

Campaign Planning 301: Spectrum of Allies

Trainer Names:

Learning Objectives:

Skills, Knowledge, and Attitude which learners should take away from this session.

- Learn how to use the spectrum of allies tool
- Understand the theory behind mobilizing allies to build power

Achievement Objectives:

Tangible steps learners will take to advance real or simulated campaign work.

- Analyze a real-life campaign story and identify key allies

Time needed: 90 minutes (1 hr 30 mins)

Normal = say out loud

Underlined = flipchart this!

Italics = trainer notes/instructions

Bold = key point

Anchor: The ANCHOR step invites learners to reflect on past experiences which relate to the learning of the session. (e.g. "Think back to a time when _____. What did that feel like?")

1) Mingle [10 mins]

Start with a kinesthetic activity: mingle! For about 8 minutes, have Sprogers mill around the room and interact with as many people as possible about the question: "What's one grassroots campaign that inspires you?" (It can be contemporary or historical, famous or not).

When time is up, call everyone back to their seats. Close with a quick poll and introduce the training:

How many people talked with someone who's inspired by a campaign you'd heard of before? How many people just learned about a campaign or issue you'd never heard of before? That's great! In this training, we'll dig into one of the most important pieces of campaign organizing: mobilizing allies.

Flipchart and read Objectives.

2) Story: Save Our Safety Net [20 mins]

*Have Sprogers form four groups. Read the SOS Campaign Story out loud, using [the accompanying slideshow](#) if possible. Trainers should practice reading this story ahead of time, in order to have a sense of what moments to **emphasize** in order to make it more interesting and engaging for the listener.*

Hand out post-its to the groups. Explain that as you read the story, groups should write down all of the groups and elected leaders they hear mentioned, one on each post-it. The first time you give the name of

an elected leader or group while reading the story, have someone record their names on flipchart. For the elected officials, also write a tagline to show where they stood on the campaign issue. You'll end up with:

ELECTED LEADERS

Mayor – "No taxes, no way!"
Graham – "I'm in!"
Barry – "Not sure yet..."
Brown – "...OK, now I'm in!"
Wells – "I'm in!"
Gray – "No comment"
Cheh – "Uhh I'm not sure..."
Evans – "I'll never raise taxes"

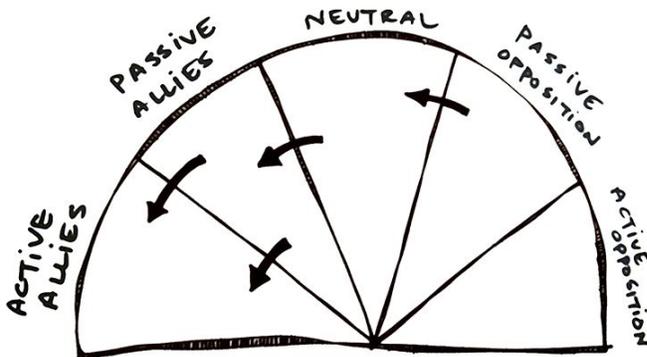
GROUPS

Fair Budget Coalition
Tenant Groups
Domestic Violence Groups
SOS
Wealthy People
AFL-CIO (unions)
Ward 3 residents
Chamber of Commerce (business groups)

Add: The ADD step introduces new information and tools for learners to consider.

3) Spectrum of Allies [10 mins]

When you've finished reading the story, present the concept of Spectrum of Allies. Flipchart the diagram:



You may have noticed that some activists spend a lot of time obsessing about our most hardcore, active opponents – protesting the big polluter or the president, for instance.

(Point to "active opposition" on the diagram.)

But we don't actually win campaigns by overpowering opponents. We win by shifting the support out from under them. We work to get passive supporters – people who support us but aren't doing anything about it – to take an active role in the campaign, and recruiting people who are on the fence to become passive supporters.

Some activist groups act like everyone who isn't actively supporting their campaign is in the last wedge of this spectrum, the active opposition. What would happen to a campaign that takes that approach? *Take responses. (Answers might include: they would never recruit new members and grow their base, they can't grow the power to actually win, people get burnt out, miss out on opportunities to combine forces with other groups with overlapping goals, foster attitude that the whole world is against them).*

Some organizers only work with people in the first wedge, the active allies. What would happen in that case? *Take responses. (Answers might include: they would never recruit new members, end up with an insular movement culture that isn't welcoming to newcomers, can't build the base they need to actually win their goals).*

To demonstrate how the Spectrum of Allies works, use one of the elected leaders or groups from the story as an example. Ask Sprogers where that person/group belongs on the spectrum, and then where on the spectrum that person was by the end of the story.

