

Building Power through Grasstops Development

A guide to creating and implementing
systematic, sustainable grasstops networks

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INTRODUCTION

Powerful organizations accomplish more. They have more success in achieving policy goals, strengthening their member base, and raising needed funds.

To win a campaign, an organization must have the power to both educate citizenry and politicians and to move them to advocate and vote for a desired outcome. An organization's power is realized as funds, facts, friends, or any combination of these things.

If an organization has funds, it can buy ads, send mailings and hold events to win over a politician's vote. But, most advocacy organizations do not have sufficient dollars to do these things. Another approach many groups use is to release reports filled with facts and figures about why a policy needs to be changed. In most cases, information alone will not win a fight. Ideally, decision makers would base their opinions on facts. Yet in reality, decision makers often disregard facts that contradict with their beliefs. While organizations can still use funds and facts to help achieve their goals, relationships become key. An organization can drastically increase its own power by building friendships with powerful people. That is why building a network grassroots relationships is so important.

Many groups already employ grassroots relationships, often, on an ad hoc basis. The grassroots relationships are called upon at critical moments and, too often, forgotten soon after. Relationships with grassroots should be as strategic and long-term as relationships with a foundation or major donor. By following the recommendations in this document, groups can create a systematic and sustainable program to build and maintain relationships with influential leaders.

The recommendations in this document have been gathered over a period of four years. They were developed through work with eleven environmental policy organizations of varying size.

By developing a grassroots network your group will:

- Enhance your fundraising potential
- Build a diverse group of messengers and stakeholders
- Use time and financial resources more efficiently by strategically allocating efforts
- Develop skills to cope with program challenges
- Increase your power to achieve campaign goals

DEFINING GRASSTOPS

Who are grasstops?

We all are familiar with grassroots. But who are *grasstops*? Grasstops are people who have significant influence with one or more decision makers. They are powerful people.

The idea of grasstops seems to run counter to the concept of democracy: that every voter has an equal voice—that a person’s opinion counts regardless of their status in the world. That may be true in the voting booth, but in reality every decision maker has an inner circle of respected advisors, both official and unofficial.

Building organizational power through grasstops means tapping into their power, credibility, and level of influence with decision makers and others. A person’s potential as a grasstop is dependant upon these things as well as their commitment to your organization’s goals and mission.

A grasstop leader may have influence because he or she is a big business owner, local elected official, community leader, political funder, or a personal friend of a decision maker. Because grasstops are powerful, they can more directly hold decision makers accountable. For example, a grasstop could decrease contributions to a campaign, withdraw support on an issue, or create harmful press.

Grasstops influence often comes from one of four categories:

- 1) **Financial**—people who contribute to organizations and campaigns
- 2) **Institutional**—elected or appointed officials, major employers, directors of organizations
- 3) **Personal**—the friends and family of the person you are trying to influence
- 4) **Influential**—well respected and trusted community leaders

While members of the media such as editorial board members and publishers of local papers are influential people, SELP has not included them in this guide. It obviously is important to build relationships with the media, but those relationships require a very different approach from the grasstops relationships that we are discussing in this document.

When thinking about and categorizing grasstops, it is important to consider how powerful a person is and with whom they have influence. For example, the largest employer in a Senate district may have a great deal of influence with that Senator, but not with decision makers in other parts of the state. Alternately, a major political funder may be influential with many decision makers throughout the state. The process that will help you assess your current and potential grasstops relationships is described later in this document.

Why are grasstops important?

Grasstops are important contributors to the power of an organization or movement. An organization may not have a sufficient number of proactive citizens in every district who can take or are willing to take action on an issue. And yet sometimes, despite our greatest efforts, decision makers still do not support the issues that their constituents wish for them to support. Grasstops development is not a replacement for grassroots organizing. It is an additional tool that your organization can use to achieve your mission. Your grasstops relationships can be the added measure that will bring success to a campaign.

Grasstops are people decision makers will respect and take seriously. They can provide an important “foot in the door.” They have influence and credibility and can help your organization accomplish its goals, regardless of whether your group has legions of grassroots activists in a district. In the eyes of the decision maker, working with a grasstop can lend more credibility to the cause or can substantially increase public awareness and action because of their recognition and influence.

Grasstops relationships can help your organization achieve its policy goals, as well as increase your fundraising potential. In addition to having the capacity to give their time and influence to your organization, many grasstops can contribute financially or recommend other potential donors.

