

Making Your Economy Work

A Handbook for Political Parties

Designing Economic Policy for Electoral Success



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On the cover: (left to right) A Peruvian businessman discusses key issues facing industry in Peru; An association CEO holds a press conference in Afghanistan; A representative from the Ukrainian Ministry of Economy confers with an association executive during a parliamentary hearing.

The **Center for International Private Enterprise** is a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy. CIPE has supported more than 1000 local initiatives in over 100 developing countries, involving the private sector in policy advocacy and institutional reform, improving governance, and building understanding of market-based democratic systems. CIPE provides management assistance, practical experience, and financial support to local organizations to strengthen their capacity to implement democratic and economic reforms. CIPE programs are also supported through the United States Agency for International Development.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	Partnering With the Private Sector	1
1	Developing a Vision for the Future	4
2	Identifying Problems, Finding Solutions	11
3	Finishing Your Platform	25
4	Building a Winning Coalition	31
5	Marketing Your Solutions	40
Glossary	Understanding the Private Sector	52

Introduction | Partnering With the Private Sector

When citizens have opportunities to participate in political and economic systems of their own choosing, they gain access to the path of prosperity, justice, and growth. Political parties, as representatives of citizens and one of the key parts of the participatory democratic process, provide people with such opportunities. Functional political parties can effectively represent the interests of different sectors of the electorate. In so doing, political parties are able to respond to their constituents and create policies that improve the economic performance of a country and provision of social services.

Properly addressing the needs and concerns of constituents is not an easy task. There exist many resources that address the history of political party development and provide capacity-building tools. This handbook concentrates on a specific area of political party operations – developing party platforms that focus on the economic issues countries face.

Recognizing that political parties exist to represent the interests of their members, it is important to note that the primary concern of mature parties rests in improving the standards of living of people whom they ultimately represent. As experience shows, this is possible through good economic policies that help to build an entrepreneurial economy, attract investment, create jobs and wealth, and support private enterprise.

Good policies are not created in a vacuum. They arise as a result of thorough and complementary efforts on both sides – the government and the private sector. Economic platforms help political parties to work with the private sector to gauge the state of the economic environment, assess the needs and wants of firms and entrepreneurs, and distill all this information into sound policies. The reward, of course, is improved social and economic performance of countries. Moreover, when citizens are rewarded with concrete programs and policies that respond to their interests, they gain interest and trust in the democratic process.

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Political parties represent not only members, but also all like-minded citizens from whom they hope to attract votes. Similarly, private sector groups – independent business associations, professional societies, think tanks, and chambers of commerce – also speak for their active and potential members representing the general public. In essence, political parties and private associations are representing the same constituents but in different realms. This provides a fertile foundation for cooperation between the private business sector and political parties with aspirations of political success.

In your country, it may be that independent private sector groups are not well-organized or positioned to help your party develop an effective economic platform. This should not deter you from inaction. Private sector thrives in a good business environment and given an opportunity to work with political parties in an open and transparent manner, it will provide important feedback to help design policies that promote employment and reduce poverty in a sustainable way.

By working with civil society groups, political parties can ensure that the policy provisions they develop address the real needs of the business community and the public at large and that their work will find the necessary support in the private sector through votes, financial support (where allowed by the country's laws), and ultimately, electoral success.

The Center for International Private Enterprise, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, developed this handbook as a tool for political parties to aid them in formulating a coherent and positive economic policy of their own design based on their own unique values, needs, and priorities. Its primary purpose is to facilitate the formulation of a sound economic policy responsive to the needs of the party's constituents. However, with minimal modification, this handbook can be used as a model to formulate other parts of the party platform because, at its core, it lays out a framework for working with constituents to identify key needs and develop policies to address them.

Once the process is started, you may find it easier than expected because many of the people and groups you will be reaching out to have already independently prepared the answers you are looking for. Yet, deciding how to best balance the competing ideas of multiple constituencies with only limited government resources is by no means an easy task. It is, however, the sign of a mature political party and a modern society.

This handbook is designed both to guide you through exercises exploring how to formulate inclusive, effective economic policies and also to help you lead your political party through the much longer process of developing, adopting, and communicating a coherent party platform specific to the values, ideology, goals, and experiences of your individual party.

