

**DEMOCRACY ★ FOR ★ AMERICA**   
**CAMPAIGN ACADEMY**

## Chapter 9

### Issue Advocacy

**Topic:**

- a. Citizen Lobbying
- b. Power Mapping

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# Citizen Lobbying

## Every Day Is a Good Day for Democracy

Too often people think of politics as something that happens one day every two or four years. Activists work hard to elect socially progressive, fiscally responsible government. Our leaders need to know that we can give them support – or pressure – on any given day. Even the best public officials need their constituents’ support and pressure to help them make the right decisions. If the grassroots do not engage elected officials, somebody else will – and that’s the scary part.

With the right training and a little practice, you can talk to your elected officials any time and hold them accountable to how they vote on issues you care about. Your opinion should matter as much to them in an off-year as it does on Election Day. **Remember, public officials work for you!**

### The Citizen Lobbyist vs. the Paid lobbyist.

You don’t need to be a high-powered, big name, professional lobbyist to make an impact on elected officials. It is to your advantage that you are ‘just your average voter’ in their district. By virtue of being a constituent (or by mobilizing other constituents) you have a level of credibility that professional firms do not. No elected official can survive with a reputation for ignoring his/her constituents.

### Goals of a citizen lobby visit

1. Familiarity. Elected officials need to see the human face of the issues. The citizen lobbyist is that face. Getting to know the legislator makes them more likely to meet with you in the future.
2. Press them to vote right on issues important to bettering society.
3. Make them accountable for votes they have made already.

<u>Principles</u>	<u>Pitfalls</u>
<p><b>1) Speak from the heart.</b> - Tell your own story. It will be the truest, most passionate thing the elected official hears all day. It is also the easiest for you to remember.</p> <p><b>2) Use the facts</b> - A small number (2-3) compelling facts will help you make your case. Make sure the facts have a credible source (i.e. not a random blog comment). Use statistics in your story if you can bring a human face to the numbers. Keep the facts local or discuss the local implications.</p> <p><b>3) Ask for one simple thing and stay focused.</b> - Never leave without asking your public official to do something (e.g. vote for or against a bill). Whatever you need the legislator to do, make sure the request is clear and that you understand the response. - Lobbying for only one issue/action at a time will keep you focused and leave little room for the public official to evade a commitment.</p> <p><b>4) Prepare for the meeting</b> - The public official’s job is to know the issues at hand. Citizen lobbyists come in to add to that official’s knowledge and to ask for a specific commitment. Know the official’s priorities, record, and major supporters. Know the local impact and costs of the issue.</p>	<p><b>1) Going on too long</b> - Keep your story powerful by keeping it short. Practice telling your story in two minutes so that the legislator stays focused on your message.</p> <p><b>2) Laundry lists and irrelevant details</b> - A few facts are great, a laundry list is a bore. Only throw a few facts at a legislator in one meeting, even if you know more. Other facts and info can be left with the legislator in the form of handouts. - National or state-wide facts simply don’t have the weight of detailed local impact.</p> <p><b>3) Getting the run-around</b> - Legislators will not want to commit to voting for or against a bill after one meeting. This is OK. They might want to read the bill or get more information before deciding, but you should make sure to set up a follow up plan to get an answer from them. If they need to read the bill first: “That’s great. When can I follow up after you’ve read the bill?” Clarify non-specific commitments.</p> <p><b>4) Acting Unprofessional</b> - Every meeting with a public official should be considered an event worthy of forethought and preparation. The citizen lobbyist competes for the attention of his or her public official with other lobbyists. Coming in prepared and organized will go a long way to impress the official.</p>

## Know the Target

A significant component of lobbying is knowing whom to target and knowing about that target. You can map out who has influence over an issue, and who has influence over that decision maker. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this manual: Power Mapping,

The first critical step in pressuring public officials is finding out which official actually has the power to do what is needed. Most of the time, this is a simple matter of paying attention. Public officials, especially elected officials, will be very public on the matters people care about. When unsure of who can do what, just ask. The Secretary of State, county officials, and any elected officials will be forthcoming over what lies in their purview. Even if this initial research seems at first fruitless or redundant, it is a time investment worth making. No one wants to meet with an official who simply cannot address the issue at hand.

