

Policy



There are many reasons why public policy is important. It is possible that in any given year are the law that you are pushing for will not pass. In that case it is especially critical to know why you are embarking on a public policy initiative.

Influencing Legislation and Public Policy

It is irresistible to state the obvious—engaging in public policy work is a way to pass better laws.

Demonstrate and Build the Power of the Organization

Turning out people for legislative hearings, rallies, generating phone calls and letters, even the very act of pushing for changes to the law at all, are demonstrations of your organization's power. The act of building the base to engage in these activities likewise builds the power of the organization.

Cultivating Allies

A public policy campaign is an opportunity to find allies. Sometimes the allies will be short term allies who only care about the single issue that you are pushing that session, but sometimes it is the opportunity to work with organizations who have the potential to be long term allies. Short term allies can create opportunities if they have a lot of clout and can push your single issue. Long term allies can strengthen your organization in the long run.

Creating Leadership Opportunities

Every opportunity that leaders in your community have to fight for their values is a potential opportunity to deepen the leadership in the community. So much work needs to be done in a public policy campaign that there are unlimited opportunities for homeowners to take on leadership roles. Whether it is being on a legislative committee, doing outreach in the community, or meeting with an elected official, public policy initiatives are a great opportunity to identify new leaders.

Getting Your Message Out

The press will only cover issues if they feel there is something newsworthy. While what the press deems newsworthy can be an area of some debate, a public policy campaign is an opportunity to create the news and get your issues known on a broader level. Even if a particular piece of legislation does not prevail, sending out press releases for key hearings or events can peak the interest of the press. This, in turn, can present your message to a broader audience and create greater awareness of your issues. Ultimately, this increased public awareness is an incentive for your legislator to do something to address your issues.

Developing Relationships

Developing relationships with policy makers can pay dividends in the long term, even if the policy that you are pushing for does not pass in the short term. In any issue that you work on, it is likely that the opposition has staff who are frantically trying to build relationships and become the go-to people. If you are going toe to toe with an industry group, it is likely that they have a paid lobbyist who is at the capital every day working to get their message out and cultivating relationships with key legislators. However, the lobbyist does not live in each and every legislative district, and at the end of the day the legislator is not accountable to the lobbyist; the legislator is accountable to voters who live in the district.

Distracting the Opposition

Sometimes the best defense is a good offense. Getting a strong message out prior to the opposition's, gaining allies, and showing that you are a powerful force can be an effective way to shut down the opposition. If they are busy fighting your initiatives, it can prevent them from marshaling their resources to create hostile legislation.

One of the questions that every organization must answer as a first step is, where do we start? What are the first things that we should push for if we want to improve the law?

The answer depends on where you are currently. It is important to have a sense of the lay of the land, and to know what laws already exist in your state. It is also important to pick issues that are the things that are important to manufactured homeowners in your state.

Just as picking issues is important to community organizing, it is also important for legislative organizing and most of the same principals apply. You must get your entire constituency involved in the process of picking your issues. You have to pick an issue that is important to people so that they will want to get involved. You have to determine if it is the kind of issue that you could expect action on this year, or if it is the kind of issue that will take multiple years. You also have to be aware of what the potential opposition is going to be: will this be a hot button issue with the park owners, or is it something that they will not really care about? If the legislation that you are proposing involves government agencies taking on responsibilities, do you have their support? Doing a thorough analysis of the issue is critical to an effective public policy campaign.

Sample Questions for Analyzing Issues

Is it consistent with our values?

- What are the values that this legislation would appeal to?
- How is this consistent with our values (what we stand for)?
- Does this build our organization? If so, how?
- How does this further racial justice/racial equity aims?

Is the issue deeply felt? Is the issue widely felt?

- What are the benefits of changing the law?
- How important is the issue to the lives of people who live in manufactured home communities?
- Who benefits?
- Is there a downside of changing this law for people who live in manufactured home communities?
- Are our members going to be willing to put in the work on this issue?

