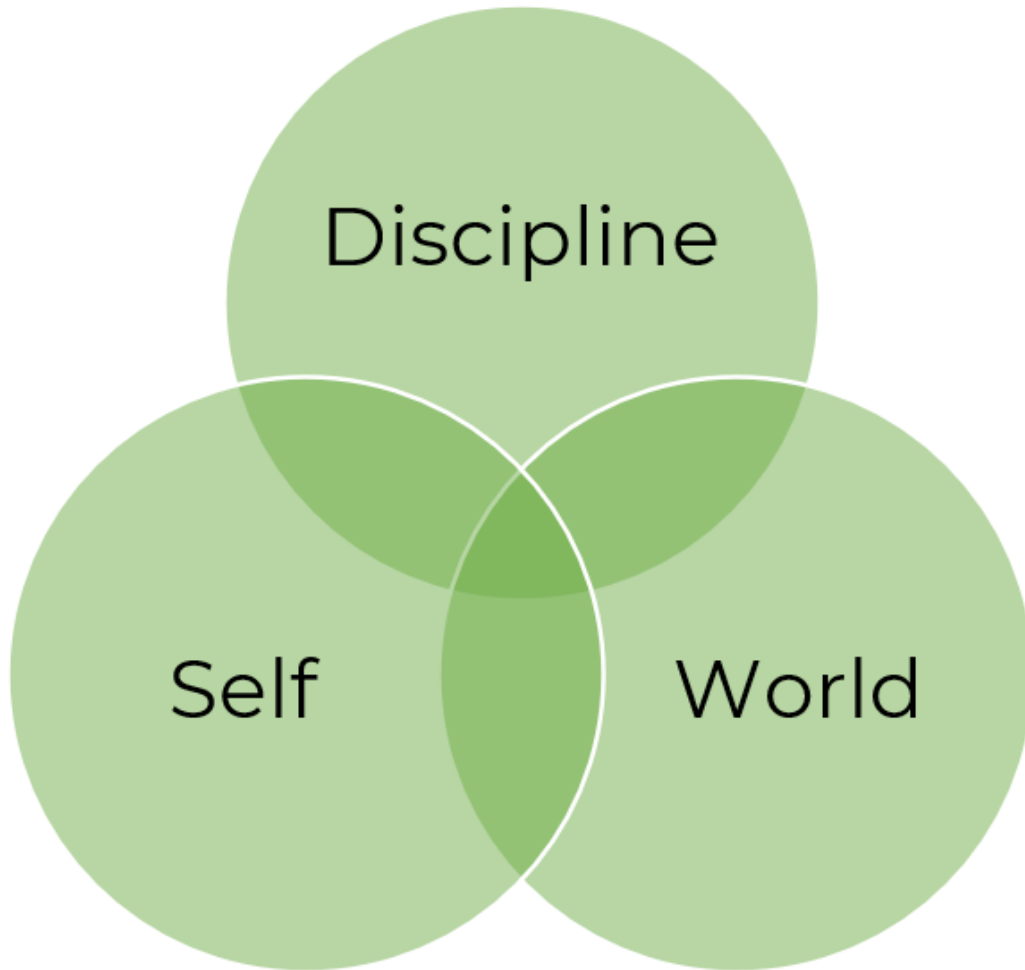
**3 Dimensions:** Discipline, Self, and World

**2 Nutrients:** Experiences and Relationships

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

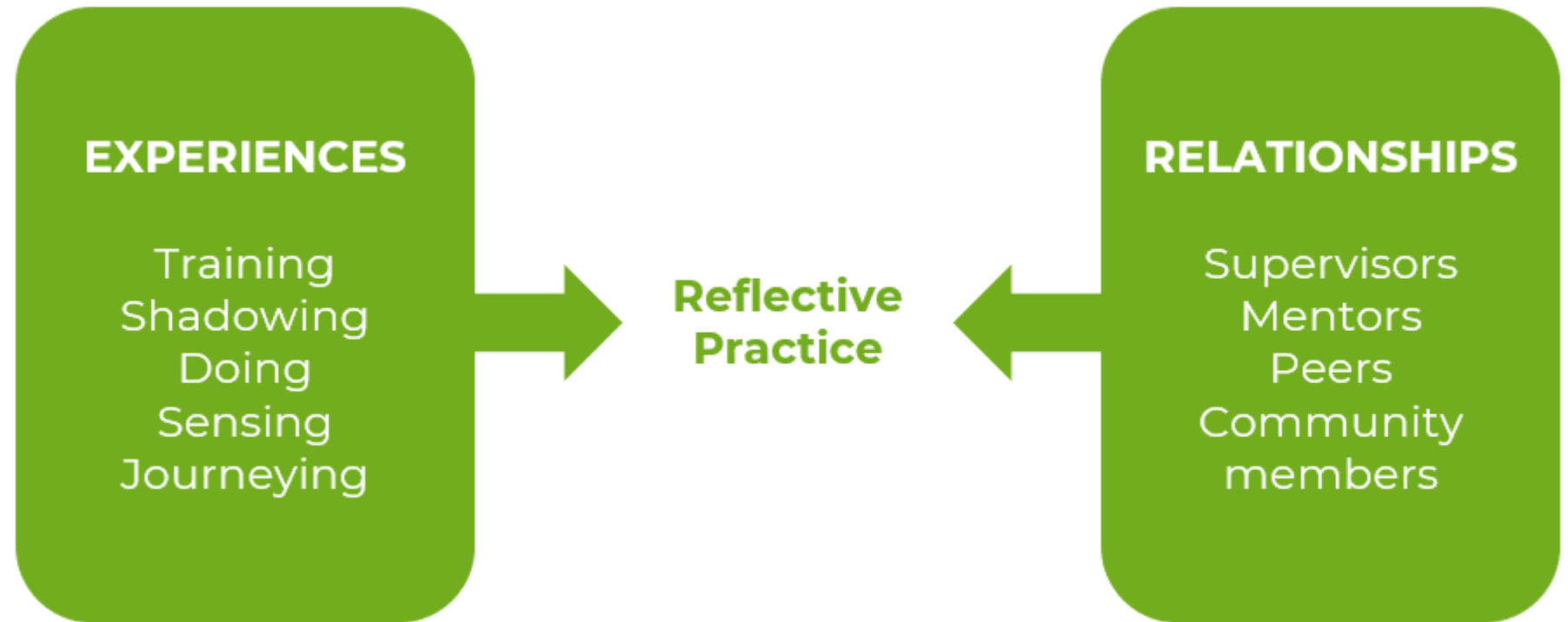


## 2. The aims of organizing are multi-dimensional and so is organizer learning.



*“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!**