Second, research your target. Who is important to the public official? To whom is s/he accountable? From whom does the official receive contributions? Who are the major employers and institutions in the district and would they be affected by your position? You are looking for the major influences already affecting this official. Ideally, you can get these influences to work with you.

## Know the Issue

For your public official to take you seriously, the citizen lobbyist needs to know at least as much about the issue as the target does. Background research into the stakeholders on both sides of the issue will help the citizen lobbyist understand the other forces acting on the public official. Come prepared to discuss the history of that issue in the legislature. At all times, discuss the local impact of the issue. If the issue is a national or statewide issue, discuss how the issue directly affects the district which the public official represents. Obviously, only say what you know. A white lie or an exaggeration of the facts can rapidly damage a group's reputation.

## Know the Solution

Come prepared with a solution the target can enact. Your ask should be specific and direct. The more specific the solution, the better. For example, instead of asking a legislator to write a bill for you, write it for them and ask the legislator to introduce it. The legislator will want to edit the bill, so be prepared to work with him/her on it. If the solution is a vote on a pending bill, be prepared to discuss the specific merits or flaws of that bill as well as current sponsors and supporters. Every meeting should have one person asking the "pin-down" question.

Many elected officials will have staff who handle specific issue areas. As a group lobbies on a particular issue, this staffer becomes a key contact within that office. Often, a group will meet with the staffer instead of the elected official. For grassroots groups, this is not unusual. The staffer can provide more in-depth insight on the issue and where the official stands politically. In the end, staffers rarely make a commitment on the elected official's behalf.

Treat every staffer with the same respect you would treat the elected official. After developing a relationship with the elected official's office, the group will find it easier to eventually meet with the elected official themselves. At some point, the organization's working relationship may include multiple contacts within the office. Meeting with the official's staffer is the first of many relationships.

### If at first...

It is unlikely that one meeting with a public official will completely persuade that official to adopt a given stance. Following up and scheduling subsequent meetings is a good way to keep up the pressure.

### Follow up. Follow Through.

Send a thank-you note to the legislator memorializing the commitments you extracted in the meeting. Follow-up after an appropriate interval to find out if your legislator did what s/he committed to do. It's also important for you to follow through on commitments that

## Incorporating Citizen Lobbying Into Your Group's Strategy

### 1. Strength In Numbers.

When a person meets with a legislator, it has an effect. When a group meets with a legislator, this effect increases exponentially. You are no longer a gadfly, but a concerned group of citizens calling on their elected representative. Let the official know that the individuals with whom s/he is meeting are part of a citizen group and show your public official that the group represents an important, informed, and influential constituency. The constituent meeting is an excellent way to build your group's credibility.

**Recruiting constituents** – The composition of the citizen lobbyists' meeting with the elected official is important. If the lobbying organization meets with an elected official, but can not bring any of that official's actual constituents to the meeting, it indicates that the groups does not have much of a presence in the district. Be sure to bring constituents to the meeting. If you do not have many constituents, start recruiting!

- **Internal lists/external networking** – Figure out who in your group lives in which districts. Collect each member's zip (preferably zip+4) or each members' precinct number (information you should have anyway). This will be useful for lobbying and for campaigns. Ask other groups who have a stake in the issue if they would like to join you, and find out who among them would make good advocates. Having a coalition representing many different shows the targeted official how powerful your group is and how important the issue is.
- **Doorknocking and Phoning**– Knock on every door in the district and see who cares about the issue. A coordinated canvass may take a lot of time, but you will almost certainly find the people who you need. If your targeted legislator asks you how you all know each other, let them know. A phone bank through the district is a less time intensive way to contact a number of people. The success rate for this kind of blanket phone canvass will be lower than the door canvass. Either canvassing method can be effective, not only at educating and engaging the district, but also at generating additional pressure on the official. (Refer to the Field Organizing section of this manual for more information on canvassing and phonebanking.)

### 2. Focus the Group's Message

This is especially important if the constituents at the meeting don't already know each other or are not from the same group. Have a meeting beforehand so that everyone is clear on the message and the task at hand. Make sure everyone involved understands all the principles and pitfalls of citizen lobbying.