Is it winnable?

- Who are our potential allies, how strong is their interest in the issue, and how powerful are they?
- Who are our opponents, how strong is their opposition, and how powerful are they?
- What is the political landscape for this issue?
- Is what we are proposing legal and constitutional?
- What is the level of public awareness of the issue? Has it been in the press?
- Do we have people with stories or testimony about the issue?
- Do we have examples to point to from other states?
- What resources would it take to push this issue (time, \$, volunteers, etc.)?

Starting from Scratch: Prioritizing Fundamental Rights

If you do not have special protections for people who live in manufactured home communities, or if you have laws that are missing some important protections, here are some ideas to think about as a starting point.

Freedom of Expression and the Right to Organize

One of the most critical steps to getting people involved is actually going and speaking face to face with other homeowners. Imagine what happens in a community where park owners can prevent residents from having meetings, knocking on doors to spread the word about activities, or even distributing informational fliers. Particularly in high-pressure situations, park owners have attempted to use the threat of trespassing charges to prevent homeowners from receiving vital information. One way to block park owner interference in getting the word out to the community is through freedom of expression and right to organize laws.

The basic premise behind freedom of expression and right to organize laws is that they allow residents and allies to speak out in any community in the state and distribute information and materials without interference from the park owner. Without the threat of trespassing charges, which can include steep fines and even jail time, homeowners and allies have a better chance of building strong resident associations.

Eliminate No-cause Eviction

One of the most basic and fundamental legal protections for manufactured homeowners is protection from no-cause evictions. No-cause eviction means exactly what it sounds like: a homeowner can be evicted from the community for no cause. Sometimes this coincides with the end of lease terms; sometimes it is simply a notice from the park owner indicating that a homeowner is being evicted.

There are many reasons that a park owner might wish to evict a homeowner without cause. One potential reason is to try to clear the park for a redevelopment, while at the same time avoiding any responsibility for relocation costs or longer park closure timelines. Another possible reason that a park owner might want to eliminate a homeowner is if that person is considered to be a “problem”, such as the leader of a resident association or someone who demands accountability. No-cause eviction can also be a mechanism for eliminating older homes from a manufactured home community.

Eliminating no-cause eviction serves several different purposes. First of all, it means that a homeowner cannot be evicted for no reason. Secondly, it protects homeowners who engage in organizing or other community activities from being eliminated from the community based on the whim of a park-lord. It prevents park owners from wielding ultimate control over every aspect of a resident’s life.

In a larger sense, eliminating no-cause eviction protects manufactured homes. It is an acknowledgment that a homeowner cannot simply pack up and leave if a park owner decides not to renew the lease or decides that it would be more convenient to have a less “demanding” homeowner. Instead, it ensures that homeowners do not lose the place they call home without a valid reason.

Retaliation Laws

As a leader in the community, a homeowner can become a target for retaliation. Even without no-cause evictions, park owners have been known to use any pretext to kick out those who challenge substandard living conditions or who push for rights in their community. However, there are laws in some states that attempt to remedy this situation. Retaliation laws flip the burden onto park owners to prove that the actions that they are taking are not in retaliation to some action by the homeowner. Retaliation laws can cover not only evictions, but also rent increases or loss of services. While retaliation laws will not prevent park owners from acting in bad faith, they can prevent them from bullying residents unchecked.

Why Start Here?

So, why do we consider these a starting point for public policy change? These policies create an environment that maximizes the ability of homeowners to assert their rights or participate in the political and civic process without undue interference from park-lords or managers. If you want to have a coordinated, statewide push for comprehensive homeowner rights, these are a critical starting point. Without these protections the park-lords will hold the upper hand in any organizing effort.

The number one question that everyone asks about public policy makers is: why should they listen to me? What chance do I have to make my voice heard in the legislative process when there are so many powerful people out there trying to get elected officials to do things for them? As grass roots organizations and social justice movements have successfully shown time and again, legislators can be forced to pay attention to the people that they represent.

