



INTERNAL DOCUMENT—FOR AIUSA MEMBERS ONLY

The Amnesty International USA Organizing Model

A dynamic document, forever a work in progress

Table of Contents

Introduction	page 2
Executive Summary	page 3
Diagram of the Model	page 5
Under the Hood of the Model	
Recruit New Members	page 6
Retention and Relationship Development	page 7
Retain Students	page 10
Mobilizing Members on Issues and Campaigning	page 10
Digital Tools	page 12
Member and Staff Leadership Training and Development	page 12
Appendices	
Definitions of Roles	page 14
Process of Developing the Organizing Model	page 20
Two-Page Version of the Organizing Model	page 21



Introduction

Amnesty International’s stakeholders, both domestically and internationally, understand that we bring a unique asset to our human rights work—activist members. Whether working one signature at a time to protect one individual or working together to right systemic wrongs, Amnesty International’s members exert pressure like no other organization within the human rights movement. Our stakeholders—activists, donors, members, people facing human rights violations, staff—all know who we are and what we bring to the movement. And yet, would all those stakeholders understand and describe our identity and our capacity in the same way?

AIUSA hasn’t laid out a core “organizing model.” Over time, we have organically developed an approach to organizing to adapt to changing campaigning and advocacy needs, but it hasn’t remained cohesive and coherent. Without clearly articulating our organizing model, it has drifted. Staff and member leaders have had to invent it from scratch. Our lack of a common understanding of how we build the base—and its importance—factored into our diminished capacity and our need for a new strategic plan.

To tackle these challenges, AIUSA needed to sort through our ad hoc organizing practices, building upon what the best of them teach us. If we are to organize effectively and become what we want AIUSA to be, we need an operational strategy on organizing—an organizing model. An organizing model sets a framework by which concrete goals that define organizing success (recruiting members, building our groups, developing leaders, etc.) can be accomplished. With a guiding strategy in place, key tactics (e.g., fixing member communications, building a new online member center) can be directed toward its fulfillment and human rights victories will naturally flow from it.

Developing an organizing model is not based on rejection of either planned or ad hoc practices. Many changes in practice were creative adaptations to a shifting landscape. The new model honors and affirms effective practices and historic strengths. Among these is our story; we make broad, systemic human rights issues real for people by focusing on affected individuals. We empower members and non-members alike to take action against horrific abuses. We build our movement through one-to-one relationships. Yet we also take action collectively. We build the base in schools and local communities, work together in communities and states and regions, and campaign nationally and in international solidarity. These historic strengths provide a powerful foundation for us.



Executive Summary

Several adverse trends led the AIUSA Board of Directors to develop a Strategy and Business Plan (SBP) in 2012. To reinvigorate our membership base, two of the six pillars of the SBP outline key membership organizing objectives—grow membership through youth and empower our members. To fulfill these objectives, AIUSA needs a cohesive and coherent organizing model. Developed in the spirit of shared leadership by the staff of the Membership Mobilization Department, two dozen diverse member leaders, and staff representatives from other departments, this document proposes a cohesive yet flexible organizing model to guide the revitalization of our organizing and meet the goals set forth in the SBP.

This organizing model is not a radical reshaping of structures and roles. While it addresses gaps, it primarily refocuses and reorients our organizing to meet the needs outlined in the SBP. The premise of the model is that relationships are central to recruiting and equipping empowered members. It emphasizes one-on-one relationship building that leads to recruiting new members/activists, building activist community, and expanding the leadership capacity of every member/activist who seeks or accepts the opportunity.

Structurally, AIUSA members/activists will work within peer circles of expanding scope within a group, as a group, as a cluster, as a state, as a region, and as part of a national network (all of these forms, including regions, might fluctuate depending on current staff and member capacity and needs). We picture this as a snowflake with lateral (peer-to-peer) interconnectedness. Relationships will be based on collegiality, not hierarchy.

As both new and experienced members/activists learn, plan, and take action, our organizing capacity grows. Members/activists will be encouraged to take on greater responsibility. Expanded focus on training that builds skill and expertise, as well as leadership capacity, will help us to capitalize on this opportunity.

Field Organizers will be chiefly accountable for meeting organizing objectives that build a membership base focused on impact. Field Organizers will work with staff and members who have leadership positions relating to specific issues or abuses within defined geographic areas (under the Programs and Campaigns or Advocacy Department umbrellas) as peers. Campaigning and advocacy on human rights issues is fully understood as the core vehicle of our work, but a strong membership base is the engine that powers that vehicle—the two cannot be separated. Impact arises where successful base-building and successful campaign development meet.



