



# WHY GET INVOLVED IN ELECTORAL POLITICS, ANYWAY?

Many community groups look at the political process with justified suspicion. They've seen their communities get shut out of political power time after time as democracy gets sold to the highest bidder. The exercises in this module are designed to help your group take an honest look at the pros and cons of being involved in the electoral process. At the end of this module, your group should be able to identify its self-interest in the political system.

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## WHO MAKES DECISIONS?

- Goals:
- to identify who makes decisions about the issues important to your group
  - to connect these decisions and decision makers with the electoral process
- Format: Guided Discussion
- Time Required: 60 minutes
- Trainer should know: About different levels of government and what they deal with; or invite a resource person who knows this information.
- Handouts:
- "One Example of the Power of the Vote," from Brooklyn, NY (3 pgs)
  - "Roslyn, WA 2001 Elections: A Case Study in Electoral Organizing" (3 pgs)
- Materials: Flip Chart
- Credit: Thalia Zepatos

What Trainer Says	What Trainer Does	Flip Charts	
<p><i>What do you (or your organization) care about? ...or want from government?</i></p>	<p>On butcher paper, write ISSUES on left hand column. Ask group to brainstorm issues of concern: e.g., jobs, education, development, toxic brownfields, transportation, taxes, racial profiling, etc., and write several on flip chart.</p>	<p><u>ISSUES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Jobs</li> <li>◆ Education</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Okay, so we've listed some of our issues, now WHO makes decisions about those issues?</i></p> <p><i>(Another way to ask is, Who can give you what you want on the issue?)</i></p>	<p>On right side of paper, write WHO DECIDES?</p> <p>Fill in 2nd column on chart – put ?? where uncertain, or multiple answers where appropriate (e.g., for jobs, could be Congress, Governor, Mayor, etc.).</p>	<p><u>ISSUES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Jobs</li> <li>◆ Education</li> <li>◆ Racial Profiling</li> </ul>	<p><u>WHO DECIDES?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mayor</li> <li>◆ School Board</li> <li>◆ Chief of Police</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Now, let's look down the list that we just created under WHO DECIDES and ask,</i></li> <li>◆ <i>"How many of these people are elected?"</i></li> </ul>	<p>Put a check mark next to those elected.</p>	<p><u>ISSUES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Jobs</li> <li>◆ Education</li> <li>◆ Racial Profiling</li> </ul>	<p><u>WHO DECIDES?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mayor</li> <li>◆ School Board</li> <li>◆ Chief of Police</li> </ul>
<p>If any names are not checked, ask...</p> <p><i>Are any of these people appointed? (or hired by government?)</i></p> <p><i>If so, who appoints them? An elected official?</i></p>	<p>Write appointed by Mayor, hired by Governor, etc. for those not directly elected.</p>	<p><u>ISSUES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Jobs</li> <li>◆ Education</li> <li>◆ Racial Profiling</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>	<p><u>WHO DECIDES?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mayor</li> <li>◆ School Board</li> <li>◆ Chief of Police – <b>hired by Mayor</b></li> </ul>
<p><i>So these elected officials have a lot of power over what we want. How do these people get elected? What do they need to get elected?</i></p>	<p>Ask group to brainstorm. List the items on the flip chart.</p>	<p><u>GETTING ELECTED</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ contacts</li> <li>◆ TV ads</li> <li>◆ letters to the editor</li> <li>◆ name recognition</li> </ul>	

What Trainer Says	What Trainer Does	Flip Charts
<p><i>There are lots of factors in a political campaign, but in the end it all usually adds up to two things: MONEY + VOTES</i></p>	<p>Write MONEY + VOTES in large letters on flip chart.</p>	<p><u>GETTING ELECTED</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ contacts</li> <li>◆ TV ads</li> <li>◆ letters to the editor</li> <li>◆ name recognition</li> <li>◆</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>MONEY</b> <b>VOTES</b></p>
<p><i>So who do elected officials really work for?</i></p> <p><i>People who VOTE for them or GIVE THEM MONEY.</i></p> <p><i>What are some examples of that?</i></p>	<p>Write examples from your area on chart.</p> <p>Optional – distribute copies of Brooklyn, NY handout, "One Example Of The Power Of The Vote" (4 pgs)</p>	<p><u>VOTES + MONEY = RESULTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ big business interests that got special tax cuts</li> <li>◆ high-income areas that got a new school</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>
<p><i>So why should we get involved?</i></p> <p><i>So our communities can get what we want, need and deserve.</i></p>	<p>Ask group to brainstorm WHAT WE WANT, and list on flip chart.</p>	<p><u>WHAT WE WANT</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ better schools</li> <li>◆ more teachers</li> <li>◆ family- wage jobs</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>
<p><i>Is it possible for US to make a difference?</i></p>	<p>Explore the groups' responses, and use examples from handouts (case studies of Brooklyn, NY and Roslyn, WA) to illustrate how organizing CAN make a difference.</p>	
<p><i>Going back to "who decides" on the issues we care about, let's review the kinds of political races that matter most to us.</i></p>	<p>Brainstorm types of races, and check the ones of greatest concern to your group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ School board</li> <li>◆ Conservation district</li> <li>◆ County commissioner</li> <li>◆ Mayor</li> <li>◆ Sheriff</li> <li>◆ Judges</li> <li>◆ State legislator</li> <li>◆ Statewide races (governor, attorney general, etc.)</li> <li>◆ Congress (federal races)</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>