Apply: The APPLY step invites learners to utilize the new information in a task, challenge, or focused conversation. (e.g. practice, application, case studies, compare, etc.)

4) Spectrum of Allies Analysis [40 mins]

Small Group Work [20 mins]

Give each group an easel pad paper with a blank spectrum of allies on it. Ask them to place their post-its on the spectrum according to where they think that person or group **started**. After 10 minutes, pause the activity. It's okay if groups haven't placed all of their post-its on the paper – ask them to focus on the ones they have placed and work on moving them accorded to where that person or group **ended**, using arrows or some other indication to mark the person or group's path across the spectrum.

Group Presentations [20 mins]

Have groups present their charts one at a time. The goal is not that they “get this right,” but that they get practice thinking about how we elicit movement from neutral to passive to active supporters. For each group, choose one or two of the people/groups on their chart and ask: “Why did you choose to put that post-it there?” and “In the story, how did the campaigns get that person/group to move?”

Away: The AWAY step invites learners to connect their new understanding to the real world context of their lives. (e.g. a personal action plan, commitment, projection into future, etc.)

5) Debrief [10 mins]

After each group has presented, ask two more debrief questions:

- How is this story similar to dynamics you've seen or heard about in other social justice work?
- What do you think we can take away about getting people “on the fence” who are neutral to start taking steps towards getting active on our side?

Offer a final theory reflection:

Our campaigns don't get powerful by starting out with everyone we need to win our demands already on board. They become powerful when we gather steam by uniting people and groups around our cause – groups that might not be like us, but who find some common interest or connection to what we're working towards. It's on us to help them find that common interest, whether it's door-knocking in the neighborhood of a fence-sitting councilmember or by planning a direct action that a passive ally group can step up to participate in.

Thank everyone for participating in the activity!

SOS CAMPAIGN STORY

In the winter of 2009, the US experienced a financial crisis, and in many cities and states, elected officials, struggling to provide services with much less tax revenue, decided to cut services to the poorest residents in order to balance their books. In Washington DC, the mayor decided to propose cuts to emergency rental assistance, legal aid, job training funds and other badly needed programs. The following year, a group of younger activists who felt very strongly that those programs needed to be

protected, decided to come up with a creative campaign to defend safety net programs. They decided they needed to be more confrontational than past campaigns, calling their group Save Our Safety Net, or SOS.

After months of research and planning, they decided on a campaign demand to fix the problem: Raise revenue from the people who can most afford to pay a little more – taxpayers making over \$200,000 annually, less than 5% of DC residents, which would raise over \$70 million, more than enough to offset any proposed cuts to critical programs.

There were already some groups fighting hard on these issues, like tenant groups representing people living in affordable housing, groups that offered services to survivors of domestic violence and others directly affected by the proposed cuts. But they hadn't had much luck stopping the cuts - the mayor wasn't listening to them.

SOS thought they needed to make the mayor and some city councilmembers uncomfortable if they were going to have a tax increase, knowing that they would get intense opposition from business groups. "We need to shake things up!" they would say. They openly talked about planning actions that might get them kicked out of city hall, or even arrested. This didn't sit well with the Fair Budget Coalition, which had always advocated for more funding for important services by scheduling meetings with councilmembers, testifying at public hearings, and by generally being polite. They told SOS organizers early on, "we may not be able to stand with you, even though we both have the same goals." They were worried the mayor and councilmembers would get mad at them, and wouldn't listen anymore.

SOS decided to begin by delivered thousands of petition signatures by DC residents demanding that the mayor raise taxes on wealthy people rather than cut services for working class residents, on March 1st. But they didn't hear back from him. So on April 1st, the day the mayor publicly presents his budget for the next year, SOS members interrupted his press conference, holding up a red net, wearing "Save Our Safety Net" t-shirts and chanting their demands to stop the cuts. Although it got them attention, it didn't change his mind.