You Asked

Always remember that your legislator is a “public servant.” Your legislator is supposed to work for you. Letting your legislator know that you are interested in an issue, that it is important to you, and that you want the legislator to do something about it is a vital first step to creating systemic change. Legislators have many groups competing for their time and attention. It is up to you to educate your legislator about manufactured housing issues. If you are prepared, if you have a powerful message, and if you have tailored that message to your audience, your legislator will listen. It is your legislator’s job to listen to you.

You have Strength in Numbers

On most issues you will have a vast numerical advantage over your opponents. Typically, your opposition will be the manufactured home park owners. For every one park owner there are tens or hundreds of homeowners. Know the scope of your numbers and communicate this to elected officials. While the statistics vary from state to state, nation wide millions of people live in manufactured home communities. There may be districts in your state where the percentage of the population who lives in manufactured home communities is politically significant or even overwhelming.

You Have a Broad Geographic Presence

Manufactured housing issues can be urban issues, suburban issues and rural issues all wrapped into one. Manufactured homeowners can live in every corner of your state. This means that there will be legislators who are accountable to manufactured home owners in almost every district in your state. Let your legislators know that they have manufactured home communities in their districts.

You Vote

Some politicians do not believe that people who live in manufactured home parks vote. In many places this is demonstrably untrue. If politicians know that your base votes they are more likely to be responsive to your concerns. Many state legislative races are won or lost by a small number of votes. If you know how many potential voters live in manufactured home communities in a district, and effectively communicate this to the elected representatives of that district, it can make them stand up and take notice.

You Can Mobilize

If you are mobilized, elected officials will be forced to listen to you. Personal phone calls, letters, emails, and meetings are all examples of ways that you can leverage your numbers into attention from elected officials. At key points in the legislative process you can alert decision maker that you want them to take action on your issue through various tactics such as post card campaigns, action alerts to your allies, and fliers encouraging homeowners in key districts to make phone calls.

You Build Relationships

Getting to know your elected officials and letting them get to know you and your issues are critical to finding champions at the legislature. This starts long before the legislative session begins. Less formal meetings, particularly in your legislator's home district, can be a good way to let your elected officials know who you are and what you are all about. It is a chance to give officials a good impression of manufactured home communities and the people who live there. Some officials may never have visited a manufactured home community and believe the same stereotypes about manufactured homes as the rest of the general public. This is your opportunity to set the stage. If you are having an event in your community, consider inviting your elected officials. Events such as National Night Out are perfect opportunities for elected officials to see manufactured home communities as real neighborhoods.

You Have Good Stories

The halls of the capitol are full of professional lobbyists paid to tell legislators about issues. Lobbyists might be working on many different issues for many different clients. They know the process well and can use relationships that they have built over the years to influence decisions makers. What they do not have - that you do have - is a personal story about the issues. The personal experience that you relate to your policy makers about an issue can make the kind of emotional impact that fact and figures cannot. Legislators sense that you really care about the issues and are not talking to them just to wheel and deal. Real people with real stories make a real impact.

You are Credible

If you are organized and prepared, if you present your message in an accurate and effective way, and if you approach your elected officials in an appropriate and respectful manner, you increase your level of credibility. You are one of the experts on your issues. Demonstrating this expertise to policy makers will make them take you seriously.

Can you go it alone when you are trying to influence public policy? Do you want to? It all depends on the relationship between the size of your organization, your resources, your power and your relationships, relative to how controversial your issue is. Unless you have unlimited time, resources, and tons of clout, it is wise to find strong allies. Just as individual homeowners form associations to leverage their power, homeowners associations form coalitions to create greater leverage up at the capitol.

Issues, Allies and Scope

Not every issue that you work on is going to involve the same group of potential allies. This means that unless you decide to form one catch-all coalition for manufactured housing issues you might be working with different groups of organizations on different issues. For example, the people who care about preservation of communities might not be the same people who identify licensing requirements as a key concern. With a broader coalition you will have more potential allies; however, some of them may be less invested in your issues. Additionally, it is important to anticipate potential conflicts within your group of potential allies. Keeping the coalition focused can eliminate the potential for major rifts within the group.