# ONE EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF THE VOTE

The Mayor and City Council recently approved a tax cut.  
But it does not cut taxes the same for all New Yorkers.  
Do you know how much YOUR tax cut is?

Take a look at the size of the tax cuts given to different families:

For a public assistance family of 4, with an income of \$12,000, the total benefit = \$21

For a working family that rents, with an income of \$25,000, total benefit = \$70

For an Accountant with an income of \$100,000 living in \$300,000 condo = \$2,757

For a Wall St Broker with an income of \$1 million living in \$1 million condo = \$10,732

**In the last election, most people in East New York didn't vote.  
Politicians ignore the needs of people who don't vote.**

**If we want politicians to treat our families and our  
neighborhoods with dignity and respect,  
we have to vote.**

# **ONE EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF THE VOTE WHO GETS THE JOBS?**

Last year, New York State had a surplus of \$720 million in welfare funds from the Federal Government.

This money could have been used to create jobs in New York City, but it wasn't.

Instead, the politicians proposed adding 8,000 new prison cells to New York prisons, even though crime is down.

Why the prisons? Because every new prison cell built upstate creates jobs upstate, and contracts for upstate politicians and their friends.

## **WHY DO JOBS AND MONEY GO UPSTATE?**

Look at the power of the vote. In the 1994 election for Governor:

% voting in East New York: 36%  
% voting Upstate: 69%

**Politicians pay attention to communities that vote.  
COMMUNITIES THAT DON'T VOTE GET IGNORED.**

# **Send a message Vote on November 4**

# **ST. PAUL VAPOR CHURCH 1997 RESULTS**

**We talked to 6,880 people.  
6,663 were registered voters.**

## **The good news is:**

We now know we can reliably beat average New York City voter turnout by 10% and 12% by having annual face-to-face contact with voters, even though we are working in neighborhoods that have long suffered some of the lowest voter turnout rates of any throughout the metropolitan area.

### **Specifically, thanks to the hard work at St. Paul,**

- ◆ 3,590 people who often miss elections voted in this one - that's 54%. That's 12% better than voter turnout throughout the City as a whole.
- ◆ We reached 1,270 voters BOTH at the door AND on the phone, and 59% of them voted - even better. But the phonebank contact alone wasn't strong enough: less than half of the voters we reached only on the phone actually voted.

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## **The bad news is:**

- ◆ 3,073 people we met or called didn't vote.

527 people didn't vote, even though we both met them at their door AND then reached them on the phone.

## **Roslyn, Washington 2001 Elections: A Case Study in Electoral Organizing**

### **Background**

Roslyn is a small Central Washington town of 950 people. Platted as company-owned mining and logging town in the 1880s, Roslyn is now home to an eclectic population of retired mining families, public employees (forest service, county government, local teachers), loggers/truckers and new arrivals who, over the last twenty-five years, have added alternative twists to the working class culture. In close proximity to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area (skiing, hiking, snow-mobiling, and camping), and the site of various movie sets and the TV show Northern Exposure – the local economy is now driven by tourism.

Resort and second home development pressure has polarized the community. Citizens committed to a sustainable ecology and economy are putting the brakes on sprawl and development. In the 1999 elections, progressive forces took control of the Mayor's office and seven-member City Council. These seats needed to be defended in November 2001 – and it required implementation of a grassroots, person-to-person voter organizing campaign to pull it off.

Roslyn has 695 registered voters with 285 voting absentee ballots. Historically the turnout in odd years (local races and state/local ballot measures/levies) was @ 55% – a bit higher than the statewide average. November 2001 saw a local levy on purchasing a fire truck; two hotly contested Hospital District races; and two high profile state ballot questions on taxes. For those reasons we assumed a 60% turnout and a total vote of 417. The number of votes needed to win was determined to be 209.