As you go through this process, it is important to keep in mind two facts. First, the development of sound economic policies that work in the real world is an ongoing process. This means that successful political

parties that develop effective economic policies maintain a regular dialogue with the private sector. This does not mean that your party's policies will be constantly shifting - however, successful political parties are mindful of real world developments both in the economy and in the interests of the voters. Sometimes this does necessitate adopting new policies; other times it suggests emphasizing different elements of your existing platform. Experience suggests that the best way to keep on top of the changes in society occurring between elections is to establish an open dialogue between your party and the many representatives of the civil society and voters.

Second, your platform is not just a printed document. It is an interrelated set of ideas addressing real world problems and proposing real solutions. It is necessary that the ideas embodied in the platform be "owned" by all party members and the party leaders, representatives, and candidates can use it to communicate their vision. Just like a vision is not confined to a piece of paper, neither is your platform. Remember, the platform does not define the political party; the political party defines the platform!

In this handbook, we are reaching out to parties of all sizes, locations, and political aspirations. Platforms can be developed to address needs on the local, regional, or national levels. While the extent and range of issues may differ, you may find that the process will often have similar components across the different sectors and geographical locations.

Finally, this is not a one-size-fits-all approach to developing an economic platform. You may find that in your country, due to legal requirements, social constraints, development priorities, or culture political parties may find it hard or nearly impossible to follow some of the steps or implement ideas. Similarly, your resources, whether financial or human, may prevent you from carrying out all the activities listed in this handbook. Nonetheless, with some ingenuity you can devise your own solutions to put together a plan for development and growth.

The Center for International Private Enterprise wishes you success as you work through this handbook, conduct larger exercises within your own party, and take your ideas to the voters. We offer our continuing support in developing sound economic policies and will be happy to help you connect with private sector groups, such as business associations and think tanks in your area, which can help you formulate stronger policies and effective messages and help you improve socio-economic conditions and standards of living in your country.

1 | Developing a Vision of the Future

A party platform embodies the official statement of the party's principles as well as a set of practical policy prescriptions that combine to appeal to the voters. Of all the reasons why a citizen might support a political party – the personal charisma of the leaders, regional or ethnic loyalty, delivery of specific goods and services, voter intimidation – only its policy proposals offer every party an opportunity to attract and sustain support over the long term.

A platform helps create an identity for the party and explains the values, positions, and policies a party represents. A well-defined platform can help a political party distinguish itself from others and draw the support of citizens. A typical party platform focuses on several issues, one of which is socio-economic development.

An economic platform outlines the party's principles and its vision in regards to the socio-economic development of a city, region, or country depending on the electoral scale of the campaign. The steps in developing a platform outlined in this handbook apply to parties operating on any level within a country's governance structure.

The Value Behind Economic Policy

Why is it so important to have clearly defined economic policies? A good economic platform is the foundation upon which your party can build its programs aimed at improving the living standards of your constituents. As a vision of modernization, a properly-developed economic platform represents the economic interests of constituents, thus giving them a stake in the governance of their own country and effectively involving them in the electoral and policymaking processes.

Economic policies have far-reaching consequences and have a profound impact on incomes, jobs, and the availability of goods and services, as well as the quality of public and social services. Good economic policies create jobs, increase incomes, attract investment, and improve public services.

Bad policies, on the other hand, achieve the opposite. As political parties seek to improve the social welfare of their constituents, it is important to be able to identify their economic standing, develop a set of policies to address short-term and long-term economic needs, communicate that set of policies to voters, and work within the governance system to achieve positive policy outcomes. This handbook is meant to help you and your political party achieve just that.

To take a closer look at the issues at hand, one can identify several reasons as to why it is necessary and so important to develop an economic platform. An effective economic platform helps to:

Define your party – Defining economic policies helps a party articulate its philosophy and agenda, and it allows voters to articulate their reasons for supporting the party. Although an economic platform helps define a party to the electorate, prior to that it helps define a party to itself. Through the process of putting together an economic platform, a political party identifies priorities and develops its positions on key economic issues, creating a standard for attracting members.