Not every ally is going to be your friend on every issue. The key is to know if any individual group is a short-term or long-term ally. Short-term allies agree with you on this one issue or set of issues, but may not on other issues. Long-term allies are the organizations that share core values and a mission that supports your organization's position in the long-term. In the instance of a formalized, broad scope coalition, long-term allies will be the most critical. They are going to be the ones who will respect your position, if not always agree with your entire legislative agenda. Short-term allies are critical for specific issues, but are less likely to accept or be interested in your entire agenda. While these allies can be critical for pushing your legislation, they are more appropriate for issue-specific coalitions.

Understanding Self-Interest

Each organization is going to come to the table in a coalition for a different reason. You must ask: why would a given organization want to participate in your legislative coalition? Understanding the self-interest of the various organizations at the table will help establish the level of commitment that each of the organizations have for a given issue. It will also let you know how to talk about the issue with a specific ally, and tell you something about the various organizations' approach to messaging on an issue. For example, if an organization is involved in a legislative coalition because their mission is to serve senior citizens, their message is going to focus on seniors.

Homeowners must also think very carefully about the role of park-lords in the legislative process. Sometimes there are going to be points of common self-interest between homeowners and park-lords. Remember; however, if you are working in coalition with the park owners' association, that they are going to be looking out for the self-interest of their members and could quickly become your opponents. From a strategic perspective, think about whether it is worthwhile to include organizations who might become opponents on an issue in your coalition. While it can be useful to work with the industry group on issues of common interest, it might be strategically prudent to do so outside of a broader coalition and on a more individual basis.

Why to be a Leader on Your Issues

With a group of strong allies at the table, it is easy for homeowners to become overwhelmed. After all, many of the people at the table will have clout and connections that your organization does not have. However, on manufactured housing issues it is critical that homeowners take a leadership role in setting the agenda.

You are the one who has to live with the consequences of any change in public policy. If there are unintended consequences that are detrimental to the quality of life for manufactured homeowners, people in other groups are only affected in an abstract way. Their lives do not change and they do not bear the burden of adverse consequences. Likewise, they do not gain the benefits of positive law changes and will have less dedication to any given issue. Smart advocacy groups understand that without the unique knowledge that homeowners bring to the table, they are unable to fully understand the impact of policy change.

Additionally, you as a homeowner are the expert on your own life. You are the one who is the most informed about how the laws affect the quality of life in manufactured home communities. As the expert you are naturally in a strong position to be the leader.

Finally, you have the base of homeowners. Your organization has the base of individual voters who have the strongest interest in the issues. This means that when it comes to developing relationships between engaged constituents and legislators, generating phone calls and letters, and demanding accountability at the ballot box, homeowner groups are in the strongest position to assert their leadership in a legislative coalition.

Tips for Leading a Coalition

1. Be assertive. Let the other organizations at the table know that you are the one convening this coalition. Let them know that as a homeowner you are the one who has to live with the results of the legislative process.
2. Be clear in establishing the scope of the coalition. This will avoid messiness and conflict within the coalition, particularly if the coalition includes short-term allies.
3. Be direct in talking about the goals of the coalition. If every organization at the table understands the scope and goals of the coalition, they can make informed decisions about why they should be part of the coalition.
4. Be firm about your position. This is not to mean that you should be inflexible. You brought people together for a reason and they may have some fantastic ideas about how to approach an issue or address the identified problem or concern. However, do not let your allies force you to adopt policy proposals that you do not feel comfortable with.
5. Be informed. If you are prepared and have done a thorough job of analyzing your issues, you will gain the respect of the other coalition members.
6. Be vigilant about park prejudice within your coalition. In an environment where park prejudice is accepted in the media and in everyday life, it is not uncommon for even your allies to have misconceptions about manufactured home communities and the people who live there. In both the formation of policies and the message that you will be using with policy makers, it is important to watch out for statements and policies that buy into park prejudice. As a homeowner you are in the best position to recognize instances of park prejudice within your coalition and deal with it in an appropriate manner.
7. Be respectful and understanding of the self-interest of other groups at the table. Knowing why other groups are there and respecting their positions can bring you a long way toward forming a consensus within your coalition.
8. Be aware of your power. When all else fails, if the coalition supports a position that is detrimental to the lives of manufactured homeowners you have the power to walk away from the coalition. Be clear about your concerns with the position taken by the coalition. Sometimes a lack of understanding of your specific concerns can lead to misunderstandings about the issues. Clarity can clear up disagreements; however, sometimes it is necessary to fight for your position - even to the point of actively lobbying against a coalition-supported bill.