Four of the five progressive controlled council seats were up for election. While one seat was uncontested, three had opposition candidates who were had name recognition, resources, and a common message that they were “sensible people” – “not beholden to environmental special interests” – “consensus builders, not extremists.” They tried to capitalize on various council votes that were contentious and anti-growth. All in all, they presented a formidable opposition.

### **The Campaign Plan**

The three incumbents (two women and one man) chose to run as individuals and not as a slate – although they knew they would be attacked as a slate. However, they agreed to pool their identified supporters (IDs) and coordinate absentee and poll voter activities for getting out the vote. They committed to gathering these IDs through personal contact: door knocking, phone identification and friends making similar contact. Each candidate agreed to use voter lists in street walking order and agreed to a goal of 215 positive supporters (rounding up the "votes to win" number of 209). They agreed to focus on frequent voters, those who are recorded as having voted in at least 2 of the last 4 elections. Each agreed to raise the \$650 required to mail once to each voter (with separate mailings sent to absentee voters on the day they received their ballots); and phone voters receiving their mailing between Saturday and Monday prior to the Tuesday's Election Day. Each agreed to post at least 10 lawn signs with some committing to as many as 40. All understood that the signs were only effective on busy streets; at the homes/businesses of influential citizens; and only as a re-enforcement to the personal contact.

## **Challenges**

The opposition carried their message of moderation – but had their supporters berate the incumbent councilors in letters to the editor, forums and personal mailings. The local papers chose not to print the incumbent's support letters – letters ran 4-1 against them. The opposition started a lawn sign race with some of them posting as many as 75 signs in the small 20 street grid that makes up town. Some of our candidates – as many often do – freaked out about losing the lawn sign and the letter-to-the-editor races. They wanted to whine to the newspaper editor and go out and make more signs. However, refocusing them on the voter lists helped them realize how many voters they knew personally; how few they believed were opposition; how many they didn't know at all and were really "up for grabs." As they plugged away toward their goal of 215 supporters they realized that no number of lawn signs or nasty letters could supplant their supporter list and one-on-one contact. They became adept at determining when polite conversation meant a "no" vote and when a totally unaware resident really was enthusiastic about seeing a candidate at their door. They had friends, family and co-workers scour the list for contacts they knew and could mine for votes. It really became fun for some of them as they became more comfortable using the lists and keeping score.

Numerous poorly attended business and civic "candidate nights" were called. It took discipline for our candidates to attend, knowing that they would come under tremendous questioning from pro-growth mouthpieces. But showing up made a difference, not in votes won at the forums – for there very few undecided voters there – but in gaining the experiences of debate and gaining the respect from the press and general public that they stood by their votes as councilors.

## **Getting Out The Vote (GOTV)**

The plans to coordinate identified support had both pluses and minuses. Initially the candidates identified between 140 and 200 supportive voters. Not enough to guarantee success. Each was given the list of supporters of the voters that they need to persuade – based on who was ID'd for a fellow candidate. After spending the last week contacting these voters – 260 voters were determined to be firmly voting for at least two of our candidates – we guessed that most were supporting all three. The plan was to turn them out on Election Day or get assurances that they had voted their absentee ballots.

Eighty of our supporters had already voted absentee. So Election Day found us needing to get out 180 voters who were poll voters or absentees that we were not clear had sent in their ballots. A team of two poll-watchers came to the polling places and checked the voting books at 2:00 pm, crossed off names and found 130 targets, and began calling. They did not leave messages. At 6:00 pm they came down and checked the books again. They realized that they needed to still find the 85 voters who had not voted. Lists were split and calls and home visits were handled by a crew of 8 volunteers. Messages were left only after 7:15 pm. Of the 85 voters needing to be found, 54 ended up voting or bringing down their absentee ballot to the polling station. Thirty-one did not show up/send in absentee ballots.

## **Summary**

We won all three races with margins of 242-174; 224-200 and 221-205.

Overall turnout ended up being 432 or 62%. "Our guesstimate" of 209 votes to win was low. Absentee turnout was 67% and polling place voter turnout was 61%. Of our 260 identified supporters we accounted for 229 or 88% of our voters showing up or sending in ballots. We clearly had made the difference – most of it on Election Day.

