

The organizer's Canvas

What is a Canvas?

Canvases help us map out an idea. By visualising an idea on a canvas, something similar to an artist's canvas, the user can look at an idea from different perspectives, better navigate it, and come to a better understanding of it through brainstorming, testing and continual improvement.

A canvas is not a how-to document but rather a tool to support creative processes, especially where there are a lot of moving parts. By breaking down a complex idea into smaller components, the user can easily shift between focusing on the finer details and stepping back to see the greater whole. A canvas can show a relationship between different parts of a key concept or provide analogies to stimulate the brainstorming.

Canvases can be sketched anywhere, on a whiteboard, a notebook or on the back of a napkin. They can be printed out again and again, or can be projected onto a large surface. They can be used by both individuals and groups, and are great for providing direction during a brainstorming session. Filling one in can take anywhere from 15 minutes to a few days, especially if used in conjunction with larger structured workshops.

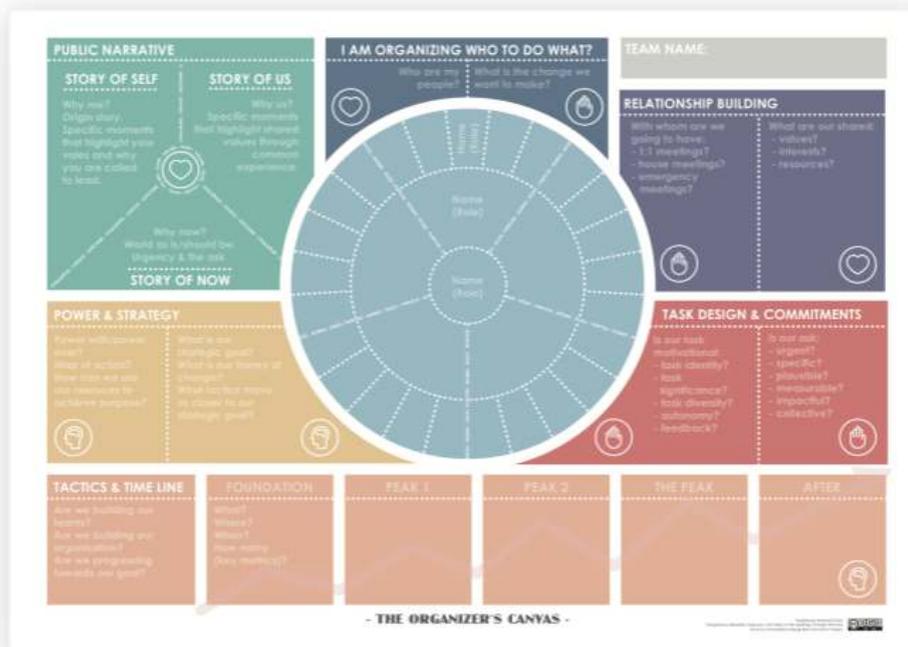
The organizer's canvas

Organizing is a practice of leadership whereby we define leadership as enabling others to achieve shared purpose under conditions of uncertainty. When building leadership to create change, there are five key organizing practices: story, relationships, structure, strategizing and action.

The process of organizing is dynamic and constantly developing. The organizer's canvas is a visual aid that helps organizers think creatively around the organizing process. It allows the organizer to focus on individual leadership practices whilst keeping track of how these practices flow into one another to create the greater whole.

The canvas has the following features:

- Colours
- Heart, head and hands perspectives
- Sections and subsections
- Throughlines



Colours - building power & using power

The colours on the canvas may be pretty but underneath they relay important concepts. Working from the top to the bottom, the colours shift from colder blues and greens to warmer reds and oranges. Organizing passes through the two phases. Firstly, building power through story, relationships and structure, and secondly, deploying power through strategy and action. On the canvas, the colder colours represent building power, whilst the warmer colours represent using power.

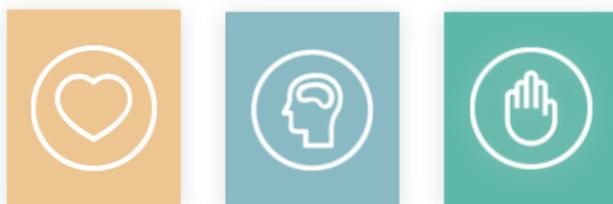


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The heart, the head and the hands - people, power and change.

Organizing is a process that engages the entire body, the heart, the head and the hands. It requires us to use our hearts to evoke emotion, find common values, and inspire hope in others. Organizing is also a practice of the head, through engaging others in common strategy. It also requires us to engage the hands, through combining with others in taking collective action to bring about the concrete change that we want to see in the world.

These aspects, the heart, the head and the hands, are represented on the canvas through the corresponding icons found in every section. Whilst no one section is totally one body part or the other, the icons give us a starting point in which to start engaging that section.



Sections and subsections - the 5 leadership practices.

The canvas is divided into seven different sections. These sections are a deep dive into the 5 leadership practices found in organizing. These can be found below, with both reference to the five leadership practices and descriptions.

| Section | Leadership Practice | Description |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Public Narrative | Story | Incorporates the story of self, us and now. |
| Relationship building | Relationships | Looks at both key activities for relationship building and how one can turn shared values into common interests and resources. |
| I am organizing who to do what? | Structure | Provides a common purpose for the team. |
| The snowflake - Name (role) | Structure | Provides space for assigning leadership positions (with roles) to individuals. Facilitates the building out of the snowflake/distributed leadership structure. |
| Power & strategy | Strategy | A space for creating common strategy, looking at power relations and resources, and breaking down the change into a tangible and |

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| | | concrete goal. |
| Tactics & timeline | Strategy | Focuses on breaking down strategy into specific tactics, positioning them on a timeline and assigning goals to each phase of the campaign. |
| Task design & commitments | Action | Provides space for creating tasks that motivate others to join us through motivational task design. Looks also at how we will present our ask so that more and more people join us in collective action. |

Each of these sections have their own subsections, reflecting both the depth and breath of the content covered in the canvas. These subsection can be treated as individual sections, to be brainstormed around, or a simple way of dividing up content after a brainstorming session on the larger section piece.