The Membership Mobilization Department’s focus on organizing—adding new members, building and revitalizing new and existing groups, and growing a community of trained and empowered leaders—will allow AIUSA to enhance our campaigning impact on board-determined priorities, while retaining the member autonomy and agency needed to advocate effectively on non-priority issues. Increasing the numbers and skills of members and groups will lead to greater capacity for human rights campaigning and advocacy.

In short:

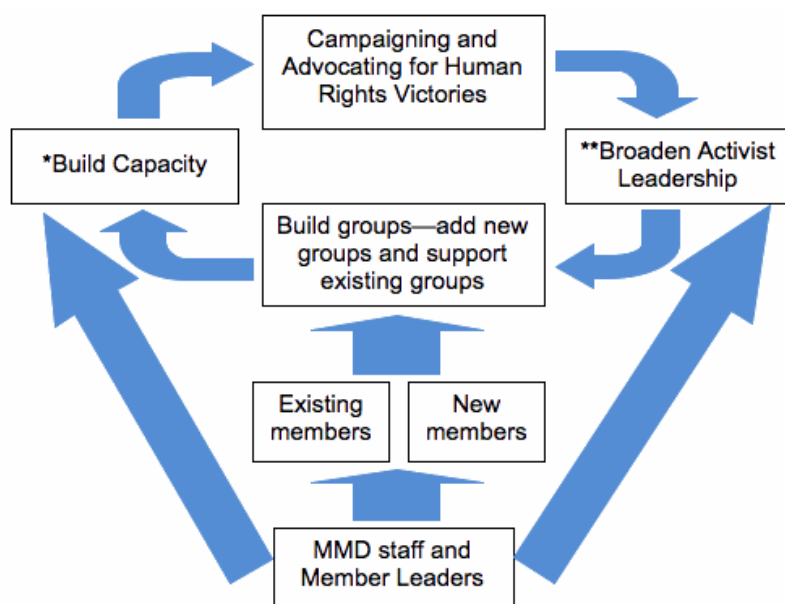
***To grow the base,
organizing staff, member leaders and members
each play key roles
in recruiting people, building groups,
and developing leaders
in order to build a strong movement
that wins concrete human rights victories.***



Diagram of the model

Campaigning is a vehicle for organizing, and organizing is the engine that powers campaigning.

As denoted by the comments associated with the asterisks, leadership development occurs as part of member capacity building.



**Equip, train, and develop groups, group activists, and member leaders*

***Identify and acknowledge members and leaders, inviting them to take on additional leadership by stepping up into new roles within their group, state, region, programmatic theme, etc.*



Under the hood of the model

Recruiting New Members

AIUSA actively recruits members, and welcomes members who decide to get involved on their own. We focus on building a recruitment-oriented culture, where everyone—staff and member leaders alike—view recruitment as a central responsibility.

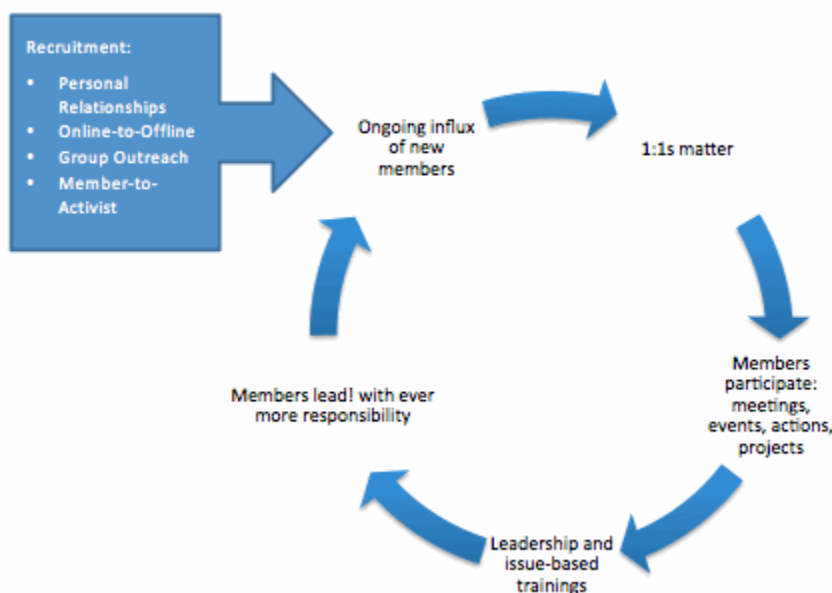
We recruit new member leaders in four ways:

1. **Personal Relationships:** One-on-one relationships are our strongest approach to recruitment; many members and member-leaders report that their first connection to AIUSA was a personal relationship.
2. **Group Outreach:** Some members connect to AIUSA through the less personal outreach methods of tabling at community events, flyers and posters, invitations and announcements on social media, and inclusion of events on a community calendar. These attract potential members by generating buzz or visibility for the group. The group's work is to be prepared to actively welcome them!
3. **Online-to-Offline:** Together with the Programs and Campaigns and Engagement Media departments, we develop strategies to engage our online activists—petition-signers and letter-writers—to attend local events in person, where local groups can meet and recruit them.
4. **Member-to-Activist:** Similarly, we develop strategies to attract members from dues-paying membership to in-person connection with local groups.

This model focuses primarily on Membership Mobilization Department staff and Area Coordinators/Student Activist Coordinators—(S)ACs—because they are most directly charged under the Strategy and Business Plan with delivering on AIUSA's goals to grow and strengthen our activist membership.



From recruitment to retention to development of member-leaders, relationships are key in AIUSA's **cycle of member engagement**:



[OM Build-Out Workgroups focused on various aspects of Recruitment will build out this section.]

Retention and Relationship Development

Retention of AIUSA members is usually fostered through relationships. Over time, members build their relationship with AIUSA and other members to take action for human rights.

Members build relationships through:

- Values-based narrative: the stories of other activist's values, motivations and experiences— creating personal connection and underscoring our potential and the importance of the work
- Personal invitation to further participation (meetings, events)—a sense of welcome
- Opportunities to deepen participation and skill set through training—introduction to the next step(s) up the ladder of engagement
- Understanding leadership role opportunities—such as group coordinator, death penalty coordinator and death penalty team members, case coordinator, urgent



action coordinator, events coordinator, treasurer, recruitment coordinator and recruitment team members, and group members, etc.

The fruit of these relationships involves orienting the new relationship toward human rights action and progress on an issue:

- Taking action—for example:
 - Letter-writing actions
 - Participation in an event
 - Participation in a brainstorming session
- Taking responsibility—for example:
 - Taking on coordination of a case or around an issue
 - Taking on small-scale (~group) leadership on an area of interest
 - Connecting with larger scale (~state, Co-Group) leadership on area of interest

Retention also has an individual/self-motivated component for the new member:

- Issue/country/case research on the AIUSA website
- Learning about AIUSA's presence, voice, perspective, and scope
- Seeking out events and training opportunities

Activism, Recruitment, Retention, and Leadership Development are ongoing and interdependent. Essential components include:

- Building and making the most of 1:1 relationships
- Buzz/generating visibility
- Telling the Story (the activist's, and the organization's)
- Finding activism to be compelling (issue/case and tactics)
- Opportunities to grow
- Asking members to lead/take on work (climb the ladder of engagement—with peer support)

Leadership Training must be available to help groups develop capacity for all of their activism and member development work. (See below for more on Leadership Training!)



How does it look when new members get engaged with AIUSA? Here are some stories:

Meet Owen. He's on his way to his first Amnesty International event.

Owen's friend Lupe is a member of the group. Owen's going because his friend Lupe invited him. There had been some buzz about the event among their Facebook friends, but it hadn't entered Owen's consciousness until Lupe asked him.

At the event, Owen will be warmly welcomed and asked to help set up chairs. He will hear Lupe and others tell their stories of what they've done as AIUSA members, and why fighting for human rights is important to them. Owen will know way more about Lupe than he had before he came.

Owen will meet the group coordinator, who will describe the group's actions and roles. He will help make posters for an upcoming demonstration. He will be invited to the next group meeting.

After the event, Owen will check out AIUSA's website, and learn more about the different roles the group coordinator told him about while at the event.

Owen will go to that group meeting! There, he will get particularly interested in his state's death penalty abolition campaign. He will participate in a brainstorm about an upcoming action targeting a local legislator. The group's death penalty coordinator will make a coffee date with Owen.

During their 1:1, the death penalty coordinator and Owen talk about the upcoming lobby day at the state capital. Owen helps organize the bus!

All this is possible because of the leadership roles of Lupe, the group coordinator, the death penalty coordinator and the members who tell their stories. They think of every interaction as an opportunity to recruit and build 1:1 relationships, and they know that more people means more effective human rights work. They learned about this in leadership training, and in turn, they see every encounter as an opportunity for leadership development.