If our 260 supporters had turned out like the average Roslyn voting population (using the 62% Roslyn turnout figure) only 161 of them would have voted. Not nearly enough to win for the margins that were needed. The 26% rise in turnout for our folks translates to 68 votes resulting from last-week "get out the vote" activities, and in all cases made the margins in our four races. The combination of our work, the fire truck levy (which passed with 80% support), and the other variables gave Roslyn the highest turnout in Kittitas County: 62 % compared to 44% in the County overall.

## **Realizations and Future Planning**

Faced with opposition willing to work their support as strongly as ours, we would have lost. Let us make a big assumption that only 62% of their supporters showed up – the City average. That means that if they had gotten 88% of their supporters voting – assuming that they knew who they were, as we did – we would have lost all of the contests.

As it was, they held margins of victory in each of the absentee ballot races. Small margins – but ones created because we had a harder time getting out our absentee vote and not concentrating enough personal contact and "persuasion work" when they were receiving their ballots.

Our projected "votes need to win" of 209 was too few – it turned out that 217 votes were needed to win. Projections should have factored in a higher percentage based on how our own GOTV work would affect the overall turnout. Our final voter IDs for each candidate really needed to be hitting closer to the 215 goal – our most diligent candidate only got 190 supportive IDs. She was the one who also got 242 votes. Since we had to pool IDs – and had the goal of turning out 260 voters – we know that we turned out some voters that split against some of our candidates. In the circumstances that we were in (tremendous polarization) we may have been better off running as a slate. Pooling IDs eventually paid off for our two weakest candidates – and totally coordinated campaigns may have made the identification work less time consuming.

Voter organizing plans that focus on personal contact are integral to winning campaigns. When communities and/or candidates are polarized and exhibit major differences – as they did in Roslyn – the need is more severe. When turnout can be as variable as it has been in recent elections in this country, getting a handle on who will vote and how many votes are needed to win is required of any serious campaign.

– *By Len Norwitz*

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## **SMASH OR TAKE OVER ELECTIONS?**

Goals:	to explore arguments for and against involvement in the electoral process
Format:	Debate involving entire group
Time Required:	40 minutes
Trainer should know:	Be familiar with arguments pro and con and able to modify the initial debate positions to fit the issues faced by your organization
Materials:	Newsprint listing each side's stance, blank newsprint for each team, hats or signs for each debater, props to cheer team on
Handouts:	"What is an Election & Why Should Community Groups Get Involved?"
Credit:	Californians for Justice

What Trainer Says	What Trainer Does	Flip Charts
<p><i>This exercise will allow us to explore the pitfalls as well as the opportunities of electoral organizing so we can make informed choices.</i></p> <p>(5 minutes for intro &amp; set up)</p>	<p>Post the two debate positions - see examples to the right. (modify them to fit your groups' issues.)</p> <p>Use a random method to divide participants into two teams (do not divide them based on their actual agreement with either of the positions).</p>	<p><u>SMASH ELECTIONS SAM</u>: "Our priority is expanding the base of low-income people of color involved in our movement. Elections are short-term, resource intensive, don't leave behind infrastructure, and use racist messages to win over a majority white electorate."</p>
<p><i>Each team will develop the arguments for their side of the debate. Write them on your newsprint, and pick one person as your debater to represent the team.</i></p> <p>(5 minutes to develop arguments)</p>	<p>Bring up "Smash Elections Sam" debater (4 minutes for their statement).</p> <p>Bring up "Takeover Elections Tammy" debater (4 minutes for their statement).</p>	<p><u>TAKEOVER ELECTIONS TAMMY</u>: "Elections are a critical way to build our base and our movement in low-income communities of color. Elections have high visibility, are an opportunity to reframe the racist debates, and are an opportunity to build leadership in communities of color."</p>
<p><i>Each team can regroup to brainstorm 1 minute rebuttals.</i></p> <p>(3 minutes to brainstorm rebuttal arguments)</p>	<p>Bring up "Smash Elections Sam" debater (1 minute for rebuttal arguments).</p> <p>Bring up "Takeover Elections Tammy" debater (1 minute for rebuttal arguments).</p>	<p>(teams can cheer their debater on with props)</p>
<p><i>How would you summarize the results of this debate?</i></p> <p>(10 minutes for summary &amp; closing)</p>	<p>Get closing comments from participants and list on flip chart. Close with your own reflections on what you heard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Electoral organizing presents real dangers.</li> <li>◆ But many opportunities too.</li> <li>◆ If we get involved, we have to have our eyes wide open.</li> </ul>
<p>Hand out "What is an Election &amp; Why Should Community Groups Get Involved?"</p>	<p>If time permits, review hand out with group and compare its conclusions with the ones reached by the group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆</li> </ul>

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## **What Is an Election in the United States, and Why Should Community Groups Get Involved in One?**

### **What they teach in school:**

They teach you that "democracy" means that "the people rule," and that elections are about democracy. They say that by voting for different candidates, the people of the United States get to decide who their government will be and what it will do. The idea is that if people don't like what their elected officials do, in the next election, they will get rid of them and put someone else in their place.