Having a system for building grasstops relationships effectively allows your organization to increase its power base and ultimately influence policy. The next sections can help your organization create an effective system to grow its grasstops constituency.

GETTING EVERYONE ON BOARD

In building a grasstops system, the first step is to ensure that your board and staff members understand the importance of building your organization's power. This is a very important step and should not be missed! Without full agreement from board and staff, it will be difficult to create lasting, positive change in your organization.

It is important to educate board and staff about grasstops development. Define grasstops so that everyone is comfortable with and understands the terminology. Be clear about who grasstops are and how the organization will benefit from establishing and maintaining these relationships. It is important that your staff and board understand why a systematic approach is essential. Making grasstops development a priority empowers staff and board and motivates them to build these relationships.

Next, your organization needs to create internal structures so that the program will succeed. It is important to assign someone in your organization to take responsibility for grasstops development. This does not mean that this person will do all of the relationship-building, but rather that he or she will oversee and monitor the progress, making sure that goals are met. Though this may seem obvious, it is worth noting: the person who takes on this responsibility must be someone who also has the authority to ensure grasstops work actually happens.

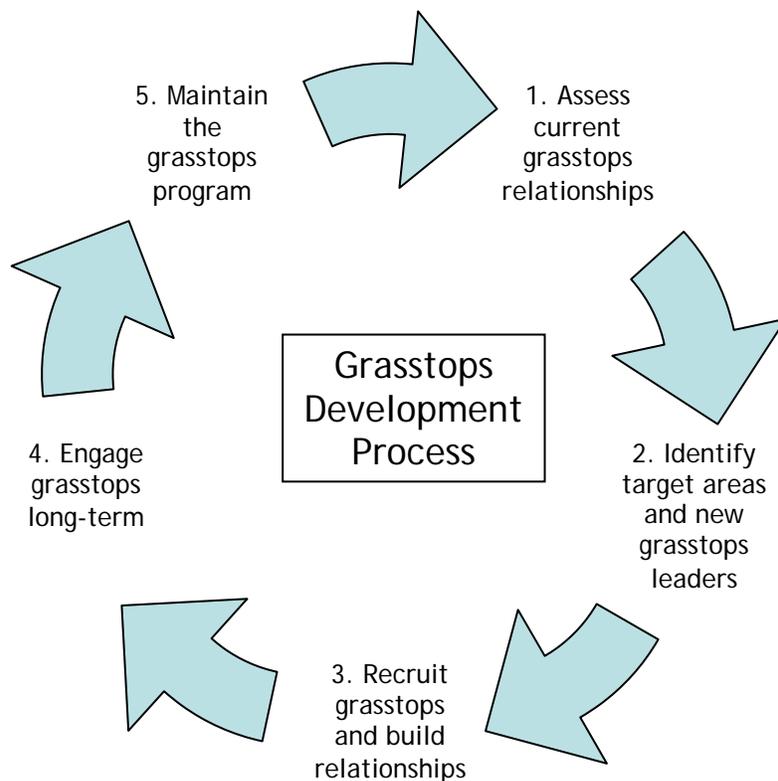
Giving this task to a senior staff member shows that it is something the organization feels is important. Other staff members also are more likely to listen to and be held accountable for their parts in the process. Make this role official by amending the staff person's job description to include this new responsibility. Formally including it in the job description will send a message to all staff that building grasstops relationships is an organizational priority.

It is important to create communications protocols for how the group will contact and correspond with grasstops. Your group will need a database or some other data tracking system to capture all of the information about your organization's grasstops relationships. Later in this document, we will provide additional detail about recording information on grasstops.

DEVELOPING A GRASSTOPS PROGRAM

Your grasstops program provides a blueprint for creating and sustaining strategic relationships between your organization and grasstops leaders. Because grasstops development is, at its core, about developing long-term relationships, it takes time. Building a statewide network of grasstops will take strategic effort.

The grasstops development process is cyclical. Organizations first assess current grasstops relationships, then identify target areas and new grasstops leaders, recruit new grasstops, engage grasstops over the long-term, and maintain the program. The process continues with the reassessment of grasstops relationships. This step can happen within the context of a given campaign or as an overall process for the organization itself.



