

About Organizing Engagement



An introduction to our purpose, mission, values, practices, and editorial team

About Us

Organizing Engagement is an online publication dedicated to advancing knowledge, understanding, and practice at the intersection of education organizing, engagement, and equity. Our website collects ideas, models, strategies, policies, or research and shares them in the form of introductions, interviews, profiles, and other content.

Our mission is to become a trusted online resource that makes a contribution to networking and democratizing knowledge in this vitally important field. We hope the website will be of use to local leaders, organizers, and practitioners, as well as the many nonprofits, institutions, advocates, and funders working in partnership and solidarity with them. To date, more than a hundred individuals and organizations have contributed to the development of the resources featured on the site.

Organizing Engagement was launched with support from the **Nellie Mae Education Foundation**, which champions work that prioritizes community goals that challenge racial inequities and advance excellent, student-centered public education for all New England youth.

What It Is (and Isn't)

Organizing Engagement is an *information-organizing project*, and our purpose is to connect people to important ideas or resources they might not have encountered otherwise, while also making those ideas and resources more accessible to busy practitioners who may not have the time to track down valuable work scattered across innumerable websites, books, articles, and reports.

We also want to recognize some of the leaders, thinkers, organizers, and practitioners who are making invaluable contributions in their fields by providing a forum that allows them to speak about their work and what they've learned over the years. Our interviews feature a diversity of voices on education organizing, engagement, and equity sharing their journeys, insights, and wisdom in their own words.

While some people see organizing, engagement, and equity as distinct fields, Organizing Engagement brings together ideas and insights from all three domains of knowledge and practice. We believe that researchers, educators, organizers, families, and community members can and should all learn from one another, and that shared knowledge and mutual understanding is the bedrock of successful partnerships. When we make an effort to understand others, it helps us understand ourselves.

Organizing Engagement publishes introductions to a variety of models, policies, and approaches that share similar goals and values, but it's important to keep in mind that the work of organizing, engagement, and equity is extraordinarily complex and nuanced. A strategy that works in one school or community may not work in another, and our resources should be seen as starting points for strategic thinking or as tools for ongoing dialogue in teams, organizations, and communities. Our resources are not intended to be comprehensive guides to the specific actions that should be taken in any given school, organization, or community.

We are also aware that a website can only do so much and that no resource or project will be able to serve every purpose or satisfy every need. The real work of education organizing, engagement, and equity happens in communities across the country every day, and in the many partnerships, alliances, and coalitions that organize to support them. Achieving true educational equity will require the dedicated commitment of millions, and Organizing Engagement aims only to make one contribution to the cause among many.

How It Works

- **Accessibility:** The resources featured on Organizing Engagement are written to be understandable to diverse practitioners working at the intersection of education organizing, engagement, and equity. We try to avoid jargon, abstractions, and vagueness in favor of specificity, explanation, and illustrative examples whenever we can.
- **Curation:** We distill foundational knowledge, ideas, and insights into introductory resources. Our goal is to develop and continually improve a set of substantive, well-organized resources that will help busy leaders, organizers, and practitioners find useful information quickly.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Knowledge:** We intentionally feature models, voices, and practices from a wide variety of fields such as community organizing, deliberative dialogue, civic engagement, trauma-informed practice, or youth leadership and development. We believe

that useful knowledge can and does transcend disciplines.

- **Open Sourcing:** With the exception of interviews, our resources are published under a Creative Commons [Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license](#) that allows others to freely reuse and modify our content under certain conditions.
- **Collaboration:** All of our resources are the product of a working partnership or derived from the work and expertise of researchers, thinkers, and practitioners. We strive to work openly and collaboratively whenever possible.
- **Acknowledgment:** Our resources acknowledge or reference the researchers, thinkers, and practitioners who either contributed directly to the creation of the resource or whose work was instrumental in its development. Every contribution is acknowledged.
- **Iteration:** Our resources will be regularly revised and improved as new information, insights, lessons, and findings emerge over time.
- **Networking:** Our resources include references and links to organizations, practitioners, and readings. One of our goals is to connect practitioners with a national network of resources and expertise.
- **Diversity:** While our editorial team is small, our resources represent a diversity of voices and perspectives. We intentionally seek out and work with thinkers, leaders, and practitioners from varied social, cultural, professional, and academic backgrounds.
- **Equity:** Our work is committed to advancing the cause of educational equity. Our resources are intended to help practitioners address inequity, bias, and discrimination in their schools, organizations, and communities.