### **That's partly true, but it's not the whole picture.**

First of all, there's a big difference between choosing between two candidates (voting) and having a real say about how the place you live in is run.

**Second**, in an election, "the people" don't rule—money does. Candidates need money to pay for television and radio ads, to pay for slick direct mail pieces, to pay for endorsements in behind-the-scenes deals. This is so true that most politicians spend most of their time raising money so they can get elected again, because in order to beat the opposition, they need to have more money. They literally sell their votes on particular laws and their general influence to big corporations who have lots of money to throw around.

So even though "the people" elect politicians, it's the folks who have a lot of money to offer who really control what the politicians do once they get elected.

**Third**, most of "the people" don't vote. Usually, less than half the people who are eligible participate in U.S. elections. The ones who do are usually the ones who also have other kinds of power in society, people who are white, who are older, who have a lot of education, and who are financially comfortable. For example, California's population is almost half people of color, but in the 1994 election, 81 percent of the people who voted were white!

There are lots of good reasons why poor people, young people, and people of color don't vote. The most frequent reason you'll hear is that they're stupid. That one's a flat-out lie. When people don't vote it's either because the law doesn't permit it (they're too young, they aren't citizens, or they have a criminal record ), or because they have made a rational judgement that voting won't change anything.

**About ballot initiatives:** Usually people vote for candidates, but in the last 20 years ballot initiatives, or propositions have become more common. Ballot initiatives certainly look more democratic than candidate elections, because people are voting directly on an issue that affects them, like Proposition 187. But we need to remember rule number 2 above, in elections, money rules. That means that it's much harder to use an initiative to make a good change—like raising the minimum wage, or spending money on schools instead of prisons,—than it is to pass ugly attacks on immigrants, people of color, women, or lesbians and gays.

**Fourth,** and this is the big secret, money rules, but "field" campaigns can also win elections. If people get organized; if they divide their city into small areas and get to know every voter in each target area and which way they will vote; if they make sure each voter actually goes to the polls; community groups can sneak in under the money barrier and change the outcome of an election!

### **If elections aren't really about democracy, why should communities and community organizations care about them at all?**

**1. Power:** Active, organized participation in an election can give community groups a lot of power. When a community group gets organized enough to have a direct, provable effect on the outcome of an election, they become a force that politicians local and statewide have to pay attention to.

**2. Legitimacy:** It's obnoxious, but working successfully in elections makes people with power treat your organization with respect. (This is especially true when you combine your electoral muscle with other kinds of organizing.)

**3. Organization and coalition-building:** The kinds of discipline and skills people learn in an electoral campaign are very valuable. And they can be transferred to other kinds of campaigns. The experience of working successfully in coalition with other community groups on a concrete, time-limited project like an election can make it easier to collaborate on other joint projects.

#### ***A couple of things to remember:***

- Electoral power is not the only kind of power, but it is definitely a kind of power.
- Keep your eyes on the prize! Elections are a means, not an end.

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## **MOVEMENT-BUILDING CAMPAIGNS**

Goals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to define ways that electoral campaigns can build movements</li><li>• to identify your group's self-interest in electoral organizing</li></ul>
Format:	Guided Discussion
Time Required:	40 minutes
Trainer should know:	Be familiar with characteristics of strong movements, of traditional electoral campaigns, and of movement-building electoral campaigns
Handouts:	"What is an Election & Why Should Community Groups Get Involved?"
Credit:	Californians for Justice & Holly Pruet

