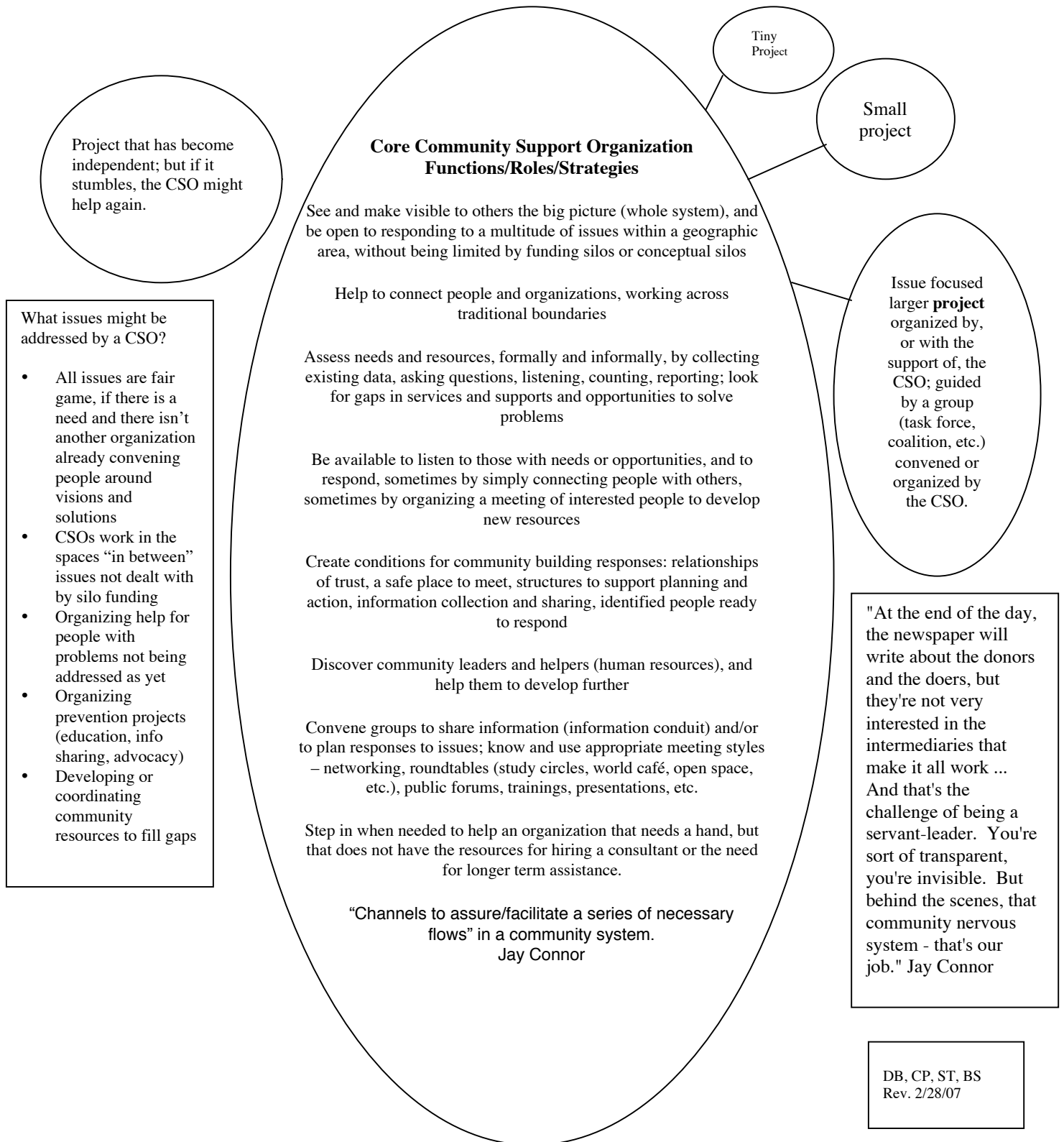


Community Support Organizations (CSOs)



Core Community Support Organization Functions/Roles/Strategies

See and make visible to others the big picture (whole system), and be open to responding to a multitude of issues within a geographic area, without being limited by funding silos or conceptual silos

Help to connect people and organizations, working across traditional boundaries

Assess needs and resources, formally and informally, by collecting existing data, asking questions, listening, counting, reporting; look for gaps in services and supports and opportunities to solve problems

Be available to listen to those with needs or opportunities, and to respond, sometimes by simply connecting people with others, sometimes by organizing a meeting of interested people to develop new resources

Create conditions for community building responses: relationships of trust, a safe place to meet, structures to support planning and action, information collection and sharing, identified people ready to respond

Discover community leaders and helpers (human resources), and help them to develop further

Convene groups to share information (information conduit) and/or to plan responses to issues; know and use appropriate meeting styles – networking, roundtables (study circles, world café, open space, etc.), public forums, trainings, presentations, etc.

Step in when needed to help an organization that needs a hand, but that does not have the resources for hiring a consultant or the need for longer term assistance.

“Channels to assure/facilitate a series of necessary flows” in a community system.
Jay Connor

Tiny Project

Small project

Project that has become independent; but if it stumbles, the CSO might help again.

What issues might be addressed by a CSO?

- All issues are fair game, if there is a need and there isn't another organization already convening people around visions and solutions
- CSOs work in the spaces “in between” issues not dealt with by silo funding
- Organizing help for people with problems not being addressed as yet
- Organizing prevention projects (education, info sharing, advocacy)
- Developing or coordinating community resources to fill gaps

Issue focused larger project organized by, or with the support of, the CSO; guided by a group (task force, coalition, etc.) convened or organized by the CSO.

"At the end of the day, the newspaper will write about the donors and the doers, but they're not very interested in the intermediaries that make it all work ... And that's the challenge of being a servant-leader. You're sort of transparent, you're invisible. But behind the scenes, that community nervous system - that's our job." Jay Connor

DB, CP, ST, BS
Rev. 2/28/07

Additional “administrative” work required to maintain the CSO: CSO network and coalition structures and processes; CSO board building and development; fund raising (primarily grant writing, donations, and fee for service contracts); marketing (brochures, press releases, etc.); nonprofit corporation legal issues; financial systems/management; fiscal agency for small projects (incubation); finding information and resources (research); maintain an office/phone/computer; maintain a website, listservs, email addresses; doing all the things that larger nonprofits do, but usually with only one or a few staff members.