

Power Building Awareness Training

by the Building Regional Power Research Project

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Goals

This training is designed to help participants:

A. Build a common awareness of the need for and promise of a systematic approach to building power in their community. Power building should be seen as a way of enhancing each group's work by building a greater capacity to shape the political and economic debates concerning their region's future.

B. Help participants begin to think concretely about how they might further develop power-building work. The training helps participants' link their existing activities with possible steps for moving further along a power building path. Given the short time available, the training seeks to wet people's appetite for a much more sustained discussion around concrete plans. One vehicle for continuing such a discussion is the Civil Leadership Institute offered by Building Partnership (see below).

Who

The training can be used for an exclusively labor audience or a mix of union and community leaders and activists.

Summary of the Three Parts

The training consists of the three parts. Not included are introductions and ice-breaking activities whose need for will vary depending upon the audience.

1. Electing Nice People versus Governing (30 minutes)-- Establishes what's at stake in building power. We distinguish between traditional electoral work in support of endorsed candidates and power building. One gives some access to positions of public authority while the later seeks

to build a comprehensive progressive regime capable of governing.

2. What is Power Building? (60 minutes)-- Participants delve through case studies of power building to fully appreciate three main dimensions: deep coalition building, aggressive political action, and ongoing policy development and research. These three legs establish a much greater whole than the sum of the parts. Indeed, power building provides a process with the potential to impact the long-term future of their region, state, and ultimately the nation.

3. Our Community (60 minutes) -- The discussion moves from an awareness of participant's existing work to an identification of possible ways to build upon this work in the direction of building power. Ideally, participants come out of the session with concrete next steps for continuing the conversation.

Time Frame

This module has been laid out as a single two and a half-hour session with a short break in the middle. However, the length of training and number of sessions can be modified to fit the particular needs of the organizations involved. For example, one session could simply encompass all of part one and part two minus question four (about challenges). A second session would then focus on part three with question four incorporated as a third question for the group activity. This two session approach allows more time to explore possible local plans.

Preparations

The training is designed to be highly interactive and to draw heavily on participants' existing knowledge. The room should be conducive to breaking people into small groups. There should also be ample flip charts and/or boards for noting the results of brainstorming sessions and for identifying overall conclusions and next steps.

Part two requires that participants read at least one case study of regional power building. Participants will need these before hand. They are available at powerbuilding.wayne.edu. This site also has one-page summaries that can be used to quickly fill people about the other cases. They are not, however, a substitute for a full reading of one of the cases.

Training Layout

The basic design for each part is explained on a single page. Following this page we provide notes to aid instructors who seek further guidance, tips, and optional ideas.

We Want Your Feedback

This training is very much an experiment in the making. We appreciate all feedback. How did you use the training? How did it go? Do you have suggestions for specific changes? Please take a moment to fill out the feedback form at the end and send it to the address given.

Look for revised versions of the training, as well as new case study information, on our web site www.powerbuilding.wayne.edu.

Want to Continue the Discussion? The Civic Leadership Institute

Drawing on the experience of leadership development programs in San Jose and Los Angeles, the non-profit Building Partnerships helps local groups establish their own Civic Leadership Institutes. A seven-topic model curriculum brings together union, religious, community, and political leaders to develop a common understanding of their region's political economy and shared strategies for developing progressive alternatives and progressive power. Most important, through the program participants develop relationships with each other as they work on a common group project. Building Partnerships helps local groups with technical support to establish their own institutes with local resources and by helping to adapt the model curriculum to local circumstances. For more information contact: Kathleen Fernicola 773-834-4685 kfern@uchicago.edu.



Building Regional Power Research Project

This material comes from a collaboration between labor educators and researchers affiliated with the United Association of Labor Education, the AFL-CIO's Field Mobilization Department and its Central Labor Council Advisory Committee. The project documents instructive examples of regional power building and publicizes such innovations inside and outside the labor movement. See www.powerbuilding.wayn.edu. For more information contact:

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Part One: Electing Nice People versus Governing

Purpose

To distinguish between the traditional strategies of electing endorsed candidates and actually governing. To raise the prospect that new ways of building power may help them better achieve their long-term goals.