What Trainer Says	What Trainer Does	Flip Charts
<p><i>So, what is movement building, anyway? What are the elements of a strong movement?</i></p>	<p>Brainstorm with group and list answers on flip chart, add others as needed (e.g. those on right).</p>	<p><u>STRONG MOVEMENTS:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Organize large #s of people to make change (scale)</li> <li>◆ Mobilize large #s of people at critical moments (scale)</li> <li>◆ Develop leaders and skills (capacity)</li> <li>◆ Have a structure and membership to sustain the work (capacity)</li> <li>◆ Have clear ideology &amp; politics (political education)</li> <li>◆ Work for the long term &amp; select fights that advance goals (strategic)</li> </ul>
<p><i>These are not the objectives of a traditional electoral campaign. What <u>is</u> the goal of a traditional / campaign?</i></p>	<p>Lead group to answer on right; write it on flip chart</p>	<p><u>TRAD. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN GOAL</u></p> <p>Win 50% + 1 on Election Day</p>
<p><i>What are the goals that WE would have in an electoral campaign, i.e. goals that would build OUR organization or movement?</i></p>	<p>Keep the "Strong Movement" chart visible. Brainstorm with group specific objectives within the electoral arena that reinforce the "Strong Movement" elements. Add others as needed (e.g. those on right).</p>	<p><u>MOVEMENT-BUILDING ELECTORAL GOALS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop the analysis and skills of constituencies to advance a political agenda</li> <li>◆ Gain power through demonstrating ability to influence election outcome</li> <li>◆ Gain experience in specific arenas, e.g. coalition work, message discipline, etc.</li> <li>◆ Identify and train new leaders</li> </ul>

What Trainer Says	What Trainer Does	Flip Charts
<p><i>Let's take a look at how these different goals play out in movement-building campaigns vs. traditional campaigns.</i></p>	<p>Distribute "Traditional Vs. Movement-Building Electoral Campaigns" Handout. Ask group to review and make any changes or additions to reflect the groups' perspective.</p>	<p><u>CHARACTERISTICS OF MOVEMENT BUILDING CAMPAIGNS</u></p> <p><i>(write up key words from the handout that fit with your group's experience)</i></p>
<p><i>Transforming traditional campaigns into movement-building campaigns takes a long-term commitment to building the capacity of both community based organizations <u>and</u> progressive campaign workers.</i></p>	<p>Brainstorm the capacity that needs to be built in <u>community-based organizations</u> in order to participate in movement-building campaigns.</p> <p>Go back through and put a check mark by the pieces that are priorities for your group.</p>	<p><u>CAPACITY BUILDING FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ability to recruit &amp; run own members for office</li> <li>◆ Base of members, donors, volunteers committed to advancing the group's agenda through electoral organizing</li> <li>◆ Ability to hold elected officials accountable</li> <li>◆ Ability to participate in and influence the way ballot issues campaigns are run</li> </ul>
	<p>Brainstorm the skills that need to be built in <u>progressive campaign workers</u> in order to participate in movement-building campaigns.</p>	<p><u>SKILL BUILDING FOR PROGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN WORKERS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Run winning campaigns that advance longer-term progressive goals</li> <li>◆ Expand the base of people involved in electoral organizing</li> <li>◆ Develop winning, values-based messages</li> <li>◆ Recruit and train effective grassroots leaders and candidates</li> </ul>
<p><i>Often there's not a clear-cut choice between the 2 kinds of campaigns. Even when a big-money, mainstream campaign takes the lead, there is room for a complementary, movement-building effort. Balancing the goals of an immediate electoral win and long-term movement building is a challenge. Being clear about our goals and bottom lines is critical.</i></p>		

## TRADITIONAL VS. MOVEMENT-BUILDING ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

*Add your own responses...*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Traditional Campaign</b>	<b>Movement-Building Campaign</b>
Definition of Victory	50% +1 on election day	win on election day + advance other movement goals
Values	do anything to win	values based
Message	"win at all costs"	at minimum, does no harm at best, educates on the issues
Medium for Message	paid media	mass field mobilization (+ media)
Relationship to People	no accountability to constituency	politically empowers constituency
Increases Clout...	...of individuals	...of constituencies
Timeframe	one-time focus	builds toward long-term strategy
Leadership	hired guns	builds grassroots leadership
Resources	resources used are gone forever	resources used are an investment
Outcome	drains, alienates grassroots base	leaves community in better shape

### SUMMARY

Through the electoral process, progressive grassroots organizations can:

- ◆ build their base (membership, donor, volunteer, supporter)
- ◆ advance their longer-term agendas
- ◆ develop and communicate winning, value-based messages
- ◆ recruit and train effective, grassroots leadership
- ◆ recruit and run grassroots, constituency-based candidates for office
- ◆ hold elected officials accountable

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## **A VOTING RIGHTS FRAMEWORK**

Goals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to define the full range of barriers to participation in the electoral system</li><li>• to promote the use of the "Fannie Lou Hamer" Standard in reforms</li></ul>
Format:	Guided Discussion
Time Required:	40 minutes
Trainer should know:	Be familiar with issues addressed in hand out
Handouts:	"Election Alternatives – The Voting Rights Movement" (4 pages)
Credit:	Holly Pruett outline, source material by Moira Bowman, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and the Fannie Lou Hamer Project