1. Assess current grasstops relationships

Even if your organization does not have a defined grasstops development program, it likely has utilized grasstops relationships to some extent. First, identify the grasstops with which your organization currently has relationships. Inviting board and staff to brainstorm current grasstops is a quick and effective way to start. The following questions act as catalysts to identifying grasstops:

- Who has been involved in past and current campaigns?
- In what coalitions has your organization been involved?
- Who are financial supporters of your organization?
- Who are current and past members, staff, and directors?

***Case Study:** The Ohio Environmental Council brainstormed lists of opinion leaders who had been involved in past campaigns. They used large flip chart pages hung around the meeting room with headings like ‘Financial,’ ‘Academic,’ ‘Government,’ and ‘Community Leaders.’ Then, staff members started calling out names for each category as someone wrote them on the charts. By the end of the short session, they had compiled a list of about 180 leaders who could be the beginning of their grasstops network and become active in many more campaigns.*

For each grasstop your organization identifies, answer these questions to assess the relationships:¹

1. How was this relationship formed?
 - Who at the organization knows the grasstop?
 - Is the grasstop a member?
 - Is the relationship with the grasstop based on a specific issue? i.e. Was the relationship formed during a specific campaign? Does the person have expertise on a particular issue?

2. How strong is the relationship?
 - Is the grasstop someone who strongly identifies with the organization?
 - Would the grasstop make a phone call to or meet with a politician in support or against an issue on behalf of or with the organization?
 - Is the grasstop familiar with all aspects of the organization or do they only know about the group’s work on one issue or set of issues?

3. What political connections does the grasstop have?
 - Which decision makers does the grasstop have relationships with?
 - Which decision makers could this grasstop influence?
 - Rate the strength of the relationship the grasstop has with the elected official.

4. Are there more ways in which the organization could work with or engage the grasstop?
 - Could a grasstop who has given money in the past become active in a campaign?
 - Could coalition partners the organization has historically worked with on one issue, become active in other program areas?

5. What other influential people does this grasstop know?
 - Who does the grasstop work with? Who is the grasstop related to, friends with, etc.?
 - What other organizations is this person involved in?

¹ See “Assess Current Grasstops Relationships” worksheet on page 20-21.

Could the grasstop connect the organization to people who are closer to or could influence other decision makers?

6. How can the organization make these relationships stronger?

Do communications with the grasstop need to be more regular or more personal?
How can the grasstop be introduced to more staff or board members and more program areas?

Could personal relationships be translated into organizational relationships?

Would the grasstop appreciate being invited to a social event with other grasstops?

Could the organization support some of the other causes that are important to the grasstop?

After your organization assesses each grasstop relationship individually and assigns someone to research any missing information, it is important to discuss the number and types of relationships as a whole. Use the following criteria to analyze your grasstops power base:

- How many grasstops relationships does the organization have?
- In what districts are the grasstops located?
- How many of the relationships are based on a specific issue?
- Which grasstops have influence with the governor, members of your state legislature, congress and local elected officials?
- Which grasstops are community leaders and can help mobilize constituents?

These questions provide the beginning for a power assessment process. If your organization has the resources, this is an excellent time to engage in a formal power assessment process. A power assessment will identify how much power your organization has and where that power comes from. It can include members, coalition partners, grasstops, donors, activists, media, and more.

A power assessment also will analyze current legislative leadership, telling you where your organization needs to build power to accomplish its goals. For example, you may want to focus on districts that are home to key committee chairs or majority leadership. It will provide a better sense of the role that grasstops relationships play in your organization's power. The assessment will help you be more strategic in step two of the grasstops program: identifying new grasstops.

After assessing the current relationships, capturing information about the identified grasstops is critical. A successful grasstops program requires:

- A method for identifying who may be interested in participating in a particular campaign
- A system for organizing communications
- A way of tracking what actions grasstops leaders have taken
- A system for assuring follow-up with the grasstops so they understand the impact of their action
- A system of storing and retrieving all of this information

Recommended fields for a grasstops spreadsheet or database:

Contact Information

Name
Spouse/Partner's name
Phone, cell phone
Address
Email
Preferred method of communication
Restrictions on communication
Gatekeeper (described on page 14)
Indication of grasstops or potential grasstops status

Affiliations and Interests

Employer
Job title
Organizations they are involved in (and their role)
Alma mater
Hobbies
Issues the grasstop particularly cares about
Affiliations or memberships

Relationships

Decision makers the grasstop has relationships with
 Type of relationship
 Length and depth of the relationship
Other grasstops this person knows
Political contributions