Time: 30 minutes

Lesson Plan

The instructor uses the below questions to tease out responses and discussion from participants. The exact questions used and emphasis given to each depends on who is in the room. Part one is intended as an introduction that sets the stage for looking at new approaches in part two.

Main Questions

1. What does it mean for labor and community organizations to have power in their local area? (Or, in our community, what does it mean when we say someone or some organization “has power”?)
2. Why do we want power -- what would we do in our region if we had it?
3. Traditionally how have we sought to build power?
4. Let's say we are successful in electing endorsed candidates, how much power have we achieved? In their elected position how much control do they have to deliver on our goals in #2. (This question could be more specific, depending on your local situation – e.g., you could say, “Recently we were successful in election Joe Blow to the City Council. In what ways has this built our power? In what ways was this victory a limited one?”)
5. Do the corporate players in our region simply rely on electing people to office in order to influence government? Or, how much of the power of corporate/business players in our community relies on their influence over elected officials?

Conclusion to Part One

Regime Theory: Recognizing that formal government has limited resources and authority at the local level, urban politics scholars developed the concept of an urban regime. Through formal and informal means government officials align with those private players that can offer a capacity to help govern i.e. various parts of the business community. Thus, actual governing occurs through public-private networks that share common assumptions about goals and the means to deliver success. Most cities have Growth Regimes that focus on creating an attractive business climate to lure outside investment and quantitative job growth irrespective of quality.

We need to develop a counter progressive regime. This means doing more than simply electing nice people to office, although we have to do this. Like the corporate power structure we need the ability to understand our regional economy, develop clear policies that focus on where public authority connects with private business, help governments implement these policies, back up our elected supporters, and to hold those elected who does not support us accountable.

Part One Discussion Notes for Instructors

What is power? -- Focus on definitions that operate at a regional level. Answers could include the power to determine which communities get job investments, power to determine wages and working conditions, the power to tax and spend.

Why do we want power? -- Focus on general goals at a local and/or regional level. Answers depend on the participants. They could include family-supporting jobs, union jobs, safety net, equal opportunities, decent public services, affordable housing.

Traditionally how? -- Depends on participants. For unions it may be collective bargaining. For community groups it may be grassroots organizing. The common element should be some form of political action. How have groups traditionally engaged in political action over the past 10-15? Likely answers will be: Endorse candidates, raise money (primarily to give to candidates), get-out-the-vote, lobbying (primarily by staff or professional lobbyists).

How much power by electing endorsed candidates? -- The point is that even elected governmental majorities do not have the power or authority to set and agenda and outright govern a region. The reasons for this are many:

- Elected officials can pass laws, but the administration has to implement it. The ability and the will to do so may be limited. Possible Question: so let's say our majority passes a law regulating business, what happens next?
- At the regional level governmental authority is fragmented among city, suburban, and county governments.
- Most elected officials and government administrators have only limited knowledge of how the regional economy works or how to lay out an alternative progressive vision for economic development. Possible Question: how many elected officials have a detailed knowledge of the region economy? How many are familiar with progressive models for economic development policy? Who knows which companies get public subsidies and what they are required to deliver in return? How many have the ability to draft good policy in general?
- Ultimately, government does not control investment decisions and local government has access to only limited financial resources. Possible Question: So if you're an elected official with limited knowledge, resources, and authority and you want to promote a vibrant regional economy who are you ultimately going to have to play ball with? = the corporate power structure -- see #5.

Corporate players? -- The use of this question depends on time. The instructor may simply state the issue out of the conclusion of question 4. Essentially the corporate power structure does not simply help elected candidates. They have think tanks that research regional issues and develop policy, they work out an agenda and take it to local government, and they have the ability to punish or reward local elected officials by either investing in the community or pulling out.

Part Two: What is Power Building?

Purpose

To familiarize participants with the elements of power building as developed in other cities. To draw attention to the promise that the sum is far greater than the parts. To identify ways that leaders in other cities dealt with challenges similar to those likely faced by participants.