Differentiate your party from others – Elections give voters a choice, and evidence shows that successful political parties achieve electoral success when they present voters with unique reasons to secure support. Constructing a platform of clear and coherent goal-oriented economic policies helps voters quickly compare and contrast your party with others. Sometimes the difference will in be in the content, the specifics, or the scope of your economic vision. Other times, it may simply be between your party's superior ability to articulate and communicate a specific plan for governing compared to the lesser ability of competing political parties to present a coherent, integrated plan or their lack of focus on economic problems.

Build a vision for economic development – The process of developing economic policy both begins and ends with the understanding that your set of priorities reflects a vision of economic development. Just as democratic countries are supposed to have multiple, differentiated political parties, similarly, there will likely be divergent visions for economic development based on each party's values, ideas, constituencies, and priorities. The voters have the power to decide which vision of economic development most appeals to them.

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Build party sustainability – Mature political parties generally define themselves by issues, not individuals. An economic platform acknowledges to the voter that the party exists to promote an economic philosophy and agenda, not simply for the advancement of interests of a particular individual or to reward a group. An individual may embody the policies of a party, but it is important that the policies stand on their own so that the party does not collapse when this individual is no longer the party's leader.

Attract new members – Your political party depends on a body of active party members; they are one of your most valuable resources and there is no substitute for them. People become involved in the activities of political parties for a number of reasons, and one of the strongest motivators is ideological agreement. To turn supporters into active party members, it is important to have a set of clearly defined policies as well as to organize and communicate them to newcomers. The same factors that help you recruit and retain active party members generally also attract votes from the electorate. Thus, having a large membership base is usually a healthy sign for your political party's electoral prospects.

Engage in coalition-building – Just as individuals provide support to political parties, so can various groups and associations. In the process of developing their economic policies, political parties have an opportunity to build relationships with other groups and individuals to achieve a common purpose. This coalition-building approach is important in that it helps parties to expand the support base and gain access to key information, the foundation for good policy decisions. It also provides ready-made outlets for the distribution of key messages from your political party through outside groups' regular communication with their members; this gains you access to voters you might not be able to reach on your own. Keep in mind, however, that successful political parties are careful not to lose their identity while building coalitions with others.

Develop useful campaign tools leading to electoral success – The primary objective of every political party is to win an election and successfully represent its constituents in the policymaking process. The party's economic platform sets forth a set of principles that the party can advocate in its campaign or use to recruit new supporters between elections. It gives voters a reason to support a particular party. A well-built party platform helps to create voter loyalty. And the process of formulating policy requires your party to reach out to groups and associations, which then enables you to draft and promote appealing solutions. The simple process of reaching out to independent, non-political organizations opens a dialogue that can lead to electoral advantages even when there is disagreement between your party and the agenda of outside groups.

Sketch a blueprint for governing – Many political parties have been ushered into office based solely on the prestige of their leaders or the numbers of ethnic groups to which they appealed, only to find that once in power, they had little to offer in terms of a legislative package. The success or failure of a government is often set in its opening days when its performance is most closely scrutinized. Having a well-developed party platform solves that problem by providing a blueprint for action. Your party, if in power, will have a plan to follow, and the voters will be satisfied when they see the government following through on campaign promises.

Create sound policies – An economic platform plays an important role in professional politics. One of the most important responsibilities of government is to ensure that economic conditions promote job and wealth creation because a strong economy does not just develop at will – it is the result of good laws and regulations. In addition to the quality of laws, there needs to be a proper balance between regulating too little and regulating too much. Too much regulation stifles business activity and diverts important resources away from productive application. Too little regulation, on the other hand, can create a vacuum in which business activity cannot take place. Overall, a political party cannot expect to participate successfully in the policymaking process without thoughtful analysis of policies that can ultimately improve the wellbeing of citizens.

Building Upon a Party Creed

Where do you begin drafting your party's platform and how do you ensure that the economic policies reflect the identity of your party? It is not an easy task.

EXERCISE 1.1

Which reasons for developing an economic platform, listed above, do you consider most important for your party? Why?