And by Labor Day, Owen will attend his first leadership training workshop, too.

Meet Lila. She's on her way to her first Amnesty International event, too.

She signed an online petition a friend sent her about Malala Yousafzai. Then she started getting emails about other Amnesty campaigns and about Amnesty events in her town. She decided to go to a vigil at the Russian embassy to free Pussy Riot, and she brought her friend Ali.

You know the rest of the story.

Meet Harriet. She's been an Amnesty International member for years, but now that she's retired she has more time to devote to her passion—human rights in the Middle East.

Dorothy went to the online member center, found contact information for the local group coordinator, and downloaded a flyer for an upcoming event on Syria. Now she's heading to the event, along with her partner Pia.



You know the rest of the story.

Meet Dinesh. He's been a dues-paying member for 8 years and an Urgent Action writer for about half of that time.

Dinesh lives in an area where there is a local group, but he doesn't know about it. The local group, however, knew that there were dues-paying members living in their area who were not affiliated with a local group. To expand their membership, they sent out a mailing to all the members within a four-zip-code area inviting them to a special introductory meeting, to tell them about their work and their openness to new areas of work led by new members. He felt welcome, he was happy to be asked to join a group, and he became more deeply involved in human rights work.

You know the rest of the story.

Retaining Students

AIUSA focuses on retaining leaders who were involved in student groups as well as recruiting people under 25 who were not involved as students.

AIUSA works to retain graduating students in the following areas:

- developing/increasing group structures targeting new graduates
- identifying opportunities to recruit at places young folks already are (i.e., concerts, job websites, dating websites)
- using social media to develop alumni networks of recent AI graduates
- connecting grads to local groups and mentors
- youth-focused training and engagement spaces like state student trainings and Mosaic

[\[An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused on Student and Faculty members will build out this section.\]](#)

Mobilizing Members on Issues and Campaigning

AIUSA's ability to win human rights victories comes from organizing a strong membership and mobilizing members for campaigns.

The Strategy and Business Plan is clear that MMD should focus on organizing to grow the membership. To free the MMD staff to focus on organizing, support for programming and campaigning on board-set priorities is provided in these ways:



- Through the online member center
- Across member leader structures
- By Campaigns staff
- ... And also by Field Organizers

We mobilize members in the following ways:

- All groups are encouraged to join at least 2 board-set priority campaigns each year. In addition, groups pursue ongoing work that they choose.
 - A process will be designed such that, when member-led initiatives gain traction, they will be eligible for staff time or modest funding. The process design will include a definition of “traction,” and will quantify “staff time” and “modest funding.”
- On priority campaigns, Field Organizers engage as follows:
 - FOs are part of campaign planning to ensure tactics will have an impact on campaign targets *and* recruit new people and build leadership.
 - FOs will then roll out campaign work with members leaders, who will roll it out with their groups, offering a compelling opportunity to be involved in the organization’s priority work. Groups/activists will decide for themselves if they are going to engage in the campaign or do something else.
 - FOs and (S)ACs coach their member leaders through effective implementation and then get report backs, both to leverage the work on the ground with targets and to know what worked in the field.
- MMD emphasizes campaigns with the following characteristics:
 - relevant (is deeply felt by members, is timely, etc.)
 - strategic (influences the target)
 - build the organization by recruiting new people
 - develop leaders
 - adequately resourced (we have the financial resources to be successful, the expertise necessary and the capacity on the ground in that locale)
 - appropriate for organizing (goals are best accomplished via organizing rather than online, for example)
- Members engage with Campaigns & Program Department by:
 - Offering feedback
 - Speaking at AGMs
 - Participating in MSPGs
 - Possibly having a network of “Campaign Coordinators” again (e.g., outFRONT and SVAW)



- Helping to provide and/or analyze metrics to support decision-making on how/why we would move a campaign from online to offline

[An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused on the mechanics of Campaigning will build out this section.]

Digital Tools

AIUSA makes innovative use of technology to unify purpose across members and ramp up organizing.

In particular, we use these digital tools:

- Revamped Member Center, which provides forums for focused discussions of key campaigns/issues, member-to-member communication, and both skill- and issue-specific tools
- Improved website that is user-friendly, consistent, and regularly updated

[An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused on Member Communication will build out this section.]

