



Welcome to the second KFTC chapter building armchair seminar. We are going to wait just a couple of minutes for everyone to join the webinar and also dial-in and then we will get started.

First I would like to introduce myself, I am Carissa Lenfert – I am a staffperson with KFTC– I work with the Madison County KFTC chapter and also am the Deputy Organizing Director for Chapter Development and work out of our Berea office.

## Welcome & Review Agenda



- Welcome & Introductions. (7:30 to 7:35 p.m.)
- What is Grassroots Organizing (7:35 to 7:40)
  - How is it different from direct-service and advocacy
- Understanding Grassroots Power (7:40 to 7:45)
  - How do we build it
  - How do we use it
- Identifying problems and issues (7:45 to 8:05 p.m.)
  - What are they?
  - When are they the same, when are they different?
  - Characteristics of good issues
- Issue Identification Exercise (8:05 to 8:30 p.m.)
  - Discuss four example issue scenarios
  - Questions & Discussion
- Adjourn (8:30 p.m.)

Welcome everyone. Tonight another piece in our chapter development armchair seminar series designed to help give new and existing KFTC leaders in our chapters the tools needed to strengthen our work in chapters. Tonight's webinar will focus on selecting and developing good local issue campaigns. We will start out by understanding a bit more about grassroots organizing and grassroots power, before then diving into selecting a good local issue. We will spend some time defining what a problem is and what an issue is – how they are different, how a problem can turn into an issue, and characteristics of good local issues.

We will then put that knowledge to work by spending a chunk of time reviewing a couple of examples of local issues and discussing the pros and cons of each and ranking them.

And then we will have a short bit of time at the end for questions and discussion. If there are more questions than we have time for, I am happy to talk one on one to discuss all of this information more.

Let's first start with introductions to learn who all is on the call and where everyone is from. Let's go around and say our name, where we live, and if we are a member of one of KFTC's chapters.



In order to understand how to select a good local issue – we need to first get a good understanding of what grassroots organizing is. Grassroots organizing is the fundamental way that KFTC works for change. There are many ways to work for change. In order to understand what community organizing is, it can be helpful to understand how it is different from other approaches we are familiar with, including service and advocacy.

Of these three ways to work for change, there is no right or wrong strategy. It is just helpful to understand what we mean by each and understanding the important role that grassroots organizing plays and shouldn't be overlooked.

## Working for change: Service & Advocacy



### Service

- People helping others
- Meeting the immediate needs of others
- Addresses problems, not causes
- Examples of service:
  - Homeless shelters
  - Food banks
  - Tutoring

### Advocacy

- People, such as experts, lawyers or lobbyists, helping others by speaking for them.
- Depends on a few “credible” people.
- Doesn’t empower people who are directly affected by the problem.
- Decision-making in the hands of the experts.
- Examples:
  - Legal Aid, Children’s Defense Fund

Here are some of the characteristics of direct-service and advocacy.

### *Review slide*

Is there anything anyone would add to these criteria? Can you think of other examples of direct-service or advocacy?

## Working for change: Grassroots Organizing



- People working together to achieve a common goal.
- Bottom-up, not top down.
- People building their own power.
- Challenges and changes power relationships.
- Empowers people who are not usually involved.
- Decision-making in the hands of people directly affected.

Examples: KFTC, United Farm Workers

Community organizing is the process of building power through involving a constituency in identifying problems they share and the solutions to those problems that they desire; identifying the people and structures that can make those solutions possible; enlisting those targets in the effort through negotiation and using confrontation and pressure when needed; and building an institution that is democratically controlled by that constituency that can develop the capacity to take on further problems and that embodies the will and the power of that constituency.

- All three of these approaches to change, direct-service, advocacy, and organizing are essential.
- We wouldn't want to live in a world without any of these approaches.
- Too often we rely only on service and advocacy and don't build or support organizations that empower people who are directly affected by injustice.

## What is power?



- The ability to get things done,
- The ability to get what you want,
- The ability to make – or prevent – change,
- The ability to make your message heard,
- The ability to shape what people believe and what they think is possible.



We often think about power as a bad thing. But it isn't necessarily bad. And successful grassroots organizing campaigns relying heavily on building and using power. Power is really just the ability to get things done and expand what people believe is possible. Understanding power – what it is, how we can build power through grassroots organizing, and how we can use it is essential in grassroots organizing and shapes our ability to win on the issues we care about!