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As you go through the process of talking with experts and stakeholders, you may experience a natural tendency to drift away from your party's unifying philosophy and instead find yourself endorsing bits and pieces of each stakeholder's "wish list" simply because they sound appealing to the voters. But the reality is that doing this is often confusing the interests of the groups with the interests of your party. Even though other people's priorities may not always be in conflict with yours, disregarding your party's philosophy is essentially letting others make decisions for you. Do not let your desire to win votes compromise party integrity!

Fortunately, most political parties already have a reference point in the form of a statement of party principles, which successful parties use as an anchor to prevent their policies from drifting.

Every political party has a reason for existing. A party's creed articulates that reason and succinctly explains what holds the party together. In other words, if someone asked you what beliefs all members of your party share, your answer would be your party's creed.

Your party's creed may be a list of core principles. It may be a historical justification of your party's origin and continued existence. It may be based on abstract ideology or on the results of real-world experimentation. It

contact cipe to provide a party creed to be featured here

SAMPLE POLITICAL PARTY CREEDS

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may not even be written. Your party may not have ever formally adopted a statement of principles; others have held on to outdated party creeds that no longer describe the current political party at all.

For the purposes of developing policy, it is vital that your party adopt a definitive, written creed that accurately reflects the current party, why the party exists, and a vision of what it hopes to achieve.

Your party's creed is different from your platform in a number of ways. Your creed is much shorter than your platform; usually it might be only a couple paragraphs. As a statement of shared beliefs defining the political party, it will speak in generalities. Your creed is not supposed to be a list of policy goals or action items in the same way that your platform is. If your creed enumerates specific, obtainable goals, does that mean that your party would disband if they were met? Probably not. But your platform, on the other hand, will change on a regular basis. It would not be unusual to update it each election cycle as items are achieved or issues rise or fall in importance to voters. Your creed unites the party and can be changed only rarely and only as shifts in the broad consensus shared by the party members necessitates it.

Because a party's creed is a stable definition of their principles, mature parties use it as the yardstick against which each and every policy is to be measured as they develop their party's platform.

EXERCISE 1.2

Does your party have an official statement of principles or purpose? If so, how accurately does it reflect party members' understanding of their party?

What is the basic creed of your party in your own words?

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From Principles to Policies

If your party has a well-defined set of core principles that are generally agreed on by the members of the party, then you have an excellent foundation on which to develop specific policy proposals to address the challenges your constituencies face.

As you begin to research economic problems and the solutions suggested by outside groups, you may ask yourself why won't all parties end up writing the same economic platform? Even if we assume that rival political parties will be conversing with the exact same set of experts and stakeholders – a highly unlikely scenario – each of you will be weighing the proposed solutions you hear about from business groups, think tanks, and professional associations differently as you compare and contrast their ideas with your party's core values expressed in your statement of principles.

It is important to note that despite your differences with other political parties, nothing precludes cooperation on individual issues on which you do agree. For example, parties may differ in their views of which industry is most important for a country's development, yet they may share a view that it is vital for economic success to simplify the taxation system or improve the protection of property rights for the benefit of all industries.

Such cooperation across party lines – even when the core values of each party are inimical to each other – provides one avenue for minority parties to form coalitions and enact their policy preferences even when they are not part of the government. And it is a good reason to familiarize yourself not just with the details of your own platform, but also to study the platforms of other political parties.

EXERCISE 1.3

What are the major economic policies that your party currently officially endorses?

Does your party advocate for specific legislative changes? Provide examples.

EXERCISE 1.4

As an individual, what economic policy changes do you think your party should advocate for and why?

2 | Identifying Problems, Finding Solutions

Because economics is essentially the “study of the allocation of scarce resources to satisfy unlimited human wants,” economic policymaking by definition requires difficult and often unpopular decisions.

For you and your political party to make the best decisions possible for the well-being of your constituents you need proper access to key information, an understanding of your priorities, and the maturity to develop consensus positions within the group. This is, by no means, an easy undertaking.

The first difficult or confusing decision is to grasp what falls under the umbrella term “economic policy.” Essentially, every government decision can be described in terms of economics. There are policies that deal with macro types of issues, such as inflation, and micro issues such as business registration procedures or labor codes. Developing laws is not the only concern – they also have to be properly enforced. Overall, any government has a role in establishing a fair framework for market economies to function within.

