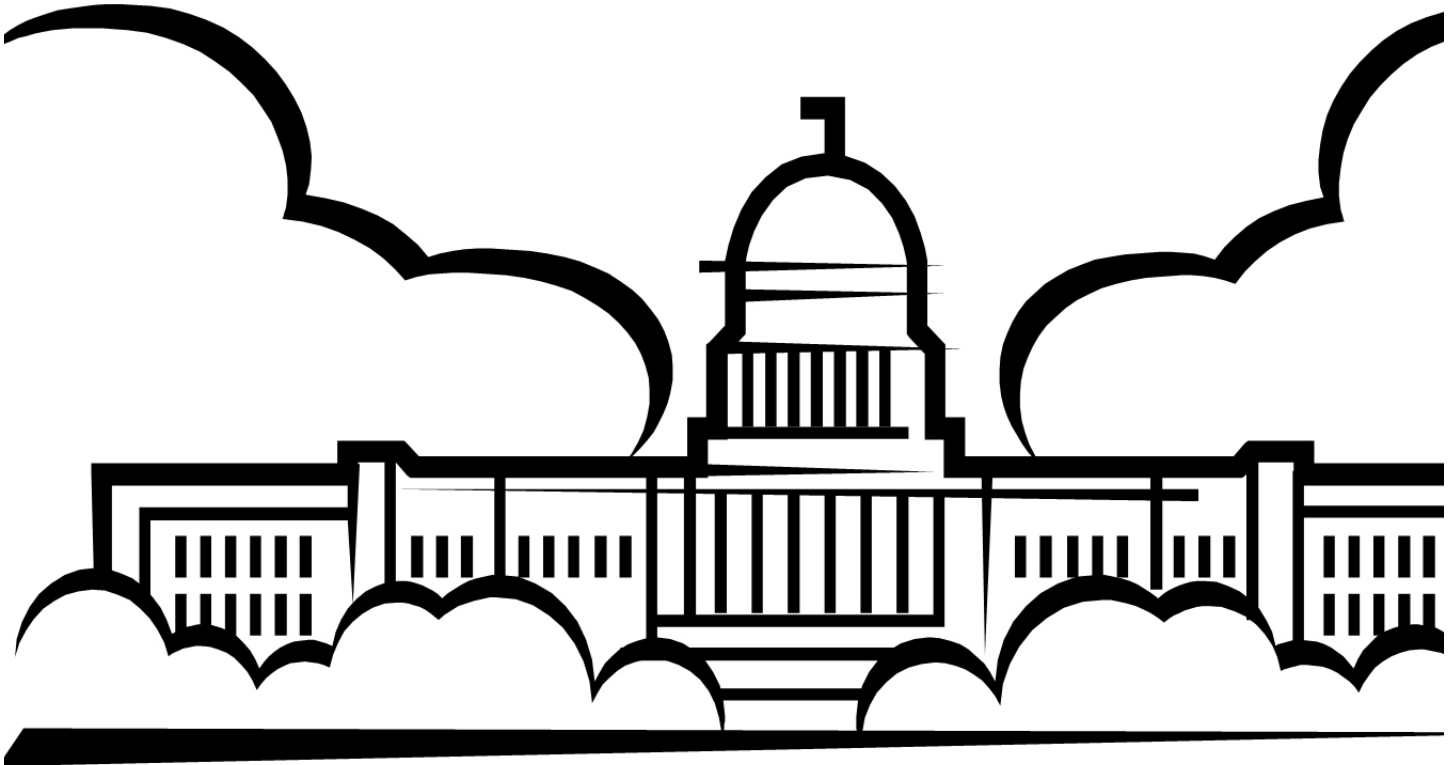


Capitol Gains: Traditional vs. Movement-Building Approaches to Legislative Advocacy



Western States Center has long believed that the folks on the ground are not only capable of electoral and legislative organizing, they are the best people for the job. Elections and legislative sessions can feel fast-paced, hard-nosed, and unwelcoming, but they don't have to be. We believe a movement-building approach – values-driven and led by those most affected by the issues – can transform these kinds of organizing into an experience that builds leadership, community, and grassroots power.

While we may still feel disappointed by the results of an election or nervous about what it all means as our state legislatures start their sessions, we must remember our long-term goals and the strategies that will get us there. The Center offers this tool as a way to think through how we can do our work differently than traditional lobbyists and legislative organizers. We have also included a framework for thinking about movement-building even we're playing defense.

We encourage you to use this as a conversation starter; to adapt and share the tool; and to give feedback and share with us your movement-building experiences.



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Capitol Gains: Traditional vs. Movement-Building Approach to Legislative Advocacy

	Traditional	Movement-Building
Definition of Victory	51% of votes	Win the vote and advance movement goals
Values	Do anything to win (court any legislator, make any deal, compromise on legislation...)	Values-based approach to the work (moving legislation that is fair, equitable and inclusive)
Message	Use any message, win at all costs	Educate on issues, don't sell out allies, not at the expense of other constituencies and issues
Medium for Message	Paid lobbyists and paid media	Constituent mobilization, community lobby visits, earned media
Direction of Message	Aimed at legislators, leaves constituents out of the loop	Keeps constituents fully informed and included in decision-making
Relationship to Constituencies	No accountability to constituents	Politically empowers constituents
Increases Clout...	... of legislators	...of constituents
Timeframe	One session, one vote	Long-term, multi-campaign
Leadership	Hired lobbyists	Grassroots leadership of people most affected by issues
Outcome	Alienates and disconnects members from process and outcome	Community is empowered and connected to the movement



Capitol Gains: Traditional vs. Movement-Building Approach to Legislative Advocacy

What Happens When We are “Playing Defense” in the Legislature?

	Traditional	Movement-Building
Definition of Victory	Stop bad bills from being passed	Stop bad bills, recruit legislative allies, advance public debates about progressive issues
Values	Focus on “their” values, not ours	Values-based approach to the work
Message	Respond to the frame put out by the opposition	Re-frame with our values, tie to our larger issues
Direction of Message	Focused on swaying moderate legislators while ignore others	Includes constituents, allies, and allied-elected officials
Relationship to People	Motivates constituency with fear	Motivates constituency with values and connection to proactive campaigns and issues
Outcome	Leaves members focused on the work of the opposition, burns out leaders and volunteers, constituents feel disempowered	Reminds members of long-term goals and our path to winning them, re-affirms our commitment to grassroots leadership, recognizes “losing forward”