

Definitions: Types of Organized Power

POWER: The ability to influence and/or determine a decision towards a desired outcome.

Above is a draft working definition of "POWER." Below are DRAFT definitions for some of the types of power that grassroots social change organizations most often try to build and exercise in order to win their social change goals. This draft can be used to:

(1) develop common WORKING DEFINITIONS; (2) make needed additions to the list; and (3) use this to inform our discussion of the TYPES and SCOPE and SCALE of Organized Power our organizations need to win our Long-Term Social Change Goals.

ADVOCACY



Power that is based on expertise, effective arguments, and/or relationships with decision-makers. Advocacy is most often done by professionals or technical experts on behalf of people who are directly affected by the problems/conditions related to the decision/outcome.

GRASSROOTS LOBBYING



Power that is based on organizing groups of grassroots people, who are directly affected by the problems and conditions, to publicly demonstrate support, to the decision-maker(s), for the desired outcome.

Examples

- Give planned testimony to decision-makers at public meetings or hearings
- Do small delegations to decision-makers' offices
- Send large numbers of letters/cards or make phone calls to decision-makers

ORGANIZED VOTING



Power that is based on educating & organizing large numbers of individuals (who are eligible to vote in a defined geographic area), AND turning them out to vote either :

- (1) a particular way on a specific issue or candidate, **and/or**
- (2) based on a broader shared platform or agenda.

DIRECT ACTION

Power that is based on organizing groups of grassroots people, who are affected by the problems and conditions, to directly impede, disrupt, or shut down the operations or activities of a decision-maker or target, in order to achieve a concrete desired outcome (demand).



Examples

- civil disobedience which stops or disrupts a target's operations or activities
- economic boycotts which measurably affect a target's profits/image
- worker strikes/stoppages/slow-downs that affect a company's bottom line.

NOTE: **Direct Action** does not include demonstrations, rallies, pickets, etc. that are purely **symbolic** ("symbolic" = they do not affect or disrupt the operations or activities of the decision-maker).

MASS MEDIA



Power that is based on influencing or shaping public opinion through the use of media institutions (TV, newspapers, radio, internet, etc.) in order to exert pressure on the decision-maker(s). Mass media power is usually done by professional experts or experienced "media activists."

LEGAL POWER



Power based on using the judicial system (lawsuits, injunctions, prosecutions). Legal power usually involves lawyers and/or experienced "legal activists."