Involvement in your organization

Financial contributions
Events or meetings the grasstop has attended
Actions the grasstop is willing to take: letter to the editor, call elected official, etc.
Communications received from your organization: newsletter, email updates, etc.
Contact history: dates and reasons the organization contacted them, brief synopsis of interaction

Note: *Some of the organizations involved in SELP's Grasstops Program have databases such as Raiser's Edge or E-base to track donors and volunteers. If an organization already has a method of tracking volunteers or donors, it is likely that by adding a few fields or modifying the database slightly, it can be used to track grasstops involvement. However, it is not necessary to purchase a special database. The Colorado Environmental Coalition uses a Microsoft Access database created by a staff member to track the involvement of volunteers. They have modified it for use with their grasstops program. Other organizations have used basic spreadsheets to track grasstop information.*

You may not know all of this information about every grasstop, so make it a goal to learn more. The more you know about grasstops, the better able you will be to tailor messages and engage grasstops on the key issues that matter to them. Every interaction with a grasstop is another opportunity to find out more about him or her. If grasstops are new to your organization, you may want to invite them for coffee or lunch so that you can learn more about them and tell them about your organization's work.

Taking the time to develop a method for tracking information about grasstops is a necessary investment.

- It provides a way to store information so that the organization is not dependent upon staff memory or will fall victim to staff turnover
- Organizing all of the information in one place will mean all staff has access to it instead of having to refer to different documents for different grasstops
- It makes it easy to access information quickly when necessary

When creating a database or other method of tracking grasstops, consider how you will want to retrieve the information. If possible, include drop down menus and other features that make searching for information easier. By being able to search and immediately find all of the grasstops who live in one district or who care about a certain issue, it will be easier to make the most of those relationships in key moments.

Case Study: *The Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) was working on a national issue in coalition with several other organizations. The Executive Director got a call asking the OEC to mobilize constituents on the issue at a key moment in the legislative process. The director's first instinct was to call the first three activists who came to mind. Instead, he went into their database and searched for grasstops who cared about this particular issue and lived in the target region. His search turned up a variety of grasstops who were a much better representation of Ohio citizens and many were unexpected allies. By having the database, the OEC provided more effective messengers for their campaign.*

2. Identify target areas and new grasstops leaders

A strategic process should guide the search for new grasstops leaders. As mentioned earlier, a power assessment process is helpful in identifying new grasstops leaders.

Case Study: *The Iowa Environmental Council (IEC) underwent an assessment of their current power. After comparing maps of where the organization has and needs power, based on current leadership positions in the Iowa Legislature, IEC identified three Senate districts to focus on in their power building efforts. Later, they brainstormed grasstops connections in those districts with board members. The first two districts produced long lists of names in those communities; however, the third was not as fruitful. It became obvious to the staff and board where they needed to focus their efforts on building new grasstops relationships.*

Whether or not an organization uses a power assessment process, it is critical that it spend its limited time and monetary resources wisely. Prioritizing the geographic or issue areas that are most important to the organization will help staff plan where to focus their attention. Use the assessment of your existing grasstops relationships to identify any holes or gaps in your network. Further narrow your focus by comparing those gaps to your organization's current campaign targets.

Once your organization has narrowed its focus for building new grasstops relationships to a few targeted regions or fields, you must begin researching those areas. Start by asking current grasstops, staff, board members, and activists if they have any connections that were not already discovered in the assessment phase to the target region.² If there are connections, introductions should be made.

Case Study: *When working on their 'Clean Cars for Oregon' campaign, the Oregon Environmental Council spoke with owners of automobile dealerships. They added dealerships that supported the campaign to a list and asked supporters if they knew any other business owners who may be interested in joining the campaign. Being referred to someone by a mutual friend or acquaintance is helpful in starting a new grasstops relationship.*

If your organization is going into a district 'cold' - with few leads or connections - staff or volunteers will need to do research to find out more about the community. The internet makes this process relatively simple. Another approach is to ask staff to brainstorm what they know about the district. While they may not know any grasstops, they may provide other useful information. It is important to include all staff, not just program staff.