But it did help get the group on the radar of some organizations who had been "sitting on the fence", like labor unions representing workers in the city. The cuts wouldn't hurt their members' salaries, and labor unions like to be friendly with the mayor. But SOS organizers had been arguing to them, "Hey, your members live in affordable housing! And some of them once in a while need help from domestic violence groups!" The labor unions - the DC AFL-CIO - had already agreed to endorse the campaign. The big victory was getting them to actually invite their members to come to the campaign's next action.

By ignoring thousands of petition signatures, the mayor had demonstrated he wasn't interested in hearing from the public. So when he had to go before the City Council to explain his budget, on April 12th, SOS and allies from the AFL-CIO and others packed the room. When it was the mayor's turn to speak, over 100 people stood up on cue, and walked out (VIDEO), leaving a note printed on the backs of their chairs: "NEW TAXES NOW." In the hallway they held their own speakout and rally, and prepared to focus on the people who could make new taxes a reality, the City Council.

As the budget process unfolded, SOS members knew they had to do more than shame the villains – chiefly the Mayor and Councilmember Evans, who had said they would never raise taxes on rich people. They had to thank those councilmembers willing to take political risks to be "safety net superheroes", by agreeing early on to support a tax increase. And so on May 5th they held a "public caping," assembling over 100 advocates along with the Fair Budget Coalition at the front steps of city hall to present embroidered "SOS" superhero capes to the four councilmembers who had agreed to sponsor the tax increase bill, Michael Brown, Jim Graham, Tommy Wells and Harry Thomas, following a week of City Council visits by volunteers encouraging councilmembers to "take the cape." But there were still some fence-sitting councilmembers who were neutral, like Marion Barry, Kwame Brown, Vince Gray and Mary Cheh. They were listening to the largest business groups in the city, like the Chamber of Commerce, who

were telling them wealthy people would flee DC for the suburbs if the tax increase went through. The group sent supporters to all write messages on Vince Gray's Facebook page, since he was the Council Chairman, and to his campaign fundraisers.

The organizers knew they needed to do more. So they went to organize the people the taxes would hit the hardest: Wealthy people! SOS convinced a wealthy hotel owner and a few of his friends to hold an invitation-only "High Income Happy Hour" for progressive wealthy people to discuss how to support the income tax. Slowly, they pulled some wealthy people off the fence, convincing some to reach out privately to councilmembers who had not yet said "yes" to the tax increase. Other wealthy activists went further, signing an open letter in the Washington Post saying, "raise my taxes, don't cut the safety net!" Councilmember Brown said their voices were one of the main reasons he decided to support the tax increase.

Still, as the final budget vote drew closer, several councilmembers up for re-election who had earlier pledged to SOS in private meetings to vote for new taxes began to lose their resolve, and pleaded for the group to wait until after the primary elections to try again. The response of SOS activists was clear: "A recession is not the time to cut further into the safety net, and raising taxes is the only way to stop those cuts. Waiting until the problem gets worse is just irresponsible."

Finally on May 26th, the day of the City Council budget vote, it was clear not enough councilmembers were getting the message, and were willing to continue to let working families bear the brunt of the recession. Hundreds of DC residents had wrapped the building in a giant "safety net", but still, they didn't have enough votes. Several dozen activists, including tenants and working parents who depend on public subsidies, interrupted (VIDEO) the Council's closed-door breakfast meeting — where last-minute deals are often hammered out — personally delivering their message one final time with chants and, in the case of one working parent, dollar bills flung onto the table in a symbolic act of throwing down for the safety net. Chanting "Chairman Gray, Chairman Gray, how many cuts have you made today?", they challenged unswayed councilmembers loyal to Gray like Mary Cheh and Yvette Alexander to be safety net superheroes.

It was not enough. They fell two votes short, 5-7, following a heated debate among councilmembers, with councilmember Barry agreeing to join the original group of four. Still, the councilmembers restored \$17 million in critical safety net funding that the mayor had wanted to cut.

And then, fast forward a year, and there is another financial crisis, with more budget cuts proposed by the mayor, and even more pressure on the City Council to raise taxes. SOS decided to focus on a councilmember where the group had a lot of supportive members, holding house parties, phone-banking events and going door to door to generate phone calls to Mary Cheh in her district, called Ward 3, demanding that she sign-on to the wealthy people tax increase. Ward 3 residents put so much pressure on her, she finally agreed to support the increase! One more councilmember joined in, and SOS won the tax increase! To this day, DC's income tax is considered the fairest in the country, and an additional \$75 million a year go to safety net services.