Regardless of where you live, it is likely that you will need to work with people from different political parties. Even if one party is in a strong position of power in both the legislative and executive branches in your state, chances are at some point in time the ebb and flow of politics will change things up. Additionally, you are likely to be working with homeowners within your own organization who share vastly different political views. Knowing what values appeal to various political parties is an important part of refining your approach when dealing with elected officials.

What Do We Mean When We Say Values?

Increasingly, political parties use the term “values” to win votes. This language of values includes many points that are more noise than action. However, at its most essential level, the term values means the core belief system that underlies the decisions that politicians make on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, there are many hot-button wedge-issues that are mired in the language of “values,” but have little to do with the position that an individual candidate holds on issues related to manufactured home communities. It is also important to realize that political parties, while theoretically united on some issues, are not monolithic in their views. Values that may seem intrinsic to each political party are likely to vary dramatically from legislator to legislator.

Republican Party Values	Democratic Party Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Small government▪ Federalism (states’ rights)▪ People should be self sufficient▪ Government should not regulate business▪ Supply side economics▪ Limited spending on social programs▪ Conservative social values▪ Ownership society▪ Privatization of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strong government▪ Civil Liberties▪ Government should help people▪ Business should be regulated▪ Demand side economics▪ Support of social programs▪ Libertarian social values▪ Equal rights and civil rights▪ Public Services

The Squishy Center

Another important factor when thinking about parties and values is that each party is in a constant battle to gain ground from the large number of voters who do not have a specific party affiliation. This means that politicians are always looking for issues that benefit a large number of voters that can be framed in a manner that is consistent with core party beliefs, while at the same time appealing to a broader range of potential voters. Many manufactured housing issues can be framed in a nonpartisan manner that does not directly conflict with core party beliefs.

Third Party Values

There is a vast range of third parties with varying levels of political power. Even if there are no third party politicians in your legislature, it is good to be aware of third parties. The major parties are frequently trying to appeal to potential third party voters. If a third party candidate takes a strong position on your issues and the major party candidates feel that this could swing the election, the major party may take a strong position on your issue.

Framing your Message

As a nonpartisan organization, what does all of this partisan political party talk mean for you? Understanding the political parties and their values allows you to frame your message in a way that is attractive for your specific audience. The ability to tailor your message to your audience allows you to gain supporters from either political party. Additionally, there are some values that are common within both political parties: family, home, community, fairness, and justice are words that are shared in the rhetoric of both parties.

Example

Here is an example of how a message can look tailored to different audiences with different sets of core values:

Issue: Park owners should get tax incentives for selling parks to resident owned communities or non-profits.

Republican Values Message: Resident ownership of manufactured home communities allows people to be property owners and homeowners. It increases self-sufficiency and creates less of a need for government services due to park closures. It creates a healthy business environment because it allows park owners to make a profit while at the same time decreasing the need for government services.

Democratic Party Values Message: The loss of affordable housing due to park closures is devastating to the low-income families, senior citizens, and people of color who live in manufactured home communities. Creating a tax incentive for the preservation of this affordable housing resource will help homeowners save their communities and prevent people from becoming homeless.