Member and Staff Leadership Training and Development

Members will elevate their involvement based on relationships, opportunities for leadership and training, interests, and other commitments. AIUSA offers a ladder of engagement with multiple pathways to climb that involve organizing, priority campaigning, and non-priority issue advocacy.

The FO's role is to support the grassroots organizing skills of the member base, in order to build the movement. That work consists of training, leadership development, support for members' coalition-building work, etc. AIUSA communicates to members that we can each bring new people in to strengthen our movement to defend human rights.

Our approach to organizing and leadership development in an era of increased racial, ethnic and national diversity—and awareness of the societal power differences among those groups—means that:

- Member and staff training that incorporates an anti-oppression framework, building on AIUSA's history of working to dismantle racism and fight for human rights to incorporate an ever-widening understanding of equality and just power



relations. When we say “anti-oppression,” we mean thinking and acting in ways that dismantle the system of oppression through attitudes, beliefs and actions. Both dominant and marginalized, or target, groups can dismantle the system by learning more about issues and groups, educating others, adjusting our own attitudes, beliefs and actions, and challenging and supporting others to examine their attitudes, beliefs and actions.

- Human resource practices aimed at increasing diversity on staff
- Membership recruitment practices to increase racial diversity in our membership: targeted outreach (e.g., historically black colleges and universities), strategic partnerships, commitment to coalition building

[\[An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused on our Anti-Oppression Framework will build out this section.\]](#)

Our MMD training program looks like this:

- FOs support ACs and SACs, who support member leaders. (When there is a (S)AC vacancy, FOs support group coordinators and member leaders directly.)
- FOs give special priority to supporting SACs and developing member leaders.
- There’s a common but flexible training curriculum with 1) a shared pedagogical approach; and 2) skill-building (but including movement building in both theory and practice).
- We prioritize training on durable skills. Some training is issue-oriented, but most training aims to develop skills that can be used regardless of issues—organizing skills and skills to work within AIUSA.
- FOs consult with membership to determine when to ask volunteer leaders to take on more responsibility, often in collaboration with other member leaders.

[\[An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused on Training and Leadership Development will build out this section.\]](#)



APPENDIX

Definitions of Roles

[An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused on Member Leader Roles will build out this Appendix.]

Member: Someone who pays dues monthly, has paid dues within the year, or has had them waived.

Member Leader: A dues-paying member who also holds a leadership role in a group or area.

Activist: A non-member who participates in any form of AIUSA activism. Many members are also activists, but formally, “Activist” is used to differentiate between “member supporter” and “non-member supporter.”

Supporter: Either of the above—a member or an activist.

Activists include *Registered Activists* and *Online Activists*:

Registered members/activists: In our databases and include Group members, Country and Thematic Specialists, Action networks, volunteer/leadership roles, urgent action network, and others. Action Networks may include the Urgent Action Network or Action Networks focused on world regions or thematic issues, such as South Asia or LGBT human rights. Supporters who sign up for these networks and receive actions regularly that include both offline initiatives (such as sending handwritten letters or staging a rally) and online ones.

Online Activists: Supporters who take action online using the Online Action Center. (We don’t have any established meaning for “Online Member.”)

Group members: There is no one specific definition—how groups define a “member” of their group is up to them. The most common view of this would be that group members are people who *at the minimum* ask to remain on a group’s mailing list so that they receive actions and are aware of the group’s work. Group “members” are not all actual dues-paid or dues-waived members of AIUSA—yes, that’s a bit sticky!



Key leadership roles include the following positions, listed here along with some of the tasks that may be assigned to people in those roles:

Group Coordinator:

- Keep group together and active according to the wishes of the group and AIUSA guidelines
- Bring in new people
- Develop members as leaders
- Develop group leadership team
- Run strategic, effective campaign/case work
- Groom his or her eventual replacement
- Handle administration (e.g., dues, registration, etc.)
- Maintain relationship with (S)AC

Area Coordinator (AC) and Student Activist Coordinator (SAC):