## Building and Using Power



### Ways we build power

- Grow our numbers by gaining more members
- Grow our resources by fundraising
- Develop new leaders
- Build our knowledge
- Develop relationships

### Ways we use power

- Lobby for positive legislation
- Nonviolent direct action and protests
- Meet with public officials and decision-makers
- Force public officials to enforce the laws against companies/people hurting our communities.

There are lots of ways we build and use power in KFTC through grassroots organizing. What do we think of the ones listed here? Can we think of others?

These are all very important to winning on issues we care about. We need to always be building power, so that we can use it to win. Every issue we select to work on, we should think about how it can be used to build our power. If working on an issue won't allow us to build our power in any way, we should examine if that is really the best issue to work on. In grassroots organizing, we should never be stagnate in terms of building power – we should also be growing, working towards something.

Are there any questions or other thoughts to building and using power in grassroots organizing?

## Problems & Issues



### Problems

Problems can be international, national, local or even personal. They can be anything that is undesirable.

- Neighborhood crime
- Hunger in Africa
- Cutbacks in Social Security
- Mr. Jones's children don't clean their rooms
- Bad roads
- Unsafe school buses
- The speed limit on Main St. is too high
- Nuclear weapons

### Issues

- Issues are a problem that a group can work on and has a specific solution.
- Example: Vacant housing in a neighborhood is a problem. The abandoned house at 205 Cherry St. we want torn down is an issue.



*KFTC members testing water pollution levels.*

Problems can be lots of thing. It is really anything that is undesirable. Review the problems listed on the slide.

Ask the group to name some other problems. Ask the participants to think of various types of problems, ranging from specific personal problems and local community problems to national and international problems.

Looking at this list, what could be other definitions of a problem? Example definitions are, "A problem is something that lowers the quality of people's lives."

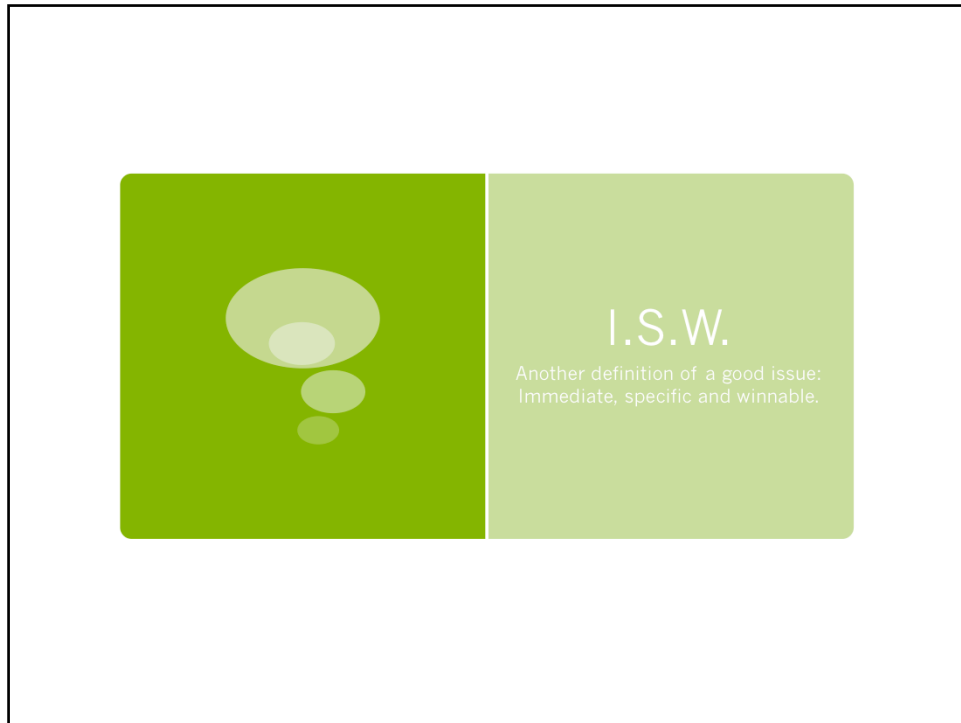
There is a difference between problems and issues and that not all problems make good issues.

Issues are things that groups can work on (has a solution, is "winnable")

Groups can turn problems into issues

A problem becomes an issue when a group calls attention to it and proposes a solution

An issue is a problem which a group can work on and get results.



Here is another definition of a good local issue.

Immediate, means in terms of either the benefit folks would get from victory or, the harm they would suffer from inaction. 'You don't have the right to vote' is a lot more immediate than "would you like to be part of a community planning process'.

Specific refers to both the problem and its solution. Vacant buildings are a problem. That building that we want torn down by the end of the month is an issue.