What Trainer Says	What Trainer Does	Flip Charts
<p>Many of us have good reason to be skeptical of the political process. The 2000 Presidential Elections, with those hanging chads, made the public more aware of some of the "Voting Wrongs" that prevent many of us from exercising our "Voting Rights."</p>		
<p>As we know, not everyone in this country gets to participate fully in the political process. What are some of the barriers?</p>	<p>Brainstorm with group and list responses on flip chart</p>	<p><u>BARRIERS TO FULL PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ felony conviction</li> <li>◆ forgot to register to vote</li> <li>◆ dominated by big \$\$\$</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>
<p>Let's look at a full list of the pieces that would need to be in place to ensure full Voting Rights for everybody.</p>	<p>Distribute handout and have groups take turns reading it aloud, or summarize it for them.</p>	
<p>What do you think about the Fannie Lou Hamer Standard?</p> <p>How does this affect your thinking about our group's priorities?</p>	<p>Lead discussion about the material in the handout.</p>	<p>[note key concepts during discussion on flip chart]</p>

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## ELECTION ALTERNATIVES – THE VOTING RIGHTS MOVEMENT

By Moira Bowman, Western States Center

### What is a Voting Rights Framework?

A voting rights framework names the continuum of barriers that undermine meaningful access to participation in the electoral system. It links current barriers to meaningful participation and to historical struggles of people of color and women for voting rights. It has the potential to make explicit a race and class analysis of current electoral systems.

### An Example of a Voting Rights Framework

**A Voters' Bill of Rights**, Developed by the Center for Constitutional Rights, 2000

- **Strict Enforcement and extension of the Voting Rights Act.** As the vote in Florida and many other states demonstrated, the intimidation and disenfranchisement of communities of color still goes on. The federal Justice Department must strengthen its vote enforcement division to swiftly investigate and prosecute those who act in this way. The Voting Rights Act, some provisions of which are scheduled to expire in 2007, should be extended.
- **Abolishment of the Electoral College and its replacement with a majority rule election.** The President should be elected by direct, popular vote and must receive a majority of the votes to take office. If no candidate receives 50% plus one of the votes cast, a runoff must be held. A system called Instant Runoff Voting, in which voters rank candidates in order of preference, will allow this to happen without the need of a second election and eliminate the "spoiler" factor. More Information at [www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org)
- **Clean Money Elections.** A ban on "soft-money" contributions is needed immediately. We also need to establish full public financing of public campaigns and public information services for voters. Broadcasters must carry debates and provide free time for all candidates and parties as a license requirement to use our public airwaves. Candidates must be given the choice of running campaigns with public funds instead of accepting special interest campaign contributions, legalized bribery. Clean election laws like those in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Arizona should be expanded to other states and taken to the federal level. For More Information: [www.publiccampaign.org](http://www.publiccampaign.org)
- **Instant Runoff Voting.** To encourage more participation in the electoral process, voters must know that their vote can really count. By allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference (first, second, third choice, etc.), if no candidate gets a majority of first choices, a runoff count can be conducted without the need for a second election. The same as in a traditional second-election runoff, the majority choice can be determined, while also allowing voters the opportunity to vote for those candidates they like the most without worrying that in doing so their vote will help candidates they like least. Instant runoff voting also promotes positive campaigning and coalitions, since winners may need the second choices from opponents' supporters. [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)

- **Proportional Representation.** "Winner-take-all" is a very undemocratic way to choose representatives to government. Why should 49% of voters in a legislative district get 0% representation? Most democracies in the world use some form of proportional representation to choose legislatures. If one quarter of the voters support a particular party, they should be able to elect roughly a quarter of the seats in a city council or legislature. The majority of voters will elect the majority of seats but minorities will get their fair share of representation; it's common sense! For More Information: [www.fairvote.org-Propportional](http://www.fairvote.org-Propportional) or <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/polit/damy/prlib.htm>
  
- **Voting Rights for Former Prisoners.** Why should ex-felons not be able to vote? They've "paid their debt to society." There are over four million American citizens in this category, particularly African Americans who are incarcerated at a disproportionately high rate. These lifetime voting prohibition laws violate citizens' constitutional voting rights and must be repealed.
  
- **Make Voting Easier and More Reliable.** Many citizens are discouraged from voting by unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles and restrictions. Although most people don't get excited by politics until a few weeks before an election, in 44 states it is already too late to register to vote by then. Citizens should be able to register to vote up to and on voting day itself, with appropriate protections against voter fraud. Students should be able to register and vote in the locality where they are going to school. To maximize voter participation, voting could be conducted by mail, or voting day could be a national holiday, or on the weekend. Voting precincts should be adequately staffed with sufficiently trained personnel and professional supervision. Old and unreliable voting machines, found disproportionately in communities of color, should be replaced, funded by the federal government, with reliable means of voting and vote counting, including provision for the use of instant runoff and proportional representation voting.
  
