



The Global ARC
Global Action Research Center

Bridging Sustainability Solutions Worldwide

San Diego Office: 4343 Morena Blvd., Unit 3, San Diego, CA 92117
<http://theglobalarc.org>

BUILDING A STRONG ORGANIZATION

Revised October 20187

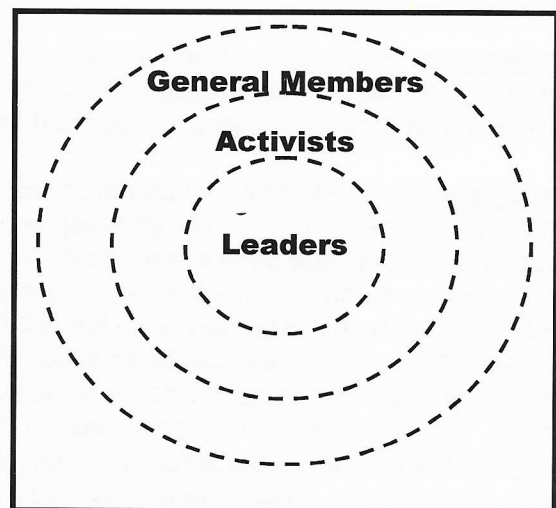
Given that power is based in money or people, the ability of a community-based, community-run organization to influence public policy is based largely on the size and level of engagement of its membership. To be healthy and sustainable over the long-term the organization needs three levels of membership, i.e., Leaders, Activists and General Members. These are:

Leaders are the people who have made the organization one their highest priorities. Their commitment goes beyond any one campaign or issue and is to building and sustaining the organization. People in leadership positions put time into this organization on a weekly, if not daily basis.

Activists also have a very strong commitment to the organization. Their commitment, however, tends to be more focused on the organization's immediate campaign and, while they value the organization, it is the issue that motivates them to act. Activists are typically not interested in organizational politics and have no interest in being in an elected/leadership position. They are, however, willing to give much of their time. Activists are the people who can be depended upon to call other people, to distribute flyers, to do setup before and cleanup after the meeting, etc. Activists give time almost weekly to the organization. The health and sustainability of an organization is directly connected to the size and level of commitment of its Activists.

General Members are people who care about what is happening in their community but are unable to give much of their time. They are willing, however, to come to an occasional meeting, a community forum and/or congress, etc. These are people who the organization depends on when they must show the level of support it has from the community.

Every organization needs members at all levels. Also, people need to feel as though they can move from one level to another based on the time and energy they have to contribute to the organization. People in leadership roles must feel free to slow down if the demands on their life call for it. People in the general membership need to feel they can move into leadership roles. It is important to pay attention to membership at all levels. Organizations that struggle to survive typically have few activists. They may have strong leaders who are able to mobilize large numbers of people, however, without the work done by the activists there are physical limits to what leaders alone can do to sustain the organization.



William T. Oswald, Ph.D.
wtoswald@theglobalarc.org