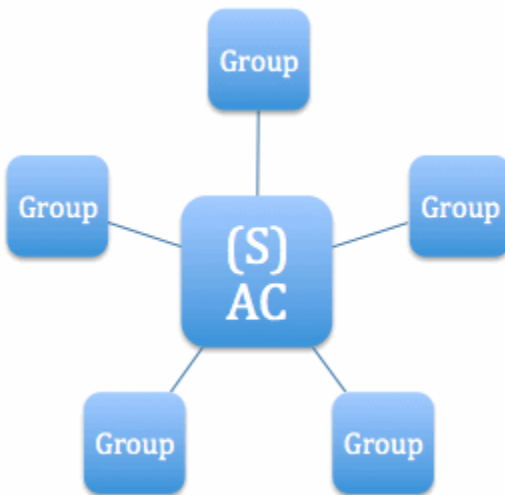
- 1:1 coaching for group coordinators on everything they need to successfully coordinate their group—strategizing, event planning, developing activists, recruiting new members, empowering group coordinators to find materials and answer questions with the online member center, etc.
- Starts new groups—helps get them off the ground
- Training, with the support of a team of trainers
- NOT getting materials—this is available in an updated and intuitive online Member Center
- To the extent possible, NOT chasing down answers—instead offers advice on obtaining materials and answers to questions
- Use phone rather than email as often as possible
- Work with the FO on statewide growth and development strategy

[An OM Build-Out Workgroup will consolidate information on policies and practices of Accessing Resources, and how these are tied to the online Member Center. This will help clarify roles related to getting materials and answers to questions.]



Campaign Roles

- Campaign Roles: Campaign-specific roles that member leaders undertake either on an ongoing or temporary basis to lead work within a single group or across groups.



Legislative Coordinator:

LCs build strong working relationships with (S)ACs in their state. They develop connections with each AI group's legislative point people (which may be the group coordinator) and mobilize these groups in their state on key advocacy initiatives.

Country/Thematic Specialist: These specialists provide campaign/action information and expertise to AI members and others through their respective action networks. They advise groups on casework and other country-focused or thematic work. Each country and thematic specialist is a member of a "Coordination Group" ("CoGroup" for short) charged with a wide range of responsibilities related to that world region or issue.

SDPAC: _____

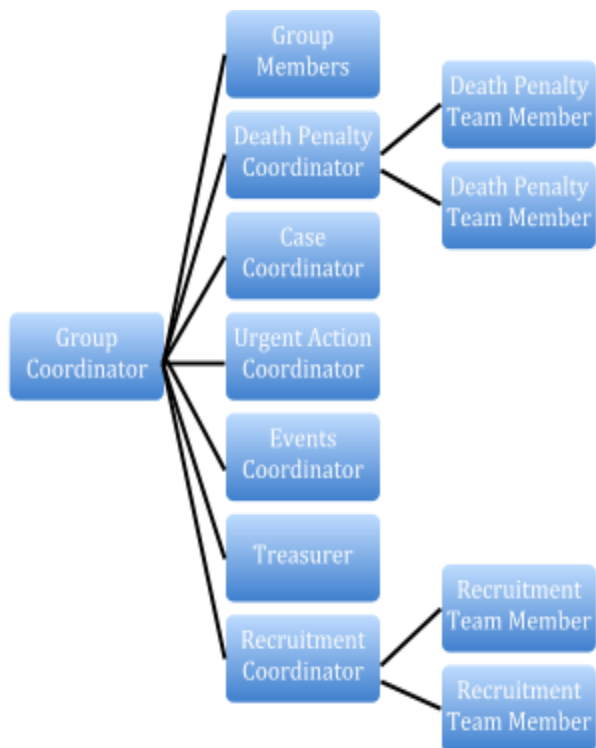
Faculty Advisor: _____



Field Organizer: The staff organizer who leads state level organizing, and guides and supports organizers in the field. FOs drive strategic planning and thinking at the state and regional level with the ML in their area. They develop and implement processes to recruit members, build groups and develop leaders. [An OM Build-Out Workgroup focused specifically on the FO Role will build out this section.]



FOs cover select geographies, deciding where to focus organizing based on where there's the most leader growth, especially among youth. Because FOs will need to prioritize movement-building, day-to-day servicing will shift to member leaders and to central resources including the Online Member Center.



Group roles: There are many possible roles, and in recent years there has been a move away from putting a lot of stock in them. It may be that we need to define a few expected roles and suggest a few additional issue-related and tactic-related roles for example:

Expected roles within groups:

- Group Coordinator
- Treasurer
- Recruitment/Membership Coordinator
- Secretary/Communications (role may differ a lot between student and local groups)

Possible issue-related roles within groups:

- Program or Campaign Coordinator (for example, SVAW, SWHR, Death Penalty Coordinator, Demand Dignity)
- Case Coordinator (Special Focus Case mostly for SGs; case dossiers mostly for LGs)
- Action Network (Country or Thematic Specialist-related)
- Urgent Action Network Coordinator



Possible tactical roles within groups:

- Events Liaison
- Publicity/Media Liaison
- Legislative/Government Action Coordinator (not to be confused with the statewide position)
- Outreach Coordinator
- Student/Local Group Liaison (for cluster coordination)

Definition of Membership

The Strategy and Business Plan emphasizes principles of “responsibility, authority, and accountability.” We will need to design a process to look through existing documents and consult with members on the definition of membership. This process will identify documentation that addresses the following components of collegial, peer-to-peer organizing and relationship building:

- Volunteer leadership responsibilities, opportunities and ladders of engagement for long-time and student members
- Accountability, including expectations; baselines and results when not met; value and vision of time offered; benefits of doing work; and charting tasks and benchmarks together (versus solely proscribed) to build personal investment
- Shared Leadership
- A Code of Conduct for AIUSA members, staff and board



Process of Developing the Organizing Model

Our intention was to develop a model that would describe how the Membership Mobilization Department helps AIUSA to effectively:

- build our base by recruiting members, encouraging their commitment, and building their leadership capacity;
- organize membership within the context of our broader strategy; and
- cultivate a culture of mutual, peer-to-peer respect in line with AIUSA's values.

All of these considerations needed to be addressed with a primary goal of maximum impact on our mission.

Just as activism can benefit from depth and persistence, we brought both to the process of shaping this organizing model.

The development of the model was inclusive of a diversity of important voices within AIUSA. From the outset, recognizing that some members have felt their voices missing from major planning processes, the editors invited dozens of members to join the staff of the Membership Mobilization Department and other staff comrades as co-owners and co-creators.

In February, 2013, the Membership Mobilization Department held a work retreat for 45 member leaders, staff representing a range of departments, and a representative from the board. In a spirit of shared leadership, a Retreat Leadership Team of five Membership Mobilization Department staff and three member leaders rigorously and thoughtfully engaged with two facilitators from Dragonfly Partners to identify key questions that needed to be addressed and set an agenda for the retreat.

We paired this breadth of input with an intensive, iterative editing process by the Retreat Leadership Team. As a team, we wrestled with difficult questions, made trade-offs and, with ongoing looping back to the retreat participants, evaluated how everyone's contributions were incorporated into successive drafts.

Key contributions to the final organizing model came from:

- The 2012-2015 SBP and the 2013 Implementation Plan
- In-depth interviews with 20 AIUSA organizers (staff and members)
- The Retreat Leadership Team's deliberations
- Study of models from other movements and organizations
- The work of the members and staff at the retreat
- An iterative drafting process after the retreat
- Consultation with the wider circles of AIUSA members, staff and board



