

Wellstone

Building Your Power: Organizing 101

To fight back against the radical right we have to recognize, utilize and integrate three critical components: community organizing, electoral politics and public policy. This is how we build our power. Wellstone Action, an organization committed to working with groups nationwide to achieve progressive change, calls this approach the **Wellstone Triangle**:



All three of these components are necessary for building power in our communities. What's more, they are connected because each section impacts the others. Since this approach is so critical to achieving change, this guide addresses all three components in depth. To get you started, let's review each area – community organizing, electoral politics and public policy – to establish what they mean and their impact.

Community Organizing

Organizing means building and growing meaningful relationships with people in our communities based on shared values and common concerns. By developing these local relationships, you build a constituency that is organized and able to demand change by electing new leaders and holding them accountable.

Electoral Politics

Politics is about determining who makes decisions and holding them responsible for their actions or, at times, their inaction. Electoral politics is a key way to compete for power in a democracy. But often people involved in politics focus so much on winning elections they work only with communities and individuals if it gets them closer to victory. This attitude results in elected officials and political parties without a base of community organizations to ground them with local support. It also creates emerging leaders who may abandon established leaders and parties because they have been ignored or taken for granted. In other words: it's everyone for themselves. Electoral politics by nature is short-term and not sustainable for long-term community growth without effective community organizing and progressive public policies.

Progressive Public Policy

Policy is our vision. It is a clear agenda for a better world. Policy is why communities organize around issues they care about and candidates run for public office: they all want power to achieve their vision.

Ultimately, it's all connected: public policy without community organizing and electoral politics is a set of ideas, isolated from any ability to be enacted. Community organizing absent policy is directionless, and organizing without electoral politics cedes one of the most important arenas of power to other leaders. Electoral politics without a clear agenda for the future quickly becomes a cynical competition that's focused only on winning, and politics without community organizing lacks accountability and focus.

At the epicenter of these three components is leadership. That's you. By educating, organizing and mobilizing other young people in Texas, you are becoming a leader in your community. And TFNEF has all the tools, tips, and tricks to guide you along the way.

Editor's note: we wrote this resource in partnership with Texas Freedom Network Education Fund as part of our work to develop a Civic Engagement Manual.