Winnable. There needs to be a simple solution that can be achieved. This can be hard. It is a balancing act to factor in on all of these components and determine whether it's worth starting out on. Some factors to consider include: who is effected by the problem, and can I get to them? How much does the problem hurt them, and how hard are they likely to fight? Are they able to escape easily, or is standing and fighting their only option? What resources are we likely to need and can we get them? On the other side, who benefited from the problem the way things are, and how much? Could they easily give us what we want, or would it cost them, and how much? Who else is peripherally hurt - or helped - by the way things are? How would the solution we seek change this equation? Could we go after something that would help us just as much, but get us more friends? In the end, all we can do is step out. The more we've tried to peer ahead, the less likely we are to stumble.

## Characteristics of a good issue:



- Winnable
- Builds the organization
- Develops leaders
- Simple, easy to explain
- Clear target
- Unites people
- Strongly felt
- Affects a lot of people
- Involves a lot of people
- Specific
- Serves organization's broader goals
- Makes a difference
- Draws attention
- Brings in new members
- Strengthens power base
- Not divisive within the group
- Good timing
- Has a clear solution

Here is a list of characteristics that make an issue into a good issue

The facilitator should point out that a good issue does not have to meet all of the criteria, but they are guidelines for choosing. Also, some characteristics are more important than others. Ask participants which characteristics they feel are most important.

The importance of issues being winnable and building the organization should be emphasized during this discussion.

## Using local issues to build power over time



Fight, Win, Fight, Win, Fight, Lose, Fight Harder



- You can use local issue campaigns to build the organization, build your power, and take on more challenges as you grow!
- It is okay to lose sometimes. Just remember what you've gained even when you've "lost."

Community organizing is a process of people working together and being effective. It is a dynamic process, that requires constant attention and effort. It is impossible to use community organizing to get to a certain point and stop, or to build a community organization up and then stop reaching out for new folks and taking on new issues. Some people will want to take on big issues, and some will identify more achievable goals. You may want to a more winnable project so that the group can get stronger together. Although simpler, lower risk issues could be addressed quickly and behind the scenes, it is especially important that they be handled the same way the big ones would. For example, even if you know that the city will put up a stop sign upon request, you should still hold a press conference on the street corner and a march to city hall to demand it, then negotiate with the traffic engineer over which tree it will be posted on. A musical mom I know tells her children that 'practice makes PERMANENT, GOOD practice makes perfect!' If people in the early stages of a group learn that all it takes is a phone call to get things done, they'll look to the same strategy next time. Community organizing is a process of teaching people to work together, and how to be effective.

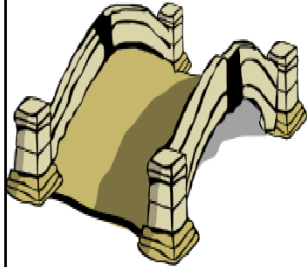
## Issue Identification Exercise

- Pretend that you are a member of a community group in another county that has just won an important victory on an issue you have worked on for over a year. Now, instead of just letting your group fade away, you want to use your new power by taking on a new issue. Consider each of the next four problems and then decide which ones would make good issues for your group to work on.



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## Issue: Overweight trucks on bridge



- A big out-of-state coal company is using a bridge on one of the main roads in your county to haul coal. The trucks are illegally overloaded and the bridge is beginning to crack. Everyone is scared that the bridge is going to collapse, especially since the school crosses it each day.

The county government has the power to put weight limits on the bridge and the sheriff could fine overloaded trucks using the bridge. Some county officials are aware of the problem but they are dragging their feet and not taking any action.

- After doing some research, you recently found out that the company has made large contributions to most of the officials' campaigns. There are a lot of concerned parents who want to do something about the problem before an accident occurs.

*Read through the slide together and then discuss.* What do we think about this local issue? What characteristics make it a good issue? What characteristics make it not a good issue?

Good characteristics: There is a specific solution, clear targets, immediate need/problem, many people are concerned about it, it could be winnable, it is specific and easy to understand, could bring in new members, makes a difference, develops leaders (if done well).

Not good characteristics: Could be divisive?

### Issue: Political patronage



- For many years the county government has done road maintenance and improvement for political favors. They have done private work for their friends and have refused to help their political rivals.
- Members of the group regard this as normal since it has always been done this way and many members have gotten favors themselves. Some of your members are related to the county government officials.
- Recently, you became aware of two private driveways illegally blacktopped with county money. They just happened to belong to a couple hard-working members of your group.