The idea of meeting with state legislators is intimidating to some people. That's probably because they look at legislators as "big shots," people who are too important to listen to them. The truth is legislators are people just like everyone else. They love to be loved, and hate to be hated. Here are some basic tips for having effective meetings with your state representatives.

You are the Expert!

Remember that you are there to talk about your experience as a manufactured home park resident and how these issues affect your life. No one knows more about this than you.

Have a Clear and Unified Message

Don't just make up what you are going to say on the spot, spend a little time preparing your message. If you are going in with a group of people, take some time to compare notes and make sure you aren't saying anything contradictory or redundant.

Respect the Legislator's Time

Stick to the main points of the bill and why you want it passed. Legislators have very busy schedules. They will likely have only 15 to 20 minutes to talk with you. You can't afford to get off message, or waste time getting hung up on irrelevant personal issues. Be detailed but concise.

Listen to What the Legislator Says

The legislator should give their opinion on the bill you are proposing. If they don't, ask them! Listen carefully to what they say. Do not interrupt them. If they support the bill, it is important to know why (it may be for different reasons than yours). If they do not support the bill, find out why. Once you know their reason for opposing the bill, you can always look at ways to refute these arguments and come back.

Tell the Truth

This probably seems obvious, but often times legislators may have questions about the bills that you don't have the answers to. Rather than making up an answer, it's okay to say, "You know, I'm not sure, let me get back to you." That's much better than making something up and then losing credibility if it turns out you were wrong.

AFTER THE MEETING

Evaluate

This won't be your last meeting with a legislator, so it is important to evaluate the meeting. What went well? What didn't go well? What are the next steps?

Follow through on your commitments

If you tell a legislator that you will get back to them with more information, make sure you do it. Follow-up not only boosts your credibility in the eyes of a legislator, it also further develops the relationship.

Stay in communication

People who are effective in developing relationships with legislators don't just meet with them once a year, they find multiple ways of staying in contact. For example, after the meeting consider sending a thank-you note for taking the time to meet with you. Before major votes on the bill, call them to say that you are counting on their support.

Public policy is a multi-player game. This means that you are likely to be called upon not only to advocate for positive policy change, but also to battle against hostile legislation. The good news, at least in this context, is that it is easier to get legislators not to do something than it is to get them to take action. The bad news is that whoever is proposing the legislation has, presumably, gotten their message out to the key legislators and created the narrative of the issue.

Why Defeating a Bill is Easier Than Passing a Bill

Why is it easier to kill a piece of legislation than to pass a law? It is in large part due to the structure of the legislature. In order to pass a law, the proposed legislation has to pass through multiple committee votes, floor votes, and get signed by the governor. This means that there are many opportunities for a bill to stall out in the legislative process. If a deadline is not met to get through a committee, if a committee has a very full schedule and does not get around to hearing a bill, or if just one committee votes against a piece of legislation, that can mean the end of a bill. On the flip side, if you are trying to defeat a piece of hostile legislation you can sometimes kill the bill by concentrating pressure on just one committee.

Another reason it is easier to defeat a bill than to pass a bill is that the legislature tends to cling to the status quo. If there is not a clear and immediate need for a change in policy, the legislature may be reluctant to make changes to a system that is already in place and presumably already works. The other side is, of course, working hard to convince the legislature that the system is broken and needs to change.

Be Proactive

Establishing relationships, building your base, and gathering information about your issues are all steps that are critical to stopping hostile legislation. Even if your organization does not intend to push for policy change, building and maintaining relationships can help you block your opposition's efforts.

Vigilance

Watch what is happening at the legislature, even if you are not proposing any legislation. Keep an eye out for any bills that have the potential to harm your members. Cast a broad net when watching out for hostile legislation; sometimes things will slip through the cracks. Having allies who have a regular presence at the capitol who can alert you to impending problems, keeping an eye on key committees, and maintaining strong relationships with legislators can all give you a heads-up for potential problems.