Throughlines - key concepts running through individual sections

If you look closely, certain sections have been divided into subsections, not by dotted lines, but by words. These are the throughlines. They represent key concepts of utmost importance for the entire section, regardless of how many subsections the section has been divided into. These throughlines can be found in the sections *Public Narrative* and *The Snowflake*. The key concepts central to these sections are:

- Public Narrative:
 - Challenge, Choice and Outcome
 - Hope and Values
- The snowflake:
 - Purpose, Norms and Roles



When to use the canvas

There are no specific do's and don't with the canvas. It is a creative work tool that is flexible enough to be used in a variety of settings with a variety of goals. Here are some suggestions:

| Context | Purpose | When | How |
|--|---|--|--|
| Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a shared framework • Give an overview of organizing • Provide a common thread and direction • As an agenda | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the start • Regular intervals • Reflection sessions • After brainstorming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project it big on the wall • Handouts • Drawn on large sheets of paper that the team gathers around • Presentations |
| Team building & development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching a team • Developing strategy • Onboarding new team members • Coaching • Revising strategy • Provide buy-in and common purpose • Facilitate a learning culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team kick-offs • Regular team meetings during the team's life span • Onboarding new team members • Evaluation points or milestones • Team retreats or gatherings • Coaching sessions or team capacity building sessions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project it big on the wall • Handouts • Drawn on large sheets of paper that the team gathers around • Presentations • Online collaborative tools for brainstorming and documentation |
| Campaigning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a campaign • Keeping focus during a campaign • Revising strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign creation • Campaign launch • Regular strategy meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project it big on the wall • Handouts • Drawn on large sheets of paper that the team gathers around |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular check-ups • Finding gaps in the campaign & troubleshooting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation points or milestones • Regular intervals during a campaign life span • When entering new phases in a campaign • When the campaign gets stuck or realities change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations • Online collaborative tools for brainstorming and documentation |
| Coalition building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating common purpose • Safeguarding against fragmentation • Combining organisations with different tactical repertoires • Specifying roles and grounds for co-operation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When bringing coalitions together • When coalitions fracture or conflict • When roles become unclear | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project it big on the wall • Handouts • Drawn on large sheets of paper that the team gathers around • Presentations • Online collaborative tools for brainstorming and documentation |

How to use the canvas

Canvases can be used by a group, to generate ideas or fine tune them, whilst making sure that all necessary parts of a great whole are present. Below you will find the standard process for a brainstorming session in a small group.

Standard brainstorming session

This brainstorming session can be repeated for every section or subsection on the canvas.

1. Gather your team (5 mins):
 - a. Hand out post-it notes and pens.
 - b. Explain the purpose of the exercise.
 - c. Explain the process.
2. Brainstorm (5-10 mins):

- a. Work individually.
 - b. Write one idea per post-it note.
 - c. Generate as many ideas as possible.
3. Presentation of ideas (5 mins):
 - a. Ask each individual to present their ideas.
 - b. Place the ideas in a brainstorming space (a white board or a large sheet of paper).
 - c. Cluster similar ideas as you go.
 4. Discussion (5-10 minutes):
 - a. Facilitate a discussion of the ideas presented.
 - b. Standard questions include; how similar/different were the ideas and why? Is there anything missing? What could take these ideas to the next level?
 5. Prioritizing (10 minutes):
 - a. Ask the group come up with evaluation criteria for selecting ideas. These should be presented as a sentence i.e. *Ideas should be actionable right away.* Create as many criteria as needed. A good starting point is at least three criteria.
 - b. Ask the group to vote of the their favorite idea. Each person has 5 votes that can be distributed over the ideas any way the person sees fit.
 6. Record the results (5 minutes)
 - a. Ask one person to record the results on the canvas.

Existing training tools

The Leading Change Network has a large selection of training tools that can be used in conjunction with the canvas. It is recommended that these be the foundation of the work done on the canvas. These workshops provide a more comprehensive overview of the organizing knowledge and can be especially useful for those new to the craft of organizing.

Below you will find a table with an overview of the canvas and how these sections relate to a standard 2.5 - 3 day training session. The syllabus and training manuals can be found on the [Leading Change Network website](#). You will need to be a member to access these worktools. You can join the network and become a member [here](#).

| SECTION | TRAINING MODULE |
|--|--|
| Public Narrative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Story of self ● Story of us ● Story of now & linking |
| Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building relationships |
| We are organizing who to do what? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building leadership teams |

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| The snowflake - Name (role) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building leadership teams |
| Power & strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategy I ● Strategy II |
| Timeline and tactics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategy II |
| Task design and commitments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action ● Story of now |

Thank you

A big thank you to the Leading Change Network for helping develop the canvas. A special thank you to Rawan Zeine, of the Leading Change Network, for the work she did pushing the canvas forward and making sure the product was tiptop. Also, a special thanks to those Leading Change Members that contributed to the two workshops done on the canvas. These people are Edith, Kim, Jake, Anand, Cecilia, Salma, Carolina, Megan, Matt, Rasha Marco, Celine and Tamar. Without you guys, this would not have been the canvas it is today. Finally, thank you Marshall Ganz for introducing us all to the craft of organizing.

If you have feedback on the canvas, feel free to email benedict.hugosson@gmail.com. If you would like to translate the canvas into your language, please contribute [here](#). You will find source files for Illustrator [here](#).