Case Study: *The Planning and Conservation League was preparing for a campaign in a district where they had little recognition. Staff sat down with flip charts and markers and started listing everything they knew about the region, including major employers, predominant industries, key issues, local governments, influential organizations and more. At the end of the session, they produced a list of groups and people to build relationships that could potentially help them increase their power in the district.*

Use the list of ideas below to help your organization find grasstops in new districts:³

- Political campaign contributors and volunteers
- Charity benefits
- Civic organizations (Rotary, Lions, Elks, etc.)
- Local/regional organizations
- Landowner associations
- City government
- County government

² See "Discovering Grasstops Relationships" on page 22.

³ See "Researching Potential Grasstops" on page 23.

- State government
- Chamber of Commerce
- Business coalitions
- Your organization's vendors
- State and federal agencies
- Religious groups and faith community leaders
- Community improvement projects
- Charity benefits
- Organized community or regional events
- Bar associations
- Medical societies
- Schools, colleges and universities

A more on-the-ground approach to learning about a community is to get involved! Have staff members or volunteers attend community events in the area to start meeting people. Have them participate in functions that are likely to draw influential people. Often civic and volunteer groups are looking for speakers on local issues. Offer to give a presentation about your organization and issues that affect the local community. Engaging with citizens on a regular basis will make it more likely that staff members are seen as part of the community. This will make it easier to build grassroots relationships. If you take this approach, it is important to allow staff to have a flexible work schedule or allow for comp time so that they can go to events on weekends and evenings as a part of their jobs.

3. Recruit and build relationships with grassroots

After you have identified potential new grassroots, it is time to build relationships. Research to find common ground or potential ways to connect. Below are some questions to consider:

- Has the person given political donations? To whom?
- Where is the person from? What local issues is s/he involved in?
- What has the person done professionally?
- Is the person a member or on the board of directors of any groups, clubs, or organizations?
- Where did the person grow up?
- What issue(s) is the person most concerned with?
- Has the person ever given money to or volunteered with your organization?
- Is the person on your organization's mailing list? Has s/he received any solicitations, e-mails, newsletters, or other publications from your organization?
- Has the person been involved in any allied or similar organizations?
- Is there any overlap of interests or activities between the person and your organization's staff or board of directors?
- Does your organization already have a relationship with anyone close to the person?

A clear action plan should be created for building a new relationship. Here is a sample plan:

1. Designate a senior staff or board member as the main contact person
2. Have the contact person introduce themselves at an upcoming public function
3. Have the contact person follow up with an email or phone call inviting the potential grasstop to lunch or to an organizational event
4. Educate the grasstop about your organization and its current campaigns or projects
5. Learn about what the grasstop is interested in and if they would be willing to be an active part of a campaign.

Each person and each relationship will require a very different strategy. Below are some suggested approaches for different types of grasstops:

- **Financial**: Research organizations and campaigns to which this person has donated money. Does this person have a foundation set up for their giving or does s/he make personal donations? If the person has given to a foundation, find out the foundation's giving priorities and more about the organizations they have funded. Learn about the political leaders to whom this person has donated. Perhaps one of your organization's funders knows this person. See if your donor could introduce you.
- **Institutional**: If the person was elected, learn about his/her election campaign, such as who contributed and who his/her opponents were. If the person was appointed, find out who appointed him/her to the position. Perhaps you know others who work in the same agency or office who could introduce you. If the person is the owner or head of a company, see if anyone you know works for them. Find out who is on the board of directors of the company. See if the business is a member of any chambers of commerce or business coalitions.
- **Personal**: The American International Automobile Dealers Association has a program in which they send out forms to their members asking them if they personally know any elected officials. It continues to ask how well they know and how they met the elected official. This is a great exercise to do first with your board and staff and then with members and donors to find out if your organization has a connection to any elected officials.
- **Influential**: These grasstops are very involved in their communities. Get your foot in the door by finding out which organizations or movements they are active in and then attend something they are likely to attend.

Because organizations have limited resources to devote to developing grasstops relationships, groups should focus on grasstops with influence in the previously identified target districts or grasstops who have a broad influence with a large number of decision makers.

4. Engage grasstops long-term

Engaging grasstops long-term accomplishes several things:

- It helps the grasstop feel connected to the organization and to the campaigns on which he or she working
- It deepens the relationship with the organization so that even if one staff person were to leave or a program was to end, the grasstop would remain connected to the group
- Building the relationship builds the organization's power

A communication plan specific to grasstop development will prompt relationship-building activities. A thoughtful plan, to which staff members are held accountable, will reward your organization with progress toward a sustainable grasstops network. The plan should answer a few basic questions about the grasstop's involvement with the organization.