What do we think about this local issue? What characteristics make it a good issue?  
What characteristics make it not a good issue?

Good characteristics: It has a specific solution, the money could be used for good things in the county that could potentially bring more people into the group?

Bad characteristics: Devisive in the group, how many in the group see this as a problem?

### Issue: High unemployment



- Your county has a very high unemployment rate; No businesses in the county are hiring. In fact, it appears that two businesses will be laying off several more workers in the coming months.
- Your county needs some new industry but you haven't heard of any businesses interested in locating there. One of the problems is that no one is promoting the attractive features of you county to outside businesses.
- Very few unemployed people in the county have joined your group but they need any help they can get.

What do we think about this local issue? What characteristics make it a good issue?  
What characteristics make it not a good issue?

Good characteristics: You see a solution – someone to promote the county to outside businesses.

Bad characteristics: Would need to go out and talk to unemployed people first to learn what sort of solutions they want and if they would be a part of this kind of issue work. The solution is less specific than is ideal (how do you measure success?)

### Issue: Trash in the county

- One of the things that frustrates you most about your community is the trash in the creeks and along the roadways.
- Your county provides a garbage pickup service but it is barely effective because it doesn't cover most of the county.
- Many of your neighbors want the service extended to their areas.



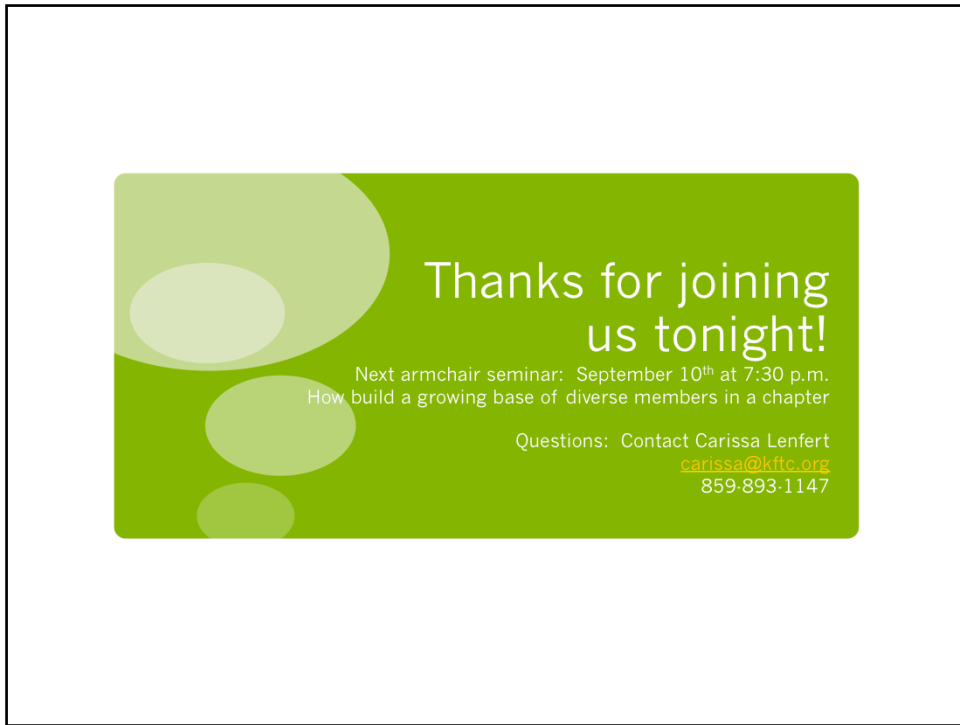
What do we think about this local issue? What characteristics make it a good issue? What characteristics make it not a good issue?

Good characteristics: Sounds like many people may be interested in working on it. Expanding trash pickup is a winnable solution if that is what the group wants to work on and the target would be clear (county government).

Bad characteristics: Not sure if expanding trash pickup will help with the littering in the creeks and along the roadways. It may, but it also may not. Does it build the organization?



Any questions? Please contact KFTC staffperson Carissa Lenfert at 859-893-1147 or [carissa@kftc.org](mailto:carissa@kftc.org).



Thanks for joining me tonight on the chapter building armchair seminar. I hope you found it helpful. If you have any questions about any of this or want to discuss it further, don't hesitate to contact me. The next armchair seminar is scheduled for September 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. and will focus on planning a successful chapter fundraising event.

I am about to flip to the final slide which will let you leave feedback about this webinar – so you can let us know what you found helpful, and areas that we can continue to improve as we offer these training webinars in the future.