Two-Page Version of the Organizing Model

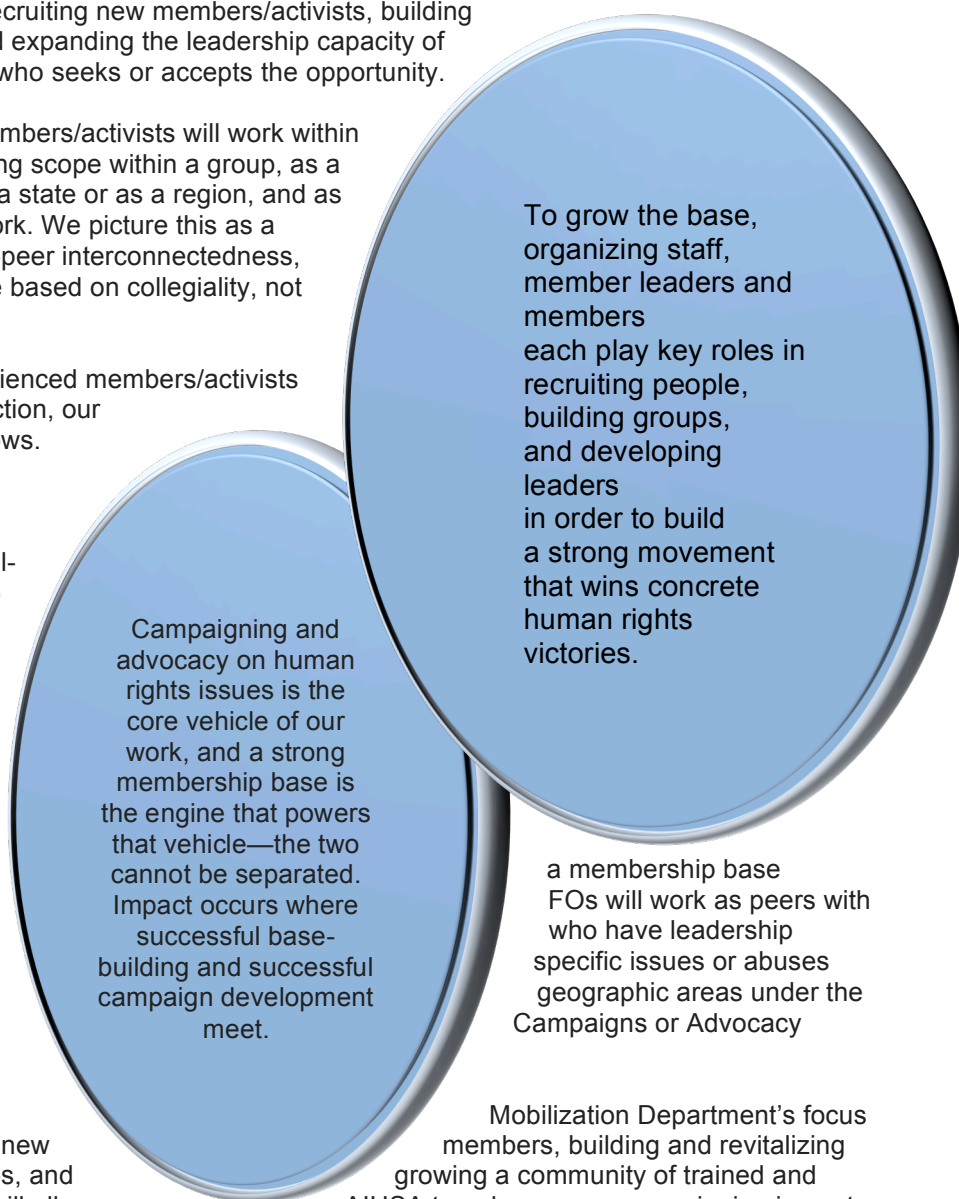
The MMD has developed an organizing model to refocus and reorient our organizing to meet the needs outlined in the Strategy and Business Plan. Its premise is that relationships are central to recruiting and equipping empowered members. The model emphasizes one-on-one relationship-building that leads to recruiting new members/activists, building activist community, and expanding the leadership capacity of every member/activist who seeks or accepts the opportunity.

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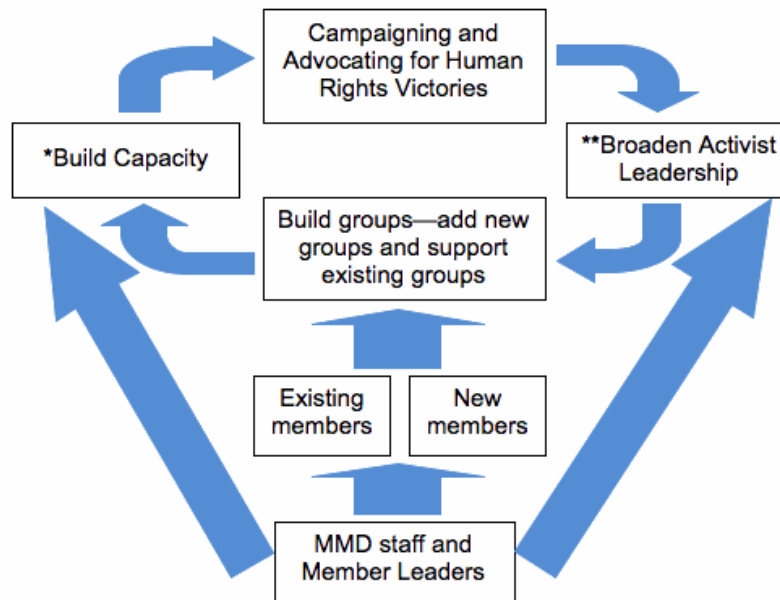
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The Membership on organizing—adding new new and existing groups, and empowered leaders—will allow on board-determined priorities, while retaining the member autonomy and agency needed to advocate effectively on non-priority issues. Increasing the numbers and skills of members and groups will lead to greater capacity for human rights victories.





Our Organizing Base is the Engine of Human Rights Victories



* Equip, train, and develop groups, group activists, and member leaders

** Identify and acknowledge members and leaders, inviting them to take on additional leadership by stepping up into new roles within their group, state, region, programmatic theme, etc.

Recruitment, Group-Building and Leadership Development Are the Engines of our Organizing Base