- How often and when would they like to be contacted?
- Is it ok to call them at home?
- Will they weigh in on any campaign or only on specific issues?
- Are they willing to 'go public' or would they prefer to stay 'behind the scenes'?
- Are they interested in being on your board of directors?
- Will they speak at public hearings?
- Will they author letters to the editor?
- Will they sign on to position letters?
- Will they contact other grasstops?
- Will they personally call and meet with a decision makers?
- How can your organization help the grasstop?

A grasstops communication plan also should include ways to thank grasstops for their contributions. As opposed to sending out thank you cards, think about more meaningful and personal ways to show your appreciation. Making grasstops feel valued will help them feel more connected to your organization.

Your organization should have a regular, agreed upon way to keep in touch with grasstops (e.g. a weekly or monthly issue briefing email). If the grasstops feel like they are 'in the loop' and getting the most up to date information from you, they are far more likely to react quickly when a staff member asks them to take action in the form of writing a letter, making a phone call, or coming to an event. They already will know what your organization is doing on the issue and may even be expecting the call.

Tracking grasstops' interests also will help with communication, especially when they may agree with your organization on one issue, but not on another. By tracking their positions, you can communicate with grasstops only on the issues that matter to them. Grasstops will be more likely to respond to your organization's requests because they will know the request will concern an issue that is important to them.

Case Study: When the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) takes a position on a new issue, they mail a letter explaining their position along with supporting materials to a list of approximately 250 important leaders in their state. Some of the people are major donors, some are part of other similarly minded non-profits, and others are people who NRCM rarely agrees with. A mailing like this can accomplish several goals:

- 1) Educating your grasstops network on a new issue and letting them know how they may be able to help in the future
- 2) Explaining why your organization took a particular position on an issue, especially if it is controversial
- 3) Making grasstops feel like they are valued insiders by filling them in on the issue before the general public

Another way to keep grasstops informed is to hold special briefings with influential people. It will give them a chance to meet each other and potentially form new relationships with other community leaders. Attending regular briefings as well as developing relationships with other influential people through your organization will help your grasstops become more invested.

Case Study: The Colorado Environmental Coalition planned a briefing to inform volunteers and grasstops about their work on an issue. The event combined the briefing with an auction of recently donated photographs of Colorado's wilderness. An event like this gives two different ways for a grasstop to become invested in the organization: donating money and getting involved in the campaign. After educating grasstops on an issue, ask them how they are willing to help right away. Have them sign up for a task like calling a Senator at a key moment. You will have a higher response rate if you ask at the event rather than waiting and contacting your guests later. Record the promise and send a thank you along with a reminder of the commitment the next day.

In a grasstops communication plan, it is important to designate roles in the process to specific staff or board members. One person should be responsible for all of the communications work with one grasstop. When new grasstops relationships are forming, it may be confusing for a grasstop to hear from five different people at the organization. If there is a grasstop to which a board member has a personal connection, that board member may not feel comfortable with other people from the organization contacting the grasstop. In these instances, it is helpful to assign a "gatekeeper" who manages the relationship.

Having said that, it also is important to help build the grasstop's relationship with the organization as opposed to building a relationship with only one specific staff member. Make sure that the grasstops are introduced to several members of staff or board members. This, again, will help the grasstop feel more invested in your organization.

The gatekeeper idea is also useful in coalition settings. When many groups are working together on a campaign, they may not want to share the names of their most influential grasstops or donors.

Case Study: When working on a recent campaign, the Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC) employed the gatekeeper idea for managing grasstops. They compiled all of the grasstop names on a spreadsheet which was shared among all organizers; however each name had a gatekeeper assigned to it. If other members of the coalition wanted to contact one of CEC's grasstops, they would have to contact CEC first. It was an effective way of pooling their ideas and grasstops without giving up control over the relationships they had worked so hard to build.

When communicating with grasstops it is important to recognize that grasstops are influential people who have valuable opinions. However, be sure that a grasstop is not given power over the organization. Occasionally, grasstops can feel that it is their right to participate actively in your organization's decision-making process. This may be a sign of engagement, but if the grasstop is pushy or demanding, it may be a sign that the grasstop does not understand his or her role. To avoid this situation, make clear the process by which your organization chooses campaigns and positions on issues, as well as when and how it is appropriate for grasstops and other activists to weigh in. If you would like a grasstop to be more involved in the decision making process, you can consider them as a potential board member. Some organizations have set up separate advisory councils as a way to involve more opinion leaders in policy decisions. Advisory councils can be based around specific issue areas or even geographic regions.

