Power Analysis
Process Guide

May 2011
ABOUT SELP

SELP was created in 1988 by and for independent, nonprofit, public interest, multi-issue environmental organizations to provide assistance with both programmatic and organizational capacity building. By collaborating and drawing upon the collective experience of those most able to affect change on environmental issues at the state level, the network has created the potential to also affect change at the federal level. Through our support and services, we encourage and assist our members to structure both their organizations and programmatic work to create lasting change, and to develop the leaders who will continue the fight for the environment into the future.

Through our core membership services including program/policy development and assistance, organizational development assistance, and annual conference, we provide the analytical and financial resources and the support necessary to help member organizations achieve their goals. In addition, we continue to provide the vital support function for the executive directors and senior policy staff of our member organizations — linking them to colleagues and professionals who share similar experiences and understand the specific challenges involved in leading an environmental non-profit organization.

For more information on this guide or about SELP contact Melissa Gavin at mgavin@selp.org
INTRODUCTION

Advocacy organizations need power to succeed. Power comes from many sources—most notably money, relationships and knowledge. In the policy arena the first two are paramount. Most nonprofits cannot compete on the money side so their power comes from relationships. If an organization has strong relationships with many members in strategic places and can turn them out, they have power. The more power an organization has, the better able they are to influence policy decisions. The goal is to build enough power within your organization that you can win any vote.

Power analysis is a data-driven tool that illustrates where and how much power an organization or a coalition of organizations has to move their agenda forward. It also shows where an organization or coalition does not have power and therefore can inform how and where to strategically build power. It is an objective way to represent this power and can help organizations and coalitions make decisions about how to work together to achieve their goals. An analysis can help an organization decide where to target power building efforts. This in turn will inform which campaigns or issues to pursue, allowing them to choose work that builds power where they need it. Alternatively, it will show areas where the organization could build alliances and partnerships to fill in places where the organization either does not currently have power or does not want to build power. Because the power analysis process is data driven, it can make an organization aware of important shifts and trends that may have not been previously perceived.

This process can be as simple or as complex as an organization chooses to make it. The key is to create a tool that is simple enough to use and be updated, but sophisticated enough that it produces valuable and usable information. Power analysis is most useful when it is updated every two years and maintained over time.
CONDUCTING A POWER ANALYSIS

Step 1: Decide who the analysis is for
Power analysis can be done for a single organization or for a coalition of organizations, but the type and depth of data may vary. For example, if it is being done for a single organization, deciding on key definitions, collecting the data and deciding what to do with the results of the analysis may be relatively easy. If it is being done for a coalition of groups, it will be more important to decide ahead of time how certain key terms will be defined and hence the information groups will have to share. This becomes the basis for the discussion of whether groups are willing to participate. In general, to ensure a smooth and effective project the whole process and expectations must be clear from the beginning. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or contract will help the process. A sample contract can be found in appendix B of this document.

Step 2: Lay the ground work
Power from relationships comes from two sources: grassroots and grasstops support. Grassroots support can be assessed by analyzing and mapping an organization’s individual membership/contributors. Grasstops can be assessed by analyzing and mapping an organization’s access to key influential individuals. A power analysis can be done with only one of these, but analyzing both gives a more robust picture of an organization’s power.

Define key words and concepts
A strong power analysis relies on good data. To acquire good data, some definitional parameters will have to be set:

POWER
Power is best defined as the ability to set and move your agenda forward. However, establishing this or a modified definition explicitly on the out-set will set the stage for the entire analysis.

SWING DISTRICTS
Define what constitutes a swing district to help target effort and resources when forming a plan to move forward. For example, swing districts can be defined as districts that have been decided on by a 4-5 percent margin or less, going back three election cycles.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBER
In most cases, an organization will assess its grassroots support by looking at its list of individual members; however, organizations differ on how they define members. It doesn’t matter what definition is used as long as it is consistent and understood by all participants. Some examples include:
• A donor who has given in any amount in the last year
• A donor who has given at least $50 in the last three years
• An individual who has written a letter or made a phone call to a legislator on behalf of the organization
• An individual who has attended an organizational event in the last year
• An individual who has testified on the organization’s behalf

While members may be defined in an organization’s bylaws, this may not be the best definition for purposes of a power analysis. Remember that good data in equals good data out. An individual who donated $10 four years ago may not be a strong enough supporter to include in a power analysis, even if the organization technically considers the individual to be a member. We recommend using a definition of member that targets the individuals the organization can count on for support.

