



CHESAPEAKE BAY
FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure

Chesapeake Watershed Forum

Balancing the Power Equation

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In 1849, Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand.” That “demand” is much more affective when a community organizes and speaks with many voices. To understand organizing is to understand the root of power: who has the power; who wants the power; and how can you influence the power equation? We all have power but in varying degrees. The key is to use your power to offset the power of the group or organization or business you are opposing. If you can balance the power equation, your chances of success are greatly increased. If the balance shifts in your favor you have not only put your issues on the front burner but may be on your way to winning the issue *and* building a self-sustaining organization.

Where does power come from?

In the political world, power comes from two basic sources:

- Money
- Votes

How do you balance the power?

Your community may or may not have significant financial resources but it does have the power of the vote.

- Many of the key decision makers are elected or appointed. That means they represent the will of the people. But the catch is that they represent the majority will and if you are in the minority you stand less of a chance of influencing them.
- The community’s power resides in its ability to generate enough public discussion of an issue such that it could be turned into a focal point during the election cycle. Once that happens, you will have the attention of the targeted decision maker.

The opposition will likely have either votes or money or both.

- If the opposition is financially well heeled, your task will be more difficult but not insurmountable. Money buys not only influence but also time, and time can be the enemy of organizing. In some cases, a local issue will catch the public’s attention and generate considerable discussion, opposition and activism in the short term. But the enthusiasm and willingness to engage in an organized struggle (as well as your financial resources) can dissipate over time.
- Conversely, time may be to your advantage as it’s cheap. If you can stall the process, hang it up with technicalities or legalities, or through an extended hearing process, perhaps the proponent will pack up and move on. In addition, it will allow you time to generate greater public support (and money) for your position. You might get lucky and have an election coming up where, with time, you could bring this before the candidates and hold a public discussion on the merits of the issue.
- By contrast, if you get involved late in the game, time is not on your side.

Getting Started

1. Targets

- Targets are the people with power whose support you must gain to accomplish your goal.
- The target is always a person – not a corporation or agency.
- There are two kinds of targets: primary and secondary
 - Primary: the target(s) that can give you what you want
 - Secondary: the targets that can influence the primary targets, i.e. campaign contributors, friends, business partners, clergy, retired politicians, family members, voters, etc.
- Targeting strategies should focus on “fence sitters” - not those in opposition or those that support you
- Choose your targets carefully and be sure their support will help you achieve you goal.
- Example:
 - Primary: county executive, board of appeals, Governor, chair of budget committee
 - Secondary: uncommitted county council members, voters in district 1, 5, 7; local homeowner associations; campaign contributors to county executive, state legislators for your district on budget committee

2. Establish a goal

- Begin by setting a goal. You might have more than one goal, or a long term goal that depends on achieving a number of short term goals. Break the task down to manageable pieces.
- The goal should be SMART:
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Attainable
 - Realistic
 - Time-oriented
- Example
 - Long term: Within five years, create a local land trust to conserve ecologically and culturally important lands within the county.
 - Mid term goal: Raise \$20,000 as soon as possible to purchase 10-acre parcel in Big Woods.
 - Short term: Stop planned development of Big Woods.

3. Strategies and Tactics

- Tactics are the steps you and your allies will take to achieve your goals.
- Some suggest developing objectives, then defining strategies and tactics to get to those objectives. One can get very embroiled in semantics here as to what is an objective and what is a strategy. Suffice it to say that tactics are the most specific actions taken while objectives are rungs on the ladder to your goal. A strategy is a combination of tactics to achieve an objective.
- Example:
 - *Objective 1:* Have Councilman Russ T. Gate receive 75 letters from his constituents by October 1.
 - *Strategy:* Inform, educate and mobilize constituents to contact councilman
 - *Tactics:*
 - Mail info to constituents
 - Phonebank constituents after mailing

- Setup sign-on letter writing event at Shop Away
- Have booth at county fair
- *Objective 2:* Get two articles in local papers about campaign to Save the Big Woods before county council meets in October.
 - *Strategy:* Educate reporters and editors about campaign
 - *Tactics:*
 - Hold rally at site, invite press
 - Send information package to editor, follow up with call
 - Find good spokesperson to interview
 - Tie conservation to local environmental issue such as problems with water quality

Things to Remember

- **An effective campaign requires a well designed approach with the ability to adjust** that plan to changes in the opposition, unexpected road blocks, changes in personnel, a short fall of cash and other unforeseen difficulties. It also requires commitment and persistence. Persistence pays off. Many times the “bad guys” count on wearing down opponents. You cannot let that happen. Look for opportunities to compromise, especially when establishing goals: is there a middle ground most people would agree to. Sometimes the bad guys don’t want a huge fight and will be willing to adjust plans to meet the needs of local concerns. Don’t be afraid to meet with them and discuss what options they would consider.
- When talking to a decision maker, **use facts not emotion** to build your case. Just because something is the “right thing to do” does not necessarily mean it will be done. Thoroughly investigate state and local laws, local zoning ordinances and master or comprehensive land-use plans. Try to learn what arguments your opponents will make and develop a counter argument.
- **Recruit good spokespeople** and subject matter experts – respected individuals within the community or a particular area of expertise. Avoid appointing the loudest, most passionate person in your groups as spokesperson.
- **Develop good volunteers and volunteer leaders.** Delegate responsibilities and let others help; this will give them a greater sense of worth and “ownership,” building loyalty and commitment.
- **Seek out other groups,** communities or attorneys who have experience with a similar situation. Some attorneys or consultants will speak with you for free or discount their services to a worthy cause.
- **Don’t overlook the media.** The media is an important tool of any campaign. Give them something to work with, plenty of compelling information, a local angle or hook and again be persistent.
- **Use the latest web tools** to organize and inform your allies and constituents. The new buzz term is Web 2.0 which refers to the social networking sites that are taking over the web – You Tube, My Space, etc. Other tools include blogs, list-serves, e-alert systems, surveys, blast e-mails, etc.
- **Be creative in your approach.** Think about fun, interesting or dramatic public events that will attract people and the media. Create a clever slogan that clearly communicates the issue. Learn from other marketing or political campaigns. Copy what works.
- Finally, not to overstate the obvious, but the greater the numbers, the greater your chances of success. **Get as many people on your side as you can and get them involved.**

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