### 3. Roleplay the Constituent Meeting Beforehand

This is a must. Everyone involved in the meeting needs to meet each other and have an explicit understanding of their role and the group's message. Determine who will speak and when. Go through expected questions and responses, anticipate roadblocks, and get familiar with the overall feel you want your meeting to have. If it begins to feel a little choreographed, that's fine.

## Coordinate: Communications, Field, and Political.

In any good, professional advocacy organization, your components work seamlessly together and in support of each other. The same is true of grassroots efforts.

Before a scheduled legislative meeting is to take place, the group's communications team could plan a barrage of letters to the editor published right before the meeting. Having a full article highlighting your issue in the major media outlets is even more potent. If you have difficulty scheduling the meeting, these 'spontaneous' LTE and media hits can be used beforehand to build pressure on the target. Mentioning your targeted official(s) **by name** in your media will get their attention.

The group's grassroots activists can also organize call-ins and letter-writing campaigns preceding the meeting. Once the public official sees your issue as something that engages his or her constituents, the official will become more receptive to proposed solutions. Whether this coordination comes off as orchestrated or spontaneous doesn't matter much to your public official. Either they're responding to the needs of their constituents or responding to a group effective at mobilizing their constituents.

## Possible Tactics to Increase Pressure

Generally, the more personal the contact, the better the response.

### Direct Contact Tactics:

- Meetings (either in-district or at the capitol) are most effective.
- Personal letters can make an impact when more than a few on the same subject arrive in the office.
- Phone calls have an effect in large numbers at critical times.
- Form letters/faxes and paper petitions can demonstrate broad support/opposition on key issues when the constituent response is extremely high.
- Email petitions are the weakest tactic. These are notable only with the response is dramatically high (organizations use this more to mobilize their members than influence a decision-maker).

**Indirect Contact tactics:** Sometimes you want to pressure your elected official in less direct, more public ways. Mentioning the legislator's name in an LTE or other media hit will get his or her attention. Tying your issue to his or her name, "Clean water is an important issue for this country and State Senator X needs to support our community by keeping our water safe," will raise the profile of your issue in the official's office. Some ideas:

- Issue-based LTE campaign.
- "Open letter to our public officials" as an Op-ed in the major papers.
- Issue-based signage placed where official can see (near home, work, target's children's schools, target's neighborhood grocery store, etc.).
- Town Hall meeting where target receives an invitation.
- Direct contact with target's major donors and institutional supporters.

## Tips For Lobbying

**1. Identify everyone in the room.** It is important for the legislator to know exactly who you represent, where your organization is based and how many members your group has. Be sure to point out which advocates are constituents of the legislator. Legislators and their staff love when you wear name tags.

**2. Briefing materials should be just that – brief.** Legislative staff only skim through thick packets of information. Legislators will read a well-assembled one-page fact sheet, usually not much more.

4. **Anticipate the arguments of your opponent.** It is better to address your opponent's arguments early in the dialogue. Do so directly and openly, without a hint of defensiveness.

### A Sample Citizen Lobbying Agenda

**1. Introductions: make sure you get everyone's name, and where they're from.**

- Legislators will want to know that they're only talking to their own constituents. Bringing too many outsiders shows lack of in-district support.

**2. Agenda and time check**

- Go over the agenda so everyone knows what's coming.
- Your time is valuable and so is your legislator's. You should set a length of time for your meeting and stick to it.

**3. Your story, your neighborhoods' story**

- Short, but powerful.

**4. Deliver your facts and ask for one simple thing.**

**5. Ask for questions.**

- Your legislator will ask questions. This shows that he or she has been listening, and that you know what you are talking about.

**6. Set up a follow up time.**

- If you can't nail down a commitment from your legislator on your first ask, establish a solid, specific follow-up plan, and then actually follow-up.

# Power Mapping

## A framework for problem solving through relationship building

People interested and involved in promoting positive social change— through service, advocacy and other vehicles—need to think about context and relationships within the spheres where they work. Social change agents need tools to access resources and to put their ideas into action. Power mapping gives participants a theoretical framework and a set of tools to tap the power needed to make things happen. Power mapping is particularly helpful in coalition building (with whom should we develop a relationship?) and in citizen lobbying (who can we use to influence this legislator?).