GRASSTOPS
Grasstops are individuals who have significant influence over one or more decision makers. They can lend more credibility to your cause and substantially increase public awareness and action because of their access, recognition and influence. Defining who a grasstop is before starting the process is critical to making the analysis a useful exercise. Some examples of grasstops include:

• Big business owners
• Local elected officials
• Community leaders
• Political funders
• Personal friends and family of a decision maker

The key to defining a grasstop is to establish a shared understanding of what level of influence a grasstop needs to have, what issue or issues they are interested in and the strength of the relationship between the organization and the grasstop. Again, it’s vital to establish a definition that is explicit and shared among all participating organizations.

Step 3: Gather the Data
Once the definitions for the project are established the next step is to begin assembling the data. If this is a coalition project this would be the place to create a contract or a MOU. A sample contract between two organizations can be found in the appendix of this guide. A good MOU should establish what each party will get out of the process, the timeframe, what each party must furnish to the other and an establishment of what information can be shared with other parties.

If the power analysis is for a single organization, there are fewer hurdles to overcome (these will most likely be internal communication protocol process issues like who has access to what information) and the data collection process can be streamlined. If the power analysis is for a coalition, each group will need to provide the information in the period of time specified by the MOU or contract and key definitions will be have to be agreed upon before the data collection process starts.
Collect the following data:
- Addresses (including zip codes) of members and grasstops
- Legislative leaders for both houses and relevant committee chairs
- Major legislative champions
- Major legislative opponents

**Step 4: Assess the Data**

Maps can be the simplest way to illustrate and analyze power. Create a map that displays the concentration of organizational members and grasstops layered over district maps. Note which districts are represented by major legislative champions and opponents, and which districts are represented by legislative leaders. The results of the analysis may also be displayed using a spreadsheet or in a narrative form.

**Figure 1-1: Sample power analysis map**
Power analysis is the first step to strategically building power. By objectively analyzing the type and location of concentrations of organizational power, you can begin to build power where there are gaps. After analyzing an organization’s or coalition’s power, most organizations will find that they do not have sufficient power in the districts needed to move their agenda forward. How to go about building power will depend on the specific results of the power analysis.

For example, if many organizations are participating in the power analysis, and wish to collectively build their power, they might start with picking an issue they are all working on and testing to see if it resonates with members in districts where they need to build power. Choosing an issue groups are already working on is important, because in most cases they will have funding already in hand to work on it. Groups may want to explore tools like the voter file to help identify individuals to target in particular districts. Completing a power map at the district level will be helpful for this effort. In creating a power map, overlay concentrations of members and grasstops that are interested in a particular issue on a district map. Include major employers, industries, etc. in the map as well, to indicate key points of influence for legislators. The district map will give a clearer picture of where specific grasstops need to be developed on an issue, and where grassroots might lend support to influence a legislator.

The analysis will give groups a good sense of where to focus their organizing efforts and where to build alliances and collaborate with other groups. In some cases it may not make sense for an organization to build power in a particular area for the long term, but by tapping into the power of another organization through collaboration, they can further their policy goals without investing large amounts of resources.
APPENDIX A: DATA FOR POWER ANALYSIS

A power analysis can be as simple or complex as you make it. Below is a list of factors that can be considered during a power analysis. The list can be tailored to any given organization’s needs.

Power analysis factors
- Number of individual and organizational members by legislative district
- Grassroots by legislative district
- Electoral swing districts
- Legislators that are swings (e.g. scorecard ratings 40-60)
- Legislators that are with you (e.g. scorecard ratings 70-100)
- Legislators that are opponents (e.g. scorecard ratings 0-40)
- Leadership districts
- Committee districts
- Key champions and antagonist legislators (who sponsor good/bad bills)
- What media outlets/markets do you have good relationship with (can consistently get good coverage)
- Population growth trends
- Population demographics
- Primary margins over the last three cycles for solid Democrat or Republican districts
- Prominent geographic or cultural regions of the state

Information about Legislators
- Party affiliation
- Years in office
- Committee chairmanships
- Committee assignments
- Leadership positions
- Margin of victory in last 3 cycles
- Scorecard rating
- Areas of interest/expertise – personal and professional
- Major influencers – grassroots
- Known political aspirations
- Term limit
- Club and organization affiliation
- Secondary address

Information about the Governor
- Party affiliation
- Years in office
- Margin of victory in last 3 cycles
- Areas of interest/expertise – personal and professional
- Major influencers – grassroots
- Known political aspirations
- Term limit
- Secondary address
- Club and organization affiliation
Information about legislative districts
- Swing meter (e.g. strong democrat, lean democrat, swing, lean republican, strong republican)
- Number of organizational members
- Number of active members
- Number of grasstops
- Major cities
- Major employers
- Major industries
- Prominent issues
- Prominent attributes e.g. parks, great lakes, etc
- Demographics
- Population trends
ABC Environmental Advocacy Organization Power Analysis
& Use Agreement

This power analysis agreement (“Agreement”) is between the ABC Environmental Advocacy Organization (ABC) and ______________________ (“Participating Group”).