Time: 1 hour

Preparation

Before they come to the training each participant should be provided and assigned one of the following case studies to read: Los Angeles, San Jose, Denver. They should also read the one-page summaries of the other cases. Cases are available at powerbuilding.wayne.edu.

Lesson Plan

Step 1. Group Brainstorming (20-25 minutes). Form groups of six participants each. Each group should have at least two people who have read each case. By comparing the cases among themselves each group answers the below questions. Someone from each group should be selected to keep notes for the report back.

- What new kinds of coalitions have been formed? With whom and what issues?
- How are participants conducting politics differently than in the past?
- What kinds of resources have leaders either pulled together or established new?
- What challenges did the leadership face that might compare to situations in our community? How were these challenges addressed?

Step 2. Report Back Questions 1-3 (20-25 minutes). Taking each of the first three questions in turn, have groups report back their top answers. The facilitator should have each group give only one answer each time they are called on. In this way the contributions will jump from group to group and all groups get to participate. Conclude report back by highlighting the “three legs of power building”, and explaining why you need all three to have a coherent power-building program:

Deep Coalition Building -- goes beyond typical ad hoc alliances to longer-term relationships that seek to expand the partners scope of action and organizational strength.

Aggressive Political Action -- electoral mobilization feeds into policy campaigns and vice versa. Groups build ongoing relationships with candidates and officeholders.

Research and Policy Development -- groups develop a sophisticated knowledge about how their regional political economy works. Creating, enacting, and implementing effective policy requires research and organizing staffing typically through a 501(c) 3.

Step 3. Question 4 and Conclusion (15 minutes). Have groups give the most important answers from the fourth question -- no more than one or two per group. Groups can repeat what other groups have said. Take the 2-3 most common answers and explore how the leadership dealt with these challenges. Make note that in every case power building required leaders to take risks. And they all drew some criticism from people who did not agree with the new directions.

To conclude ask: What is the ultimate goal or outcome of this work? The main answers we are trying to get at are that leaders are:

- A. Building elements that allow them to not only elect majorities, but to govern.
- B. Shifting public debate onto issues of social justice, economic democracy, and sustainability.
- C. Establishing a base upon which to contest for state and national power.
- D. Growing their own organizations.

Part Two
Discussion Notes for Instructors

Coalition Possible Answers:

- Labor-immigrant alliances
- Get Out the Vote
- Economic development coalitions
- Living Wage
- Labor-ACORN
- Interfaith Coalitions
- Healthcare

Note: The arenas where public authority connects with private business offer especially rich coalition possibilities. This is why living wage and community benefits campaigns are so common

Coalition Possible Follow Up Questions

What seems to be new about these coalitions?

Have partners stayed together to work on ongoing projects?

= Some have, some have not. All of these relationships, however, are very strategic with leaders aware of what they are looking to get and not get out of cooperation. All of the cases involve targeted efforts at deep alliances, such as the South Bay Labor-ACORN or the labor-Latino LA alliance in which the partners join together to help build each other's organizational strength

Political Action Possible Answers:

- Candidate issue awareness training
- Coordinated labor endorsements-electoral work
- Sharing of lost-time staff
- New grassroots get-out-the-vote work
- Willing to challenge moderate Democrats

Political Action Possible Follow Up Questions

How do the above new political elements compare to the traditional "endorse candidates then get-out-the-vote" electoral work?

What do they deliver that the old methods don't?

Note: Groups are taking a much stronger role in developing candidates and holding them accountable. The scale has also grown as organizers expand their ability to move votes by growing their capacity to directly interact with voters.

Resources Possible Answers:

- Sharing of lost-time staff
- 501(c)3 "Think and Do Tanks"
- Joint Labor-Community Leadership Training

Political Action Possible Follow Up Questions

Where did they get the resources? = Some of it came from existing staff, some from resources in the community, and some from foundation money.

Notes on the Conclusion

A. Building elements that allow them to not only elect majorities, but to govern.

Leaders are essentially building an alternative progressive regime. In other words, not only are they establishing their ability to elect progressive majorities, but they are creating the informal networks of organizations and individuals that help set the agenda for government and enhancing its capacity to implement that agenda.