Defining Organizing, Engagement, and Equity

The terms *organizing*, *engagement*, and *equity* mean different things to different people, and no single definition can capture the many meanings people have attributed to the terms. In general, one of the best ways to arrive at a meaningful understanding of organizing, engagement, or equity work is to sit down with diverse community members and co-create definitions through dialogue and listening.

To define how the terms are used on Organizing Engagement, the editorial team developed the following framework:

- **Organizing = Building Power**
- **Engagement = Sharing Power**
- **Equity = Equalizing Power**

We want to note, however, that our framework builds on generations of thinking and practice—these are not new ideas—and it is closely modeled after the [Power Moves framework for equity and justice](#) developed by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.

The **Building Power-Sharing Power-Equalizing Power framework** guides our editorial team as they make decisions about the resources and voices that will be featured on Organizing Engagement.

For example, if a district establishes a student, parent, or community “advisory committee,” but the committee is not given any decision-making authority, and administrators routinely ignore the advice of members, then the committee would not qualify as an organizing, engagement, or equity strategy—according to our definition—because power is not being built, shared, or equalized. On the other hand, a student, family, or community leadership team that is formally authorized in district policy, given defined leadership roles, authentically involved in school decision-making, and able to publicly criticize or disagree with administrative decisions—without fear of retribution—would meet our definition.

Finally, some readers may ask: But why are we building, sharing, or equalizing power? What’s the end goal?

On Organizing Engagement, we believe that power should be built, shared, and equalized to achieve greater equity in school systems and communities. As one of our interviewees, [Cynthia Silva Parker](#) of the Interaction Institute for Social Change, discusses in her forthcoming interview, there are two dimensions of equity: *process* and *outcomes*. Equalizing power refers to *equity as process*—that is, the strategies used to build greater fairness into systems, such as institutional policies, programs, and formal decision-making bodies. The other dimension, *equity as outcome*, refers to the beneficial results produced by more equitable systems. As Parker says in her interview:

“If we’re talking about race, we could say that equity means being unable to predict outcomes on the basis of race. So right now, if you look at anything we measure in the United States that gives us an idea about wellbeing—whether it’s health, income, wealth, public education, or access to public transit, clean water, or healthy air—well, across all of those indicators, people of color in this country fare worse than white people in the aggregate.

We could say that racial equity will be achieved when reliably predicting worse outcomes for people of color is no longer possible—that when you disaggregate the data about wellbeing, let’s say, it looks exactly like the aggregate numbers. That’s a wonky way of saying that everybody in the country effectively has the same chance at achieving wellbeing, and that wellbeing won’t be determined by race, ethnicity, gender, or other dimensions of identity.”

We couldn’t have said it better.

Editorial Team

Editor

Stephen Abbott

As the editor of Organizing Engagement, Stephen Abbott oversees the editorial process, manages the website, writes original content, and conducts interviews and research. Abbott is also the founder of Abbott & Associates, a consulting firm that works in the fields of public education, civic engagement, and social-change communications. Abbott was previously the director of a regional student, family, and community engagement initiative, supported by the [**Nellie Mae Education Foundation**](#), that provided multiyear grants and technical assistance to districts, schools, and communities across New England.

Contributing Editor

Kip Holley

Dwight “Kip” Holley is a researcher, civic-engagement specialist, and community advocate at the Ohio State University’s [**Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity**](#) and a contributing editor to Organizing Engagement. Holley has worked on a variety of civic-engagement projects in cities and communities across the United States, and his work on community engagement, social capital, and civic leadership synthesizes research from domains as diverse as social psychology, political science,

and economics to describe how racially charged narratives produce inequities in community life. Holley has authored or contributed to a number of reports and publications, including [***The Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Guide to Transformative Change***](#).

Read the [**Organizing Engagement**](#) interview with Kip Holley →

Brand Identity



The Organizing Engagement logo visually represents a diverse group coming together (i.e., organizing, engaging, collaborating, building/sharing power), but the form taken by the group has not been predetermined, engineered, or controlled by convention, history, or establishment power. The image symbolizes the unfolding of an inclusive, co-created, community-determined change process and gestures to the core values we want to uphold on the website.

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