Perhaps even more difficult than determining how far you and your party want to go in defining economic policy is determining the proper balance in government involvement in the economy. While the government plays a role in developing laws and enforcing them, it does not need to insert itself into every private sector activity. When governments begin micromanaging the activities of the private sector, there is a real danger of inhibiting economic development rather than encouraging it.

No clear-cut boundaries exist, and economic issues weave together into a vast interrelated web. As you will see, part of your challenge is to study this complex web and – based on your party’s values, traditions, ideology, and priorities – select simple patterns within it. There are many different angles from which any public policy concern can be

NOTES

approached, and there is no shortage of ideas in the private sector on how to address the most pressing problems facing society.

Your job is to identify problems and then to devise solutions, and it begins with understanding the breadth of economics. As you connect with different people, each will have a different idea of what you mean when you speak of “economic policy.” Their ideas might include:

Business regulations – How does the government affect employers and commercial activity through regulation, banking laws, and taxes? Are the manufacturing, retail, agriculture, and service sectors treated fairly when the government makes decisions on infrastructure improvements or on privatization?

Fiscal policy – The government directly affects the economy through its approach to taxes and public spending on government programs. How responsibly the government acts in setting and adhering to its annual budget can impede or accelerate the health of the private sector.

International economics – How can your country become more competitive in the global marketplace? Issues would include the strength of the national currency, tariffs and trade policy, the impact of globalization, and how to attract foreign direct investment.

Institutional foundations – Every functioning market economy relies on fundamental institutions to operate efficiently. These include protection of private property rights, a functional judicial system, effective anti-corruption measures, and the free flow of economic and political information among other things.

Social policy – Directly affecting the performance of the economy are the availability of an educated workforce, the availability and affordability of quality health care, the conservation of natural resources, and the scourge of crime.

As is evident, these loose illustrative categorizations can easily overlap, and they are all interrelated to some degree. Examples are numerous, and the end result is that different policies have an impact on a country’s economic performance in different ways, which, in turn, affects the standard of living, the availability of jobs, security, and the quality of public services. All these components of social well-being are a reflection on a party’s ability to bring about better living standards for their constituents.

Just as a musician has many instruments and many possible arrangements to play a specific composition, similarly, the politicians have multiple choices for action. Exactly which issues your political party

chooses to focus on and how you choose to link them is for you to decide. The issues that you address in your economic platform will also indicate to voters that you understand their needs and are willing to engage in dialogue with them.

Your party will need to look both internally (within the party) and externally (within the private sector) to determine which economic issues the party will address and to explore the solutions for each issue. It is important to look within the party to ensure that what the platform proposes is acceptable to the members and leadership of your party. Since you are devising an economic platform, it is also important for the platform to reflect the priorities of voters representing the private sector since you will be appealing for their support in future elections.

The process of developing an economic platform is also an opportunity to engage members of your party and the private sector. It is through this process of consultation and engagement that you can gather good ideas, develop support for issues within your party, and build coalitions of support for your party and its policies among the electorate.

All Problems Have Solutions

At this stage in the policy development process, it is essential that you set aside your own personal policy preferences and engage in an extensive survey of what others think about economic issues based on their own unique perspectives and experiences. In short, successful parties listen much more than they speak. Later in the process you will have the opportunity to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of policy recommendations – and the problems they are intended to solve – but it is important to listen to outside voices. Since it is these outside voices that will be casting ballots in the next election, it is prudent to explore their perspectives and try to understand their concerns. Through this process, you can construct policies that flow from your party's principles and address the most pressing problems in the public eye.

At the end of this process you will have a much better idea of which economic issues the public expects elected representatives to address, how to filter down those issues into a manageable list, and how they mesh with the core principles of your party.

As your political party gathers information from constituents, it is important to take thorough notes. Later in the process, you will need to refer back to these notes.

Look at the sample form for recording the essence of each meeting on the opposite page. Such a form, which you can customize as appropriate, allows different note-takers to collect information in a standardized format so that it can be easily compiled, quickly understood, and shared without difficulty. This is imperative given the number of people who will be speaking with constituents and the number of people who will be reading these forms.