B. Shifting public debate onto issues of social justice, economic democracy, and sustainability.

The "think and do" tanks are a key institution in helping leaders develop a common agenda, build campaigns around it, and to get their message into the public debate.

C. Establishing a base upon which to contest for state and national power.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s the New Right realized that if they were going to take the Republican party and ultimately the nation's politics out of the hands of pro-New Deal moderates they needed to start at the local level and build their capacity from the ground up. Over time they used the agenda, candidates, organizations, and grassroots organizing ability developed in local efforts to infiltrate and take over Republican state party structures and to get their people elected in state and federal districts. Local power building is the key to state and ultimately national power. It provides the incubator for developing a clear agenda, candidates that support that agenda, the capacity to get people elected, and the ability to follow through on our agenda once we have achieved electoral success.

D. Growing their own organizations.

Power building is not just about political power, but also building our own organizations. The two go hand in hand. For labor this means that growing political power and coalition work has to translate into support for workers to organize. In San Jose, the labor council sees increasing ACORN's membership ranks as a key component of its efforts to building power.

If you have time, this last point deserves some dwelling upon. Rather than simply the instructor making the point, the below questions lead participants to this conclusion.

What has been the effect on the key organizations involved?

How has the work supported union organizing?

How has the work supported the growth or strength of other groups?

Part Three: Our Community

Purpose

This part has three purposes. First, participants share and acknowledge the work already going on. Second, they identify some "big picture" possibilities that would advance their work. Finally, they identify practical steps for continuing the conversation.

Time: 1 hour

Lesson Plan

Step 1. Group Brainstorming Existing Work and Resources (25 minutes). Break participants into at least three groups. Ideally, in a diverse gathering mix people so that different kinds of organizations are represented in each group. Assign each group one of the three legs of building power: coalition building, policy development and research, and political action. They then brainstorm answers to the following two questions:

- What work are people already doing in this area that we can build on?
- What pieces or actions would build upon this work to move us further in the direction building power?

Step 2. Report Back (20 minutes). Take each topic area in turn starting with coalition building, then political action, and then policy development and research. For each topic go through the two questions putting summary notes on a flip chart/board. Alternatively, if sufficient flip chart/ board space is available you can have groups record their ideas on their own chart/board then make a report back.

Once you participants have reported back on all three areas, ask people to identify which areas seem particularly promising or of interest to them. This is intended to be a quick measure of where the group is at, not a detailed discussion.

Step 3. Carrying the Conversation Forward (15 minutes). Review the list of ideas and people's preferences to highlight the possibilities for continuing this conversation. Have the group discuss possible next steps for continuing the conversation. Some possible questions include:

- Who else needs to be at the table? Should this training be done again with new/additional people?
- Are there particular ideas that the group wants to explore in greater detail?
- If relevant, would establishing a Civil Leadership Institute be a next step or goal?

Part Three
Discussion Notes for Instructors

Report Back

The instructor's goal is to help participants define existing and potential work in ways that are tangible and clearly defined. Some ideas may need to be broken apart, while others may need to be lumped together. You want ideas that can be offered as definable projects.

One Way to Measure People's Priorities

Review the list and have each person select two options that represent their top priorities. You then go through each option and people raise their hand if it was one of their top priorities.

Overall

Obviously the exact outcome of this part will depend upon the context in which the training is being held. Is there a convening organization that will follow up on the steps identified? Alternatively, does a steering body need to be created out of assembled group? Is this one of a series of training with different participants who will need to be brought together at a later date?

Power Building Awareness Training Feedback Form

Contact Info

name

preferred phone

street address

best times to reach you

city and zip

email

Briefly Describe How You Used the Training

Briefly Describe How It Went

Suggested Changes, Further Comments on ,Your Experience, or Suggestions for Additional Materials

Please add additional sheets if necessary.

*Please send to David Reynolds, Labor Studies Center,
Wayne State University, 656 W. Kirby, Detroit, MI 48202.*