When working with grasstops who may disagree with your organization on an issue, use the information to your benefit! Find out why they disagree and what your opponent's strongest arguments are likely to be. Practice defusing them with people who may disagree on this point, but are usually supporters of your organization. You may even be able to convince some previously dissenting grasstops of your position, in which case they will be even more valuable spokespeople because they understand your adversaries.

As with any relationship, it is important that both the grasstop and the organization benefit from the association. Benefits to the organization are obvious: building more power, being more effective in campaigns, communicating with decision makers more directly, and increasing fundraising potential. Benefits to the grasstop depend upon the individual grasstop and relationship. Some grasstops, especially elected officials and business people, will appreciate being on the inside track on legislative issues while others will enjoy meeting other influential people through grasstops events.

Regardless of the benefits, the relationship must remain balanced. Organizations should be careful not to ask too much of grasstops. This can be accomplished with open communication and respect of the grasstop's answers to the initial survey questions.

5. Maintain and reassess the grasstops program

Your organization should regularly reassess its grasstops program. You may choose the timing of the review, but should decide on a set time at which it will occur—perhaps at the beginning of a

campaign or on an annual basis in time with the legislative cycle. Following through with the cycle will help your organization advance to the next level of grasstops development. Being intentional about each step of the process will create a systematic, sustainable program.

When reassessing, your organization should look at your network to determine if all of the grasstops are still relevant and effective messengers. While it is rare, there are times when an organization may no longer want to consider someone a grasstop. For example, people who move out of state may not remain invested in the organization. However, they may continue to be a good resource because they still will have connections and relationships in your area. There also may be times when an organization overestimates the amount of influence possessed by a grasstop. If a grasstop has been ineffective and does not seem to be following through with what is expected of him or her, the organization may want to reassess the relationship and find other ways for the person to contribute.

Conversely, if a grasstop has been a great asset and has built a strong relationship with your organization, you may want to approach him or her about being on your board of directors. Cultivating grasstops is an ideal way to find and develop new board members.

Also, assess the capacity of current grasstops as donors. Be sure to send membership appeals to grasstops who may not have formalized their membership with a check and consider any major donor prospects.

In addition to assessing the efficacy of individual grasstops, your organization also will want to assess the overall grasstops program. This brings your organization back to the first step in the cycle. By looking at where your organization now has power as compared to when you started the grasstops program, you can see the progress your group has made.

After reassessing, the organization should continue the cycle of grasstops development by identifying new grasstops, recruiting grasstops, engaging grasstops over the long-term, and maintaining the grasstops program.

Finally, follow through with the plans that you've put together. So often groups strategize and come up with well thought out ideas, but don't follow through. Remember to hold board and staff, as well as yourself, accountable to the grasstops plan, and you'll start seeing benefits to your organization.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Campaign planning

Every campaign strategy should include ways for an organization to increase its power. Adding grasstops development to your campaign planning process elevates the importance of grasstops work and sets clear goals to continue its progress. Groups should end every campaign in a stronger position, regardless of whether they reached their ultimate goal.

For example, an organization is working to pass a policy in their legislature. One step toward that goal could be to build ten new grasstops relationships with people in the target decision maker's district. Regardless of whether the group achieves the policy goal, the organization will have increased its power because of the new relationships it developed with influential people.

During the planning stages of a campaign, the following things should be kept in mind:

- Grasstops may enjoy being involved in the planning process. They can give input on when and how they can be effective in the campaign.
- Communicate your organization's campaign priorities, your rationale, and system for arriving at them. This will help to avoid potential conflicts or disagreements.
- Grasstops should be called on strategically. With a limited number of grasstops relationships, it is important to not use too many on one issue and then be left with no one who can get involved on another. Groups also should match the level of influence of the grasstop with the importance of an issue. If a campaign is a top priority, organizations can call on their most influential grasstops. Conversely, an organization can use more specialized or local grasstops for smaller campaigns.

Staff time

The amount of staff time needed for grasstops development depends on the depth of the program, the number of grasstops it includes, and their level of involvement. As mentioned earlier, while all staff may be involved in relationship building and maintaining the program, it is key that an organization designate one staff person to hold everyone accountable to their roles in the process. Individual grasstops goals and maintenance tasks should be included in staff work plans.

