

Base Power

Learning Community



Definitions

This is a living document, representing the ongoing understanding and experiences of the Base Power Learning Community. Last updated 2/9/2022.

501(c)3 - A nonprofit that is prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elected public office.

- Non-partisan voter education allowed
- Non-partisan voter registration allowed
- Lobbying limited

501(c)4 - A social welfare organization that may pursue educational, lobbying, and some limited political activities as a secondary activity.

- Unlimited amount of lobbying allowed
- Work on passage or defeat of ballot measures
- Partisan political activity allowed to an extent (i.e. informal rule of thumb = less than 55% or 60%)

Advocacy - Sustained actions taken to achieve policy wins or systems change.

- Education of the public
- (c)3 example: Pressuring a legislator in their capacity as legislator to vote for or against a particular policy
- (c)4 example: Connect pressure of that legislator to their candidacy in an election (tie policy position to an endorsement or recommendation to vote for or against a candidate)

**Via Advocacy That Builds Power, Center for Evaluation Innovation*

Formal Legal Membership - We use the term “formal” members for organizations that meet the IRS definition of membership organization. To meet that definition, the organization’s bylaws must list out members’ powers and rights to govern and influence the organization. Members often have the ability to select board members, sit on the board, and/or may have control over direction of the organization. Bylaws may establish different categories of membership with differing rights and powers.

**Thanks to Bolder Advocacy for this definition*

Informal Membership - Most organizations have “informal” membership programs, meaning the organization does not design its membership program to meet the legal IRS definition of a “membership” organization - rather, it has its own process for defining membership in its organization or family of organizations. In the progressive movement this is often what organizations mean when they say they are membership organizations.

Member - The definition and terms of membership varies greatly and many organizations do not have clear definitions of membership. However, we define members as the people you hold yourself accountable to and are developing as leaders. It is those who have opted into a more formal relationship with your organization. Your members should be your leaders and can be referred to as your “deep base.”

Definitions (Cont'd)

Base – Your base is the broader community you represent and/or seek to engage and need to win. It is often part of the group of people who stand to benefit from your goals and whom you seek to both organize and mobilize.

- **Mass Base:** Your mass base is often your mobilization target (Who do you need to get to 50 + 1). They are the people you need to mobilize to win, and are usually a broader constituency than just your supporters or members (e.g. Latinx and Black women in a certain geographic area).
- **Deep Base:** Your deep base is often your members or - if you don't have members – the individuals that you are developing as your most engaged leaders. They are the people at the center of making your social change. They might be your super-activists who organize others.

Mobilizing – Mobilizing “build[s] power by focusing on transactional outcomes like building the association’s membership. They try to get as many people involved as possible, but they do not try to transform or cultivate volunteers’ capacities for further activism.”* Mobilizing is an important tactic that is often used in election years and/or for activities like voter registration and/or turnout/get out the vote. Nonprofits often mobilize their mass base, but organize a smaller section of more engaged members (their deep base). Organizing and mobilizing are most effective when done in tandem.

**Via Hahrie Han, How Organizations Develop Activists*

Organizing – Organizing is the activities that grow collective capacity to act, invest heavily in growing and training leadership, organizes organizers, and shares the responsibility to recruit and train leadership to have growing levels of agency.* Organizing and mobilizing are most effective when done in tandem.

**Via Hahrie Han, How Organizations Develop Activists*

Supporter – The definition of supporter varies greatly across organizations (like members!). Every organization should get clear internally about defining your supporters vs your members. Supporters are often what the Base Power Learning Community referred to as “the many.” They might be the people on your larger email list, people who are following your work, or those who are donating without being directly involved.