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Interview with Levana Layendecker

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Active volunteers and participants who are very active on social media, they like this group and they want to do the work, they often share ideas with the organization that they adopt; how can you engage people who are active with your organization to help you do the work, do it with you or for you.

A lot of the time it's a question of whether they will be top down, they think, 'I have to hire a staff person for that'.

A lot of the things I teach are simple, a lot of the professional staff don't use these tools, for instance I had a client concerned about twitter, whether someone would tweet in such a way that would confuse his message or might confuse people; I explained how it worked and why he shouldn't be that concerned, how it would show the way it worked....

It's not that there is not a community to engage, it's that the staff of these smaller nonprofits don't know how to engage them.  Some of the people out there organizing on their own start their own groups, maybe they have a simple petition, groups see that as competition, as if that group is organizing against us.... it's not too difficult to have a conversation about how it can work together, how social media is like a river and it's all floating by in the same direction or we can build dams, getting them over the fear of reaching out to some stranger that they might only meet online..... asking them to join together.... all the principles of organizing apply online....

Environmental group, small business owner, very involved in progressive causes, kind of cool project....

A lot of national groups will send staff to an NOI boot camp, or Net Roots nation, or In Ten conference, a group like MoveOn or whatever they totally get it; some larger groups, like American Friends, they have departments that care about that and everyone else just lets them do that work....

The difference between organizations that have grown up with the internet....the biggest difference is that larger organizations have a pretty clear presence, they have a strategy, with smaller organizations it's rare they've done the basics.  The lack of resources makes a big difference.  It's strangely disproportionate.... The benefit a smaller organization could get is much larger than that a larger organization could get ....

I wouldn't say spending "lots of money" as a proportion of the budget- now I separate the MoveOn's etc- they are spending all of their money online- but other large traditional organizations are not trying to spend a huge percentage, but at least resourcing enough to make significant progress with their online presence.  Just one particular types of groups, like SEIU, invests a lot, but what the UAW invests is nonexistent.... and it depends a lot on the culture of the organization...

They need basic training on how to work with social media, how to engage people in their work.... I participated in a training funded by Dodge foundation mostly for arts organizations, but also for other advocacy groups, and it was packed.  There wasn't anything else like this that 2 or 3 staff people could attend; groups that were trying to do local environmental issues, real grassroots organizing to help reduce global warming; they were starving for that kind of information.  Most of their staff are fellows who are college graduates; their staff are there for a year and will leave, that's a common situation.  It's great to teach organizers those skills and send them out in the world, it needs to be a pretty regular thing.

Affordable is between... it depends.... environmental groups, arts groups can afford $50 - $100, but other groups for hunger or homelessness may only be able to afford $25 - $35 for a day long training.

Something that one of other consultants I work with does is she works with them on a sliding budget, she asks some of the organizations that pay more, so that they can subsidize folks who can't pay more.  So like add $10 to the fee for a larger organization so that a smaller organization can bring their people....

I've just done one formal training, though I've done trainings internally and usually as part of it I recommend doing a training with their staff and they recommend that, I've done plenty of those.

Would you be interested in being part of a larger org that arranges these things?

If it has the quality of a larger organization, it could be more efficient, it could have a brand benefit.... a lot of the orgs want to associate with one another, may find a lot of value in and of itself.... the other thing I'd say is that if one client is paying me to do one thing, it's hard to invite someone in, but if it was a national session, I could do that as a group thing.

I haven't had to do a lot of business development, been pretty lucky, but one of the other consultants that participates in the training, that's her whole model, she sets up follow up meetings...

Curriculum: I start with principles of organizing from the get go, With social media in particular it changes so much, so right beforehand I'm doing research to make sure I'm up to date..... but for a basic training- strong online writing, how to have an internet strategy, etc.- that stuff I have.

I'm subscribed to a lot of different lists that are educating me about social media, etc. I try to do a diversity of sources, I'm subscribed to fancy corporate PR newsletters, I want to know what they are doing, I want to leverage our activism to hit them the hardest- I look at what other progressive groups, straightforward political groups, how they are promoting small business, etc.

How do national .... there was a thing of like "that's national, we let them do that...." and there are definite differences in local, but when it comes to how to write effective subject lines, etc- there is less difference. But there is a sense of things being different for smaller organizations.

Community organizing training, how to build your work from neighborhood to neighborhood, that's something people are more comfortable with NOI, is mostly first year organizers for national organizations; but if I'm a staffer for a local cause group I'm more likely to sign up for a community training.....

I think you have to have words like "community" and "neighborhood to neighborhood" to make it seem like it's targeted to me and my work.  Because in national campaigns it's like "check with your press secretary first," and that doesn't apply....

Been more on the political side, NetRoots nation community, of all the gatherings I go to that's where I feel there are most of my people; I do participate in a lot of listservs; those are good ways for communities to form, that's how I know a lot of other people.... Gamechangers, Townhouse, in terms of media there is one called CommHouse, that's more for people who work with national organizations, it's a group of smart people who have insight..... there are a lot more on them.  I've also been to PDF conference a couple of times, some good smart things happen there, but PDF is more about next generation of what people are going to be thinking about ....