Funding

Since grasstops development will be part of every campaign, it can be included as a line item in grant proposals. Grasstops organizing would be one of the methods the organization would employ to achieve the goal of the campaign. Some funders also may be willing to fund grasstops development programs as a way to increase civic engagement.

By building relationships with influential people, your organization increases its funding potential. Taking full advantage of that potential requires clear communication between the people developing the grassroots relationships and your development staff. People who are already invested in your organization as a grassroots leader are more likely to donate money. Grassroots development can pay for itself through these increased donations.

CONCLUSION

Developing a systematic, sustainable grasstops program will increase your organization's power and ability to win campaigns. By targeting grasstops efforts an organization can use its resources more effectively and efficiently and also increase fundraising potential. A successful grasstops program will lead to an organization that is powerful, effective, and victorious!

RESOURCES



Assess Current Grasstops Relationships

Name of Grasstop: _____

Your Name: _____

1. How was this relationship formed?

Who at the organization knows the grasstop?

Is the grasstop a member?

Is the relationship with the grasstop based on a specific issue? i.e. Was the relationship formed during a specific campaign? Does the person have expertise on a particular issue?

2. How strong is the relationship?

Is the grasstop someone who strongly identifies with the organization?

Would the grasstop make a phone call to or meet with a politician in support or against an issue on behalf of or with the organization?

Is the grasstop familiar with all aspects of the organization or do they only know about the group's work on one issue or set of issues?

3. What political connections does the grasstop have?

Which decision makers does the grasstop have relationships with?

Which decision makers could this grasstop influence?

Rate the strength of the relationship the grasstop has with the elected official

4. Are there more ways in which the organization could work with or engage the grasstop?

Could a grasstop who has given money in the past become active in a campaign?

Could coalition partners the organization has historically worked with on one issue, become active in other program areas?

5. What other influential people does this grasstop know?

Who does the grasstop work with? Who is the grasstop related to, friends with, etc.?

What other organizations is this person involved in?

Could the grasstop connect the organization to people who are closer to or could influence other decision makers?

6. How can the organization make these relationships stronger?

Do communications with the grasstop need to be more regular or more personal?

How can the grasstop be introduced to more staff or board members and more program areas?

Could personal relationships be translated into organizational relationships?

Would the grasstop appreciate being invited to a social event with other grasstops?

Could the organization support some of the other causes that are important to the grasstop?

Comments:

Relationship development plan:

Discovering Grasstops Relationships

Your Name _____ Title/Role _____

I have a relationship with the following Elected Official or Grasstop:

Name _____ Title/Position _____

Relative Close friend Know his/her staff Campaign work

Fellow alumni/ae of _____

Current/former colleague at _____

Other _____

How would you rate your relationship?

Acquaintance Close working relationship Know well/friend

How long have you known/worked with this person? _____

How often do you communicate with this person? _____ times per month

Has this person been involved in our organization in the past? _____

How? _____

Does this person have any issue interests that overlap with our organization?

Can our organization contact this person or should we communicate through you?

Researching Potential Grasstops

Use the websites below to begin your search for new grasstops.

To find grasstops based on their financial contributions:

Open Secrets, Campaign Contributors <http://www.opensecrets.org/>

The Institute on Money in State Politics, State Campaign Contributors
<http://www.followthemoney.org/>

Fundrace, Campaign Contributors searchable by neighborhood <http://fundrace.org/>

Newsmeat, Search by contributor or zip code <http://newsmeat.com/>

Federal Election Commission <http://fec.gov/>

To find grasstops involved in business:

America's Career InfoNet, select your state then scroll down to 'State Information: Largest Employers' for a list of the 50 largest employers in your state
http://www.acinet.org/acinet/select_state.asp?id=11,8&nodeid=12&socode=&next=state1

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Member Directory
<http://www.uschamber.com/chambers/directory/default.htm?d=false>

To find grasstops involved in civic organizations:

Lions Club, after entering site click 'Club Locator' on the left side
<http://www.lionsclubs.org/EN/find-a-club.php>

Rotary International, Club Locator
<http://www.rotary.org/en/AboutUs/SiteTools/ClubLocator/Pages/ridefault.aspx>

Elks Club, local lodge directory <http://www.elks.org/lodges/default.cfm>

Kiwanis International, find a club <http://www.kiwanis.org/FindaClub/tabid/84/Default.aspx>