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| **Working Within an Issue Ecosystem** |

***What is an Issue Ecosystem?***

An issue ecosystem is the environment surrounding a decision maker. The goal of an issue ecosystem is to create the conditions for decision makers to take action on the issue you care about.

Think about a fruit tree: the tree needs a lot of different conditions to line up for it to grow and produce fruit. It needs to be planted in an area with the right amount of sunlight, water, and nutrients in the soil—and it needs all of these things to work in tandem with one another. Even if the fruit tree receives plenty of water, but it’s planted in the wrong soil and receives little sunlight, it will not grow.

Just like a fruit tree will not grow without the right combination of sun, soil, and water, a decision maker will not take action on the problem you care about without the right combination of tactics, voices, and messages. Here’s why:

* **A variety of tactics**: Using multiple tactics—press, digital, and in-person—ensures that your message is heard by the decision maker and shows him or her that people who care about your issue are everywhere. Tactics that are strategically spaced on a calendar keep the issue popping on the decision maker’s radar.
* **A variety of voices:** Multiple groups working on an issue shows more support for that issue and each organization contributes its unique voice to the conversation on the issue.
* **A message that appeals to the target’s motivations:**All decision makers are motivated by something. It is the job of you and your partner organizations to figure out what that motivation is and how to appeal to it.

Decision makers are surrounded by many issue ecosystems every day. If you and your partner organizations are not part of an issue ecosystem around a decision maker, the opposition is filling that space with their message or the issue is not on the target’s radar.

***Building Partnerships***

Another important aspect of an issue ecosystem is your ability to successfully and effectively work with coalition partners. In order to establish meaningful partnerships, you should identify your own strengths, and then combine those strengths with the strengths of your partner organizations.

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| **Observed Problem with Organizing Strategy** | **Solution** |
| ***The issue did not have enough steam:***   * The state DREAM Act was a more urgent issue in the eyes of key decision makers and activists and organizations who opted to rally around this issue instead of the raising the minimum wage campaign. * Outside the House of Representatives, the DREAM Act had strong prospects of passing in the Senate and of being signed by the Governor after that. The minimum wage bill, by comparison, faced an uphill battle in both the House and Senate, and the Governor’s stance on the issue was not clear. | **Choose your issue carefully and change takes time:**  Organizing does not happen in a vacuum. While there are issues that you and others might be passionate about, there are others that might take priority at a given moment. This does not mean you stopped organizing around your cause. Instead, it means that you organize strategically, considering the broad political environment and mood.  The more you fight for your issue, and the longer you expose your message, the more likely you will win on the issue. But that win takes time, as the political mood environment and mood changes.  *In Harmonia, the DREAM Act greatly overshadowed the minimum wage bill as a key issue of the moment.* |
| ***No clear strategy or effective tactics:***   * The Minimum Wage Campaign claimed the bill had overwhelming support from all Harmonians, but their tactics didn’t show this. * The press conference organized by the Minimum Wage Campaign was poorly attended, leading the newspaper to report attendance as “abysmal” and to doubt the “overwhelming support” the group claimed. * The Harmonia Economic Policy Forum hosted a panel discussion in support of the resolution. But as a Tweet showed, the panelists represented only the academic community. There was no presence from business owners or minimum wage workers themselves, which did not prove that the issue had overwhelming support among all Harmonians. * Hundreds of people came to a rally in support of the DREAM Act, and only six members of the Minimum Wage Campaign were reported present. Their strategy of six people blocking the doors to the capitol did not support their message of overwhelming support. | **Tactics must validate the strategy:**  It takes a variety of tactics to create an effective issue ecosystem. That is, we cannot count on just one method of communicating with a decision maker to make the change we want to see. We need a combination of tactics—in the press, online, and in person—and a staggered calendar to keep our issue on a decision maker’s radar.  However, and equally important, your tactics and strategy must walk together to reinforce the message. In other words, the tactics that you select must support your strategy, which achieves your goal.  *In Harmonia, the Minimum Wage Campaign failed to use their tactics as evidence of their messaging strategy.* |

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| **Observed Problem with Organizing Strategy** | | **Solution** | |
| ***Motivations of key decision makers:***   * Minimum Wage Campaign organizers did not target the motivations of each of the key decision makers – their messages appealed to their own motivations. * The statements following the vote show that, while some key decision makers would have liked to support the issue, they were not totally aware of either the support for the issue or the urgency for the issue among Harmonians. | | ***Targeting the motivations of key decision makers:***  Like all people, decision makers have certain motivations that influence the decisions they make. The best chance for a decision maker to take action on the problem we want to solve is for our issue advocacy work to appeal to his or her motivations. There are several possible motivations a decision maker could have—here are just a few: Career and legacy, validation, and reputation.  *In Harmonia, the minimum wage organizers failed to target each decision maker based on their motivations. In fact, at times their messaging was completely mismatched with the motivations of the decision maker, as in the case of Rep. Magaña.* | |
| ***No collaboration or coordination:***   * There were two main groups organizing around raising the minimum wage. However, as demonstrated by their various events (some held at the same time) there was no clear collaboration among the groups. * Student groups such as Harmonians for Opportunity may be supporters of raising the minimum wage. However, they were too busy with the DREAM Act to collaborate with the minimum wage groups. | | **Stronger Together:**  The goal of working with partner organizations is using each other’s complementary strengths to make progress on an issue. Building relationships with partner organizations and coalitions enables you to work effectively within an issue ecosystem and make the most of the strengths you have.  *In Harmonia, there were multiple groups working on the minimum wage issue. However, they failed to lean on each other’s strengths and coordinate together.* | |
| ***Tactics did not reinforce each other:***   * While the Minimum Wage group organized a movie showing one night, and a rally a few days later, they did not use the first event to organize for the rally. As a result, the rally was poorly attended. * The action of blocking the Capitol door did not influence key decision makers, nor lead to further organizing. Instead, it soured the issue for some Representatives. | | **Organizing = One tactic leads to the other:**  If you organize a meeting or an event and there is not a clear follow-up activity, then you failed to organize. When organizing around an issue, make sure to plan tactics that help you build towards the next action.  *The Minimum Wage Campaign did not use the movie showing to recruit people to attend the press rally. The Harmonia Immigrant Rights Coalition, on the other hand, used their sign-making party to recruit for the DREAM Act rally.* | |