**The Goal** is to visually map out relationships between people, organizations, and institutions in a given context in order to understand the value of these relationships.

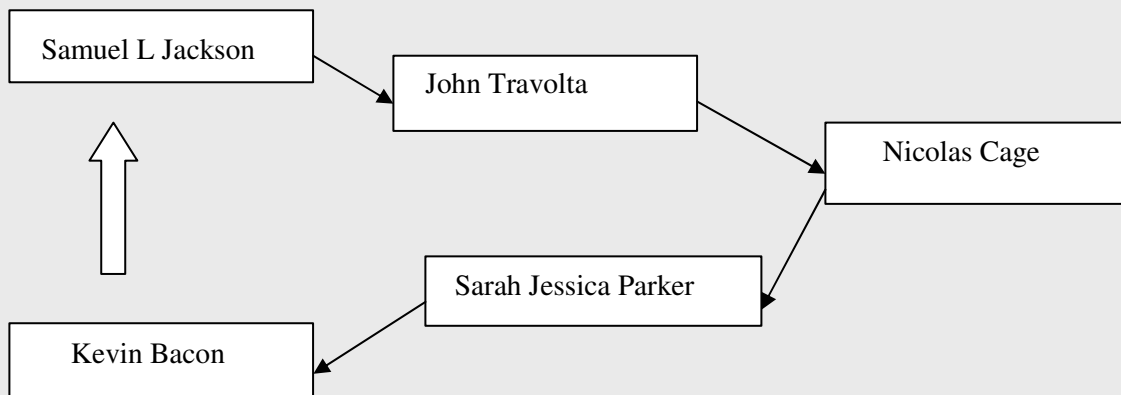
A power map reveals avenues of influence available to an organization. The method allows a group to see how a particular target is influenced and to see connections between these influences. For example, you might want your state legislator to sponsor a bill. Understanding the relationships your state legislator has within her/his district can help you make your case. Your group might discover that one of the district’s largest political donors has a stake in the issue your bill pertains to. You might even discover that your group is connected to that legislator through another organization with whom you work. You can leverage that donor (by lobbying) or that organization (through the relationship you already have) to help you make the case to your targeted legislator.

### Warm-up: 6 Degrees of separation: Kevin Bacon.

This game assumes that every person in the world (or at least in Hollywood) is connected to every other person by no more than six ‘degrees of separation.’ One person, who knows another person, who knows another person, who, eventually leads you to your target – in this case, Kevin Bacon.

Here’s an example: How is Samuel L. Jackson connected to Kevin Bacon?

- Samuel L. Jackson was in *Pulp Fiction* with John Travolta.
- John Travolta was in *Face Off* with Nicolas Cage.
- Nicolas Cage was in *Honeymoon in Vegas* with Sarah Jessica Parker.
- Sarah Jessica Parker was in *Footloose* with Kevin Bacon.



Samuel L. Jackson connects to Kevin Bacon in through four people, or ‘degrees.’

Try another one with Kevin Bacon or any other actor. You may see that different groups manage to find different pathways to the target.

## Power Mapping: A step-by-step

- 1) Determine your target
- 2) Map influence of the target
- 3) Determine relational power lines
- 4) Target priority relationships
- 5) Make a plan

### Step 1: Determine your target

A power map is a visual tool; it should be drawn. The map starts with a person or institution you want to influence – this is your target. Power maps are often worked out for the purpose of solving a problem. The person or institution who can solve this problem is usually the target for the map. Often the targets are decision makers.

**Example:** Wal-Mart is trying to build a giant new building in your community.

The City Zoning Commission is considering a special rewrite of the town’s ordinances to accommodate the giant new Wal-Mart. Your local DFA group opposes efforts to rewrite local laws to accommodate Wal-Mart. The Zoning Commission has the final say over any changes to the ordinance. Two members are opposed, two members are in favor. One member of the Commission, Joe Smith, is undecided. Your group has decided to influence Joe Smith to ensure that he votes against the zoning re-write. The group is developing a power map to determine how to best influence Commissioner Smith.

