



# Building Creative Communities from the Ground Up

Here are five fresh looks at how nonprofit leaders can revitalize their communities.

By Terrence Fernsler

## Community: The Structure of Belonging

By Peter Block. 254 pages. Hardcover. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, [www.berrett-koehler.com](http://www.berrett-koehler.com).

Leadership is about creating a structure for belonging. The challenge, as Peter Block asserts, is to transform isolation and self-interest into connectedness and caring for the whole. Instead of focusing on problems and blame, we can emphasize possibilities and cooperation.

Problem-solving isn't effective in transforming our wound-edness. Instead, we must learn to be welcoming while being accountable to each other. We participate in creating our world for better or worse, and each of us has the power to help heal it, but not alone.

The most effective unit of transformation is the small group. Questions facilitate transformation better than answers, and Block suggests compelling queries for your next gathering, such as: How much risk are you willing to take? What doubts and reservations do you have? What have others in this room done that has touched you? The power, Block notes, is in the asking, not in the answers. ■

## From the Ground Up: Grassroots Organizations Making Social Change

By Carol Chetkovich and Frances Kunreuther. 215 pages. Softcover. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [www.cornellpress.cornell.edu](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu).

Researchers give much less attention to small nonprofits than large ones, and social-change organizations receive even less. To remedy this situation, the authors of this revealing book studied 16 social-change organizations — groups that transfigure systems by increasing the power of disadvantaged people. They found that many social-change groups have a large reach despite their small size, due to the dedication of staff and constituents.

Leaders of such organizations face problems similar to other nonprofits, but must be especially skilled at setting direction in a participatory way. This book offers keys to doing so on a limited budget, paving the way for grassroots groups to help people become informed, proactive citizens who can make changes for themselves, their families, their communities, and society. ■

## The Creative Community Builder's Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Arts, and Culture

By Tom Borrup. 279 pages. Softcover. St. Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance ([www.fieldstonealliance.org](http://www.fieldstonealliance.org)), available for a discounted price at [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org).

Arts and culture organizations play key roles in community development. They bolster community identity and increase people's potential to understand themselves

and change how they see the world. Such organizations transmit values, bridge cultural boundaries, and stimulate economic development. They trigger innovation that helps communities celebrate their sense of place.

*The Creative Community Builder's Handbook* presents 10 strategies for community revitalization. The book not only shows how communities can come together to raise appreciation for the unique characters of each place, it also explains how to make a community more sustainable. It walks you through a way of tapping the creativity found in every community, turning it into a place where everyone can thrive. ■

## The Community Leadership Handbook

By James F. Krile. 231 pages. Softcover. St. Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance ([www.fieldstonealliance.org](http://www.fieldstonealliance.org)), available for a discounted price at [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org).

In healthy communities, people work together for the common good and have a hand in creating their own futures. Community leaders must be skilled at doing the following:

**Frame ideas** for people, helping them see opportunities in ways that result in effective action.

**Build relationships** marked by trust, reciprocity, and durability.

**Mobilize resources** by involving people throughout the community, moving them to act in support of goals, and engaging those with access to key networks.

James Krile provides exercises and checklists to help use all these skills effectively. The tools he provides take you step by step through the process of building a healthy community, from identifying issues to realizing goals. ■

## Consensus Organizing: Building Communities of Mutual Self-Interest

By Mike Eichler. 271 pages. Softcover. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, [www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com).

Join this experienced community organizer as he describes his journey of discovering and teaching a style called consensus organizing. Consensus leaders, he explains, determine goals through one-on-one conversations and then build strategies cooperatively. You can learn these skills, but doing so requires you to honestly assess yourself.

Mike Eichler adeptly concludes each chapter with thought-provoking questions. Although he provides his own responses (at the back of the book), you'll find it valuable to reflect on these questions yourself.

Eichler shows us how to accomplish more in the long term and unite people rather than divide them. As our society begins to function less divisively and more collaboratively, methods like consensus organizing become vital to understand. ■

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