

Organizing to Win:

Housing Advocacy
and Getting to Yes!

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**I
WANT
POWER**

Organizing Lessons

- **Avoid polarizing**, especially when you have less power
- **Be specific about what you want**
- **Whoever sets the agenda has more power**
- **Don't argue on principles** or "It's just not fair" positions
- **Know your audience** and what they want
- **Don't confuse power with force**

Prepare for negotiations

- **Set the stage**
 - How many people to involve and in what venue
- **Choose approach**
 - What approach do you want to take?
- **Preparation**
 - What motivates your group (internal analysis) and what motivates the other group (external)
- **Terms**
 - Know specific terms you will accept

Define a Winnable Issue

- Difference between a **problem** (“There’s not enough housing for poor people”) and an **issue** (“We need inclusionary zoning to facilitate affordable housing development in town”)
- Need to organize around a **clearly defined** and **winnable** issue

“I don’t have time to organize!”

- You don’t have time NOT to organize
- Develops advocates throughout community
- Implements policy changes to support work
- Complements organizational work
- Clears the path to get things done
- Housing Commission – an organizing win – now supports CAHMCO’s work

How to Run a Meeting

- Have a focus, mission
- Stay focused
- Limit time (1-1/2 hour maximum)
- Have an agenda and follow it
- Take ACTION every meeting
- Assign next steps; follow-up on completion
- Keep momentum going

Pitch the vision, not numbers

- Pitch **focused on themes and visions**
- **People are wooed by message, not numbers**
 - Obama doesn't dwell on "45% of families below 80% of AMI need..." He tells the story of ONE woman living without health insurance
- **Translate data to people**
 - How much rent can the woman who cuts your hair afford? A local police officer? School teacher?
- **Have numbers to back up pitch**

Good Pitch/Bad Pitch

- **Bad pitch**
 - 45% of the people below 80% of AMI pay more than 50% toward their rent
- **Good pitch**
 - A starting teacher in McHenry County can afford to pay \$500 for rent. Market rents for a 2-bedroom apartment in McHenry County start at \$900.

Good Pitch/Bad Pitch

- **Bad Pitch**
 - 30% of families in McHenry County pay more than 50% of their income toward house payments
- **Good Pitch**
 - 1 in 3 families are house burdened

McHenry County Housing Commission

1. Got numbers to back up need (housing study)
2. Got key stakeholder and staff buy-in
3. Took our show on the road: Pitched it across the County to municipalities, townships, business leaders
4. Pitched it in terms stakeholders would buy: transportation, education, economy, jobs. . . .

Housing Commission successes

- **Partnered, not polarized**
- **Clear focus** with model bylaws, ordinances
- **Set the agenda**, but let County own it once momentum built
- **Focused on outcomes key stakeholders cared about**