Mobilization

Be prepared to get your base and your allies to communicate with legislators as soon as you become aware of hostile legislation. Remember, defeating a bill in just one legislative committee can be enough to kill a piece of hostile legislation. If the bill comes up for a hearing in a committee, you have the opportunity to mobilize your base to show up for the hearing and also to provide testimony against the bill.

What is the problem? Disenfranchised Residents

When Election Day comes, only half of all eligible voters go to the polls. They do not have trust in our democracy and see no reason to get involved because they feel that their vote doesn't matter and that they have no influence over decision-making. Candidates and elected officials appear to be much more influenced by people with economic power such as park owners, government agencies, developers, and fellow elected officials instead of the people they actually represent and no one seems to be doing anything about it. People feel powerless, ignored, and hopeless, but are sick of the injustice.

One challenge to gaining electoral power is the perception and sometimes reality that, like many disenfranchised groups of people, residents of manufactured home communities do not participate in decision-making, do not stand up and take action against injustice, and do not even know their rights. This is an assumption that causes decision-makers to continue ignoring the needs of residents and those with economic power to continue expanding highways, closing parks, and destroying communities.

This will not come to an end unless residents unite, take action, and hold decision-makers accountable. When people do not stand up and engage in the decision-making process they are unheard, allowing others to set the agenda and make the decisions for them.

Although we cannot make all the decisions, we can decide who does. People have the power and the right to elect representatives, influence decision-making, set the legislative agenda, and influence public meaning.

What is the Solution? Electoral Power

Electoral power is a collective tool we exercise to elect candidates, influence their stance on an issue, and hold them accountable. When people with a similar interest come together to voice their concerns and be a part of the political process, they build political power that can be used to influence and improve public policy and further social change.

Electoral power is successful in creating social change because it empowers and unites a historically disenfranchised group of people. They use their power to address issues of injustice, build political relationships, and make demands of decision-makers throughout the elections and into the legislative session. The power that they gain from their work at the legislature strengthens the representation of their communities and eliminates the injustices that they decided to fight from the start.

Electoral power provides access to a longer-term and more influential power that not only strengthens community organizing efforts and collective power, but changes the public meaning of the community and their issues so that their perceived power is stronger as well. Here we see that electoral power has two sides: it is both perceived and real. It is perceived in the way that it reflects a large voting block that has the power to influence election results and it is real in that it works as a tool to bring park issues to the forefront of political discussions and hold decision-makers accountable. These two sides to electoral power are what get candidates and elected officials to lead the public policy changes that support the communities they represent.

How Can I Build Electoral Power? Electoral Organizing

Electoral organizing, although a key element in creating social change, is only one step to building power and cannot be effective unless it is also connected to legislative work and community organizing.

Electoral organizing also strives to achieve the same goals as community organizing by building power and leadership, but with a focus on influencing election results and holding decision-makers accountable. It pools together ideas, resources, and people to organize tactics and strategies that influence and educate candidates and elected officials. It builds leadership not only in the people it organizes, but also in candidates and decision-makers by challenging them to be better leaders and better representatives.

Electoral organizing strategies and tactics typically include, but are not limited to:

- Voter registration: canvassing, pledge drives, and registration drives can prepare unregistered and infrequent voters for Election Day.
- Voter education should answer: Why should I vote? How do I vote? Who are the candidates and what do they think? Tools and tactics such as voter guides and candidates forums can answer these questions.
- Candidate education: literature on the issues, forums, and questionnaires.
- "Get Out the Vote" (GOTV): canvassing, literature drops, voter guides, phone banks, rides to the polls, and assistance at the polls.

These efforts get more people to the polls, and define public meaning during the elections by addressing issues not previously included in political discussions. Electoral organizing often utilizes media and candidates to redefine a community's values and make their needs a priority so that the perception of their issues is positive and ready to be further discussed at the legislature.

A POWER BUILDING CYCLE