- **Easier Access to the Ballot, the Media and Debates for Candidates.** In our two-party system, third or fourth parties face a host of institutional barriers, from getting on the ballot to being included in debates to broadcasting their views. This discourages people from voting because alternative voices help enliven the political debate that is at the heart of any healthy democracy. Prohibitive ballot access requirements should be altered, debates should be open to all ballot-qualified candidates, and all such candidates should receive free air-time.
  
- **Create Independent and Non-Partisan Election Administration Bodies.** As the controversy in Florida has proved, the partisan or bipartisan control of electoral institutions can cast a cloud of illegitimacy across what should be the simple act of vote counting. Electoral commissions at all levels of government should be free of control by any political party. Many countries, including neighboring Canada and Mexico, already have such bodies. We need to move to emulate those kinds of truly impartial systems.
  
- **Statehood for the District of Columbia.** The District of Columbia has more citizens than several other states yet it has no voting representation in the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives. This is manifestly undemocratic. There is no good reason why all of our citizens should not have to opportunity to choose voting representatives to Congress.  
[www.freespeech.org/dcstatehood](http://www.freespeech.org/dcstatehood)

## **Framing Campaign Finance Reform: CLASS**

"...resentment about the unfair influence of money in politics is simmering just below the surface of American society. So far, by and large, that resentment has contributed to disaffection, cynicism, disenchantment, and a lack of voting."

"After all, maybe two-tenths of 1 percent of Americans make contributions of \$1,000 to U.S. political campaigns. Give or take a few, that's half a million people. For the sake of argument, let's give them a name: the ruling class. Building support for reform means driving a wedge between that half a million and the vast bulk of Americans who've been disenfranchised by the power of money in politics. It means making millions of people angry that Mercedes-driving, Martha's Vineyard-vacationing, boardroom-inhabiting, lobbyist-employing rich people use their money to intermingle so intimately with elected officials and set Washington's agenda."

"Phony campaign finance reform would polish up the rough edges of what we have now, eliminating a few of its worst features but preserving the power of the elite to determine what gets acted on and what doesn't. Real campaign finance reform requires a massive power shift based on class. The test of whether it's any good will be whether or not it brings about a palpable and lasting transfer of raw political power away from affluent donors and the corporate elite to, well, the people."

Robert Dreyfuss, "Reforming Reform" *American Prospect*, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000

## **Framing Campaign Finance Reform: RACE and CLASS**

The Fannie Lou Hamer Standard, developed by the Fannie Lou Hamer Project

There can be no doubt that today's campaign finance system, which requires candidates for major public office to raise and spend huge sums of money, is exclusionary, corrupt, and badly in need of reform. But what is "reform"? What is real reform? And how will we know it when we see it?

The "Fannie Lou Hamer standard" (also known as the "political equality standard") named after the legendary African-American voting rights champion who led the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in 1964 — provides a way to see immediately what constitutes real reform and what doesn't. It's a standard for the kind of reform that is consistent with our highest aspirations for democracy — reform based on the sacred principle of POLITICAL EQUALITY.

- ◆ Political equality means, according to the Voting Rights Act, equal opportunity for everyone to participate in the political process, regardless of race, gender, or economic status and access to wealth.
- ◆ Political equality means "one person, one vote," not one dollar, one vote.
- ◆ Political equality means, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln, "government of, by, and for the people" —by which he meant all the people, not just those who can raise, or who can afford to give, big-money campaign contributions.

## **HOW THE FANNIE LOU HAMER STANDARD WORKS**

Every time a politician, political party, or citizens group puts forward a proposal to reform the campaign finance system, we ask "How far does this reform really go in making the system fair for someone like Fannie Lou Hamer — a passionate leader, a woman, a person of color, a person of little means?"

### **Other Resources on Election Reform Alternatives:**

Public Campaign's Clean Money Reform and voluntary public financing [www.publiccampaign.org](http://www.publiccampaign.org)

National Voting Rights Institute - challenging of the Wealth Primary [www.nvri.org](http://www.nvri.org)

Demos – "a network for ideas and action" – electoral reforms [www.demos-usa.org](http://www.demos-usa.org)

Center for Voting and Democracy - studies how voting systems affect participation, representation and governance [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)