SAMPLE RECORDING FORM

Organization/Meeting:

Contact Person:

Mailing Address:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Location:

Date:

Number of People Present:

POLICY AREA(S)	PROBLEM	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	EXPECTED IMPACT

It is beneficial to note every idea voiced during the sessions without rejecting any out of hand at that time. It will be very easy for you to cross off impractical ideas later but very difficult to reconvene a large forum to replace ideas you neglected to document.

Do not think that every box on the form must be completed. As you listen, you will hear people talk about problems that they have no idea how to solve. You'll hear people ask for government actions without fully comprehending what they are supposed to accomplish. Write these thoughts down. Later, when you begin aggregating information, you will be able to better see how one person's original idea could satisfy another group's dilemma.

EXERCISE 2.1

List some economic problems that need to be addressed in your party's platform?

Which single problem would you give highest priority to? Why?

EXERCISE 2.2

Propose a policy prescription to address each of the economic problems you listed in the previous exercise?

Looking exclusively at your recommendations, which single policy do you most want to see implemented? Does it correspond to the problem you ranked highest in the previous exercise?

Reaching Out

Who do you listen to? You simply cannot speak individually with every voter as even this approach would not necessarily guarantee you stronger economic policies. (In all likelihood, you would end up with a long list of problems and very few meaningful solutions.)

Basically, there are three different groups to be engaged in your dialogue. The process begins internally with your own party members and some potential party members and it ends with a dialogue with the electorate.

Dialogue with private sector stakeholders will provide a bridge between party members and the public. Each of these groups brings complementary perspectives to the table, but exactly how much weight is given to the views of each group will be determined by the party leadership later, during the process of identifying the party's policy priorities.

Party members and potential party members – The logical place to start developing your party's economic policy is close to home. The party seeks to appeal to the voters, but it is responsible to its members – those who have voluntarily decided to associate with the party; participate in its activities (electoral and otherwise); and who are the party's presence on the ground as they interact with their friends, neighbors, family, and co-workers on a daily basis.

The members of your party may start off with very similar views on economic questions if your political party's core principles provide a certain degree of direction.

However, your party members may have no discernible, unifying viewpoint on economic issues, and it will be necessary to build a consensus. This is entirely possible if your party was formed for narrowly defined reasons, such as ethnicity or geographic interests. In such a case, your initial temptation may be to exclude economic policy almost entirely from your party's platform. However, that default option doesn't contribute to electoral success because, regardless of how unimportant these issues may seem to your members, they are important to the electorate as a whole and are weighed heavily when they vote. Also, as was pointed out before, all government actions have economic consequences; any public expenses and any tax collected affect the economy. The impact of government actions on the private sector and in turn on the economy as a whole may be less overt. For example, the quality and scope of public education directly affects the ability of employers to find skilled workers locally, which ultimately affects a country's global competitiveness.

What do your party members think about the most important issues you face? The best way to find out is to ask them and to include all levels and segments of your political party in this process: the central leadership, the regional leadership, office holders, specialty organizations (for example,

women's groups within the party), and other party members. The practice of inclusiveness does make the process longer and complicates reaching a consensus, but in the end it creates a stronger, more broad-based platform that party members will take "ownership" of. Therefore, it is important that policymaking be a "bottom-up" process and not a "top-down" exercise.

Making sure to give all segments of the party a seat at the table will also cultivate firm commitment and loyalty from your local party structures to the party's economic platform. This will be very important when your party begins to use the party platform as a campaign tool. You want to avoid having major factions within your party criticizing elements of the platform after it has been released!

To solicit the views of party members is comparatively easier than soliciting outside opinions because you are already familiar with the organization and have direct access to the members.

As your party begins the process of gathering data for its economic policy development exercises, you can make the best use of regular party channels, such as newsletters and party meetings to announce the process. This allows members to begin thinking about the project and also encourages conversations between party members.

To actually engage party members, you have several options. It is not necessary to gather responses from each member, but it is wise to solicit them from all. Because you have the ability to reach all party members, written questionnaires – sent through the mail, distributed at meetings, collected through the party's website – are a good place to start.

