

# Family, Community and Sexuality Project Building a Movement

## *from the Ground Up*

### Organizing Tools: Principles for Working Wedge Issues

*Wedge issues are not simply inflammatory or “hot button” issues, but issues that are framed and actively exploited to divide opponents and fracture their existing or potential power based.*

*Certainly the right wing’s use of wedge issues is most successful, as in the case of anti-immigrant or anti-gay issues, when they tap into deeply felt prejudices or and historical oppression. These issues can split the members of a particular organization or movement, or split groups and constituencies involved in a larger coalition unless progressives are prepared for the wedge. The following are principles that may be useful in helping organizations prepare to fight **and win** on wedge issues.*

- Understand how wedges work. The rightwing doesn’t announce that they are going to use a wedge strategy. Instead, they cloak racism or sexism in other language that can sometimes make it difficult to “unmask” the strategy for what it is. Taking time to develop skills at identifying and explaining how wedges work is critical work for progressive organizations.
- Use a movement building strategy. This kind of strategy deepens our constituency’s commitment to a broad progressive framework.
  1. Even if we are working on focused single-issue campaigns, it is useful to place these campaigns in a broader context. For example,, Sisters in Action for Power (Portland, OR) may work on a school equity campaign, but their leaders can articulate how schools relate to gentrification and privatization.
  2. Developing a statement of values can be useful in creating a framework that allows an organization’s membership to assess their position on wedge issues. Examples: Rural Organizing Project’s (Scappoose, OR) Democracy Grid provides members with a consistent tool for assessing the impact of wedge issues. Voz Hispana (Woodburn, OR) was able to say “no” to banning gay marriage as a result of basing their decision on their explicit shared values of equality.
- Actively work as allies on wedges that are not directed our constituencies and build long-term principled alliances. Wedge strategies are tools that that are sometimes used against others and sometimes used against our constituencies. When we work as allies on wedges we accomplish many things including strengthening the progressive movements ability to out-organize a conservative agenda.
- Organizations that consistently utilize political education strategies that strengthen the language and analysis of members and leaders are less vulnerable to wedge strategies.
- Organizers can prevent wedge strategies from taking hold if they have the skills and tools to challenge oppression when it arises and create conversations among members when wedge issues surface.