ABC is conducting a Power Analysis Project (“Project”). The purpose of this Project is to help ABC’s members evaluate their collective power so that participating organizations may engage in advocacy more effectively and build organizational capacity. As part of this Project, participating organizations will submit membership lists for input into a state-wide power map in order to establish the collective level of influence of ABC and participating groups, to further organizational development, conduct more effective advocacy for ABC and participating groups, and encourage increased civic engagement and voting participation by members of participating organizations.

Power Analysis Process. Participating Group agrees to make its membership list (“Membership List”) available to ABC in the specified format for the purpose of the Project.

This information will include:

- Addresses (including zip codes) of individual members or contributors
- Addresses of Grasstops (individual with significant influence with one or more decision makers)

After the mapping process is complete, Participating Group will receive an electronic copy of its own mapped list back. After the mapping, Participating Group will also receive a group training session on how Participating Group can utilize the information to enhance its programs and an analysis of the implications of the analysis for the environmental movement of the state as a whole.

Data Storage & Security. ABC agrees that all lists and working files utilized and created as part of the Project will be stored on a secure computer system, which is password-protected and accessible only by the ABC staff, agents and computer contractors hired for the Project.

Use of Participating Group’s List. ABC agrees that it shall not use Participating Group lists to induce or encourage violations of law or public policy, to cause any private inurement or improper private benefit to occur, nor to take any other action inconsistent with the Internal Revenue Code.

Participating Group grants permission to ABC to use its list for the following purpose ONLY:

(a) ABC’s Power Analysis Project

Ownership of Lists. Participating Group and ABC acknowledge that the Participating Group’s Membership List is confidential and constitute valuable assets. Participating Group hereby grants to ABC the right to use its Membership List on a strictly confidential basis, for the limited purpose which is stipulated in this Agreement. The parties acknowledge and agree that the Participating Group is and shall remain the sole and exclusive owner of its Membership List. ABC shall not sell, rent, or use Participating Groups list for any purpose, internal or otherwise, than the Power Analysis Project.
Indemnification. The Participating Group hereby irrevocably and unconditionally agrees, to the fullest extent permitted by law, to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless ABC, its officers, directors, employees, and agents, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses and expenses (including reasonable attorneys’ fees), directly or indirectly, arising from or in connection with any act or omission of the Participating Group, its officers, directors, employees, or agents, in carrying out the use(s) to be supported by the information or services provided under this Agreement, except to the extent that such claims, liabilities, losses or expenses were caused by the negligence of ABC, its officers, directors, employees or agents.

ABC hereby irrevocably and unconditionally agrees, to the fullest extent permitted by law, to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless Participating Group, its officers, directors, employees, and agents, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses and expenses (including reasonable attorneys’ fees), directly or indirectly, arising from or in connection with any act or omission of ABC, its officers, directors, employees, or agents, in carrying out the Project or services provided under this Agreement, except to the extent that such claims, liabilities, losses or expenses were caused by the negligence of Participating Group, its officers, directors, employees or agents.

Contact. In order to maintain effective communications, Participating Group agrees to appoint the following individual(s) as contact(s) for the Project: _____________________________. Said contact(s) will be empowered to represent the organization to ABC.

Duties will include:
(1) Ensuring group participation at training(s)
(2) Ensuring data quality and transfer in a timely manner to ABC.

Entire Agreement. This Agreement supersedes any prior oral or written understandings or communications between the parties and constitutes the entire agreement of the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof. This Agreement may not be amended or modified except in a written addendum signed by both parties hereto.

Governing Law. The Agreement shall be construed and interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois.

Assignment. This Agreement is not assignable by either party.

Effective Date & Termination. This Agreement shall be in effect starting on the later of the two dates set forth below and ending upon ______________, 2011. This Agreement may be terminated by either party at any time, upon provision of thirty (30) days' notice in writing to the other party.

Date: ___________________ Date: ___________________

By:_________________________ By:_________________________

Participating group ABC Environmental Advocacy Organization