No special laws for Wal-Mart Power map.

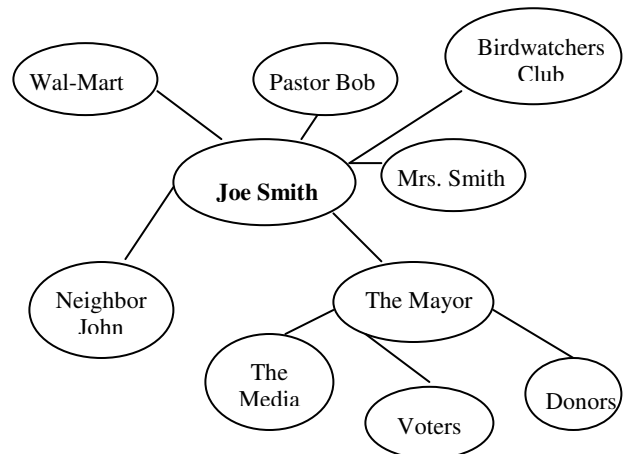
Joe Smith

### Step 2: Map influence of target(s)

Think of all the associations who have a relationship with this target. Think broadly. These can include work, political, family, religious, and neighborhood ties. Anyone who can exert influence on this individual is mapped.

**Be creative.** Even if you decide you do not want to target, for example, the Commissioners family, putting them up on the map might give you ideas on other avenues of influence.

**Be strategic.** Elected officials are easy to map. Look at all the major donors and constituency groups. Do some research.



**Be Thorough.** Spend some time thinking about Joe Smith from every different angle. Once you are satisfied, start thinking about what *these* people and institutions are connected to. A good power map will have major influences mapped out, outlining multiple degrees of separation.

### Step 3: Determine Relational Power Lines

Take a step back and review the network you've created. Some of these people and institutions not only connect to Joe Smith, but also to each other. You might find that Joe Smith is a member of the local bird watching group, but so are the mayor, Joe's wife, and his pastor. The bird watching group connects many of the influences in Joe's life. These connectors are called "nodes of power" within a given network.

These nodes don't always connect directly to the target. If Joe was not a member of the bird watching group, but his wife, pastor, and mayor were all members, the bird watching group could still be a major influence on Joe. Power mapping sometimes reveals surprises. (Who knew that a bird watching group could be so politically strategic?)

Also, some of these networks may connect directly to you or your group. Maybe Joe Smith's next door neighbor is in your car pool.

### Step 4: Target Priority Relationships

Now analyze some of the connections and make some decisions. One way to do this is to circle the few people that have the most relational power lines drawn to them (the bird watching group and the mayor). Consider attempting to involve these people through your group's current relationships. If no one in the group has any influence over these nodes of power, it may be useful to do a power map around that institution or person to help you figure out how you can influence them. Your power map will begin to resemble a web. Don't worry if it gets a little messy.

Another consideration might be a person or institution in the map that doesn't necessarily have many different relational lines running to him/her/it, but nonetheless has a few critical ones and seems very influential. If you can identify a priority person/institution for which there isn't a clear relationship, then you might want to encourage the group to find out more about this person/institution.

As you get used to power mapping, you can draw more complex maps. Many problems will have multiple decision-makers, for example. You may start to draw the target's most influential relationships closest in proximity to the name in the physical map. You might use different colors to indicate whether the person or institution is friendly to your position, unfriendly, or unknown.

### Step 5: Make a Plan

The Power map itself is a first step in figuring out an advocacy organization's strategies. After the map is completed, it is used to decide how and where to take action. What are some possible strategies for your group?

**In the example, two nodes of power present themselves as avenues of influence.**

#### 1) Influence the Mayor

- Citizen Lobby Day. Groups meet with the mayor.
- Media campaign. LTEs, news conference, and a high visibility rally outside the mayor's office.

#### 2) Coalition Building

- Conservation groups reach out to the bird watching group asking them to join an anti-Wal-Mart coalition.
- Public awareness campaign on over-development and its dangers to birds.