

Membership Models & Member Engagement

Webinar 1: Base Building & Multi-Entity Membership Models

WATCH RECORDING

Presenter: [Jay Carmona](#),
Sematonic Strategies

This introductory webinar helps build a foundation of understanding of the key questions and common model for base-building in the multi-legal entity context.

Webinar 3: Using Your 501(C)(4) to Engage Your Membership

WATCH RECORDING

Presenter: [Nijmie Dzurinko](#),
Put People First PA

This webinar discusses the challenges and successes of engaging members across legal entities.



DOWNLOAD WEBINAR RESOURCE:

Definitions of Key Terms on Membership and Base Building

Key Questions To Bring Back To Your Organization:

1. Do we understand the type of power we need to have to win?

One goal of organizing is winning victories with and for your community. Consider working with your staff to assess the type of power and influence that will most help your community win critical policy battles (i.e., power mapping). Ask your team: What levers of power do we need to pull to achieve our theory of change? What types of power and influence would we need to wield to win our key goals and achieve our mission for our community? Who do we most need to influence? How can we most effectively direct our people and money to impact those people we most need to influence? Identifying the type of power you need to have to win can help determine what types of strategies to organize around.

2. Do we understand which organizing strategies will help us pull the most critical levers of power?

Once we know the types of power you need to have to win, you can be more strategic about how you engage members to exert their power and influence. Ask your team: What organizing strategies should each of our organizations be using (organizing and mobilizing) to pull the most impactful levers of power? Is our organization's membership model designed to support the strategies most

likely to achieve our goals? Are we organizing in the right geographic locations to exert influence given our policy objectives? How are members involved in setting priorities? How can we center members in our work more directly? Are our members and community playing a critical role in designing our strategic priorities? If not, what would it look like to be more specific and targeted about the ways in which we design our organizing strategies and campaigns?

3. Do we have the right legal structures to engage in the organizing strategies that we want to use to build power?

The legal structures that you use to conduct your work and organize supporters matters. Ask your team: Given the strategies we believe are most likely to help us build power, do we have the right legal entities to execute those strategies? Are we clear about how we want to move members through a journey of engagement *across* our legal entities? Are the limitations imposed on our work by the legal structures we have limiting our ability to achieve change?

4. Does our family of organizations consistently define who members are?

Clarity and shared understanding of the different ways your organization engages your community is important. Ask your team: Are our organizations clear and consistent about how we define the different groups of people whom our organization touches? Do we make useful distinctions between levels of engagement? Do we have a clear understanding of who our members and leaders are (our most highly engaged leaders) versus our supporters (the many who support our work in some form) versus the community we mobilize (the broader group that we need to win key battles or need to turn out to vote in elections)? Would it help us prioritize our outreach if we distinguished between different levels of supporters and had more clarity about when each entity engages each type of supporters?

5. Are we collecting, analyzing, and sharing the data that helps us build and direct people power?

Ask your team the following questions: Does our organization effectively collect, analyze, and share data about our supporters/members across legal entities? What data do we need to collect to improve our understanding of our community and/or the impact of our organizing?

Tips to Keep in Mind in Your Work:

1. Clarify the strategies each legal entity will use when organizing members.

It is important for multi-entity organizations to achieve strategic clarity about which legal entities will lead certain strategies. Leadership, staff, and members all need to understand how the ladder of engagement works across the legal entities you use to build power.

2. Create shared definitions and language.

Clear and consistent organizational language and definitions are always important—but they are especially important when power-building work expands across legal entities. Ensuring that your family of organizations has clear written definitions that distinguish between different levels of community engagement (i.e., supporter, member, base) will help your staff align on the most effective strategies to organize and/or mobilize in a given campaign, and will increase your impact. *See our definition sheet below.*

3. Joint membership is a best practice.

If you have multiple legal entities, consider bringing all your members in through your 501(c)(4) and/or signing them up as joint members of both organizations from the outset. 501(c)(4) and/or joint membership helps to house data under your 501(c)(4) for maximum flexibility and allows dues to generate unrestricted funds for your 501(c)(4) work.

4. Center your community in your organizational structures and strategies.

Your legitimacy as an organization comes from your members and the people power you can demonstrate. When you are designing your membership and/or organizing model, be specific and clear about the role members play in decision making, leadership, and strategy in your organization. Consider how your organization centers and grows the leadership of your community and how those most impacted by injustice are leading the fight for change, your campaigns, and your organizational strategy.



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