

# UNDERSTANDING ELECTIONS & CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

## Grassroots Organizing For Civic Engagement

Presenter: Buffy Wicks, Campaign Consultant and Grassroots Organizer

### Lesson Description

This lesson looks at three key elements of any grassroots campaign - leadership, capacity building, and putting the plan into action. Find out what principles are required in a leader, how to build a list of supporters and why it's important, and how to spur people to take action for change.

### Lesson Overview

1. How grassroots organizing applies to an electoral campaign
2. How grassroots organizing can be used for social movements
3. Using social media in grassroots organizing

### Discussion Questions

1. Think about the reasons people organize grassroots campaigns. What are the kinds of issues that inspire a collection of people to organize around a single idea or purpose? What issues are facing your community that could be helped by a grassroots campaign?
2. Some historical examples of grassroots social campaigns have been the American Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr, the Kenyan Green Belt Movement led by Wangari Maathai, and the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. Think about the kind of leadership required to lead a peaceful and positive grassroots campaign - big or small, national or local. What are the characteristics needed in a grassroots leader that could address some of the issues you noted in discussion question #1.
3. In the video, Buffy Wicks talks about using short emotional messages to get the word out on a campaign. Think about what kinds of messages or communications can get you to take action. What elements resonate with you? How would you craft a message for different groups of people around different issues? For example, what types of messages would you craft for parents with young children in school to get them to the polls on Election Day? How can your message be factually convincing and demonstrate an imperative for action?

### Development Actions

1. Outline the specific steps needed to launch a grassroots campaign on a topic you care about in your community. Think about how you would identify leaders, who your initial supporters would be and how you could build capacity, and how you would use social media to create enough support to spur positive change.
2. Identify an issue for which you want to make a positive change. Create a message for social media that will spur community members to join your cause. Try and prototype your idea as much as possible, even if just on paper. Present your idea to people who you would want to support your idea for feedback.

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**About the presenter:** **Buffy Wicks** is an expert in building and running local and national grassroots, community-based campaigns. She is currently a Fellow at the Institute of Politics and Public Policy at Georgetown University. She advises private sector and political clients, utilizing innovative communication and engagement tactics to shape public opinion and drive consumer behavior. Wicks worked on President Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns. Wicks previously worked in the labor movement, fighting for better health care and wages for disenfranchised workers, and on Capitol Hill. She was a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress focusing on public policies affecting women and families. She is originally from California and graduated with a double major in political science and history from the University of Washington.