In drafting your questionnaire, write open-ended questions. It is not helpful to design a questionnaire that produces unanimity; even if you believe your party already has a natural convergence of economic thinking, use the opportunity to press for original thinking.

Another opportunity to engage your party members in the party's platform formulation process is to conduct issue-focused forums with them as either part of regular party meetings or as separate special meetings. Issue-focused forums will be discussed later as a tool to engage the general public.

Finally, it may be useful to consider reaching out to people and groups that your party has identified as potential members that you would like

EXERCISE 2.3

Name some civil society groups that might provide fertile grounds for recruiting new members to your political party. Identify the policy issue you see that each group has in common with your political party.

NOTES

to attract to your party. These could be members of a non-political organization that has a natural overlap with your party's positions – or even members of other political parties with a similar philosophy.

Private sector stakeholders and experts – In any market economy, it is the private sector – not the public sector – that is the source of growth and development. Therefore, the private sector can be the greatest source of information on which policies affect economic activity and how. The people and organizations that deal with laws and regulations on everyday basis – small entrepreneurs, medium-size companies, as well as large national firms – know best what is good and what is bad about the way the system works and how the legal structure can be improved to stimulate economic activity and promote development. It is crucial for success, therefore, to reach out to the private sector and get its input into the policy process.

When designing economic policy, your richest input will come from the business sector, but remember that the heterogeneous private sector does not speak with a single voice. The competing voices of large and small employers, associations from different industries, the needs of different regions give you a large palette from which to develop an economic platform.

EXERCISE 2.4

Name the private sector organizations with which your political party regularly communicates.

List as many private sector organizations with which your party can open a dialogue.

The diversity of private sector groups has no natural end, but we can speak of two different classifications of private sector groups that you will encounter. The first is stakeholders; the second is experts. These two classifications are not mutually exclusive; indeed, stakeholders often hold unique expertise. But these classifications will help you differentiate between the type of information and assistance you can expect from each.

The stakeholders (private sector representatives who hold a vested interest in the outcome of your policies) are often directly affected by the economic policies that your party may promote or oppose. Stakeholders for your economic policies could include business associations (as well as each individual business), professional associations, labor unions, student groups, and community groups. They could be well-established or may spring up as ad hoc groups.

Often in transitioning economies, business groups and other stakeholders will not spontaneously contact a political party just to offer their assistance. To gain views and opinions it may be necessary for the political parties to reach out to the stakeholders and ask for help. By reaching out and working together, both the political parties and the stakeholders win. The stakeholders are able to participate in the political process to benefit their own interests and the greater good of the local or national economy, and the political party receives suggestions and advice on what issues need to be addressed.

In addition to stakeholders, you will want to reach out to recognized experts. You will find economic experts within think tanks, universities, and sometimes within business associations. Bringing sometimes a different perspective, international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations have economists aplenty. However, there is no substitute for local knowledge and individualized solutions to economic problems developed with local input. The importance of developing solutions indigenously becomes clear when you consider that your political party is aiming for electoral success. Your efforts to design an economic platform that embraces the values and experiences of your party will win votes both because it yields a superior final product and because the very process of soliciting input, gathering opinions, and vetting ideas in and of itself attracts support.

When parties reach out to solicit advice from the private sector, they are building a support network that they will be able to utilize and rely on during a campaign. Parties are also demonstrating to these groups that their concerns are being taken into consideration in designing the party's economic platform. If this is done effectively, your party will have policies that reflect the will of a key segment within society, and your party will have a strong support network during an election campaign. If people believe that your party listens to them and uses their advice, then as far as they are concerned, the party shares their ideals. People will work to help their ideas come to fruition!

NOTES

There are numerous ways to solicit opinions from the private sector. These range from holding face-to-face meetings with representatives of the business community, commissioning opinion surveys and focus groups, and mailing questionnaires to key elements of private sector. This is also a great way not only to gather important information, but also to convey to the private sector the message that your party takes seriously its responsibility to represent their interests and priorities.

Finally, it might be a good idea to request copies of studies, reports, newsletters, and publications produced by private sector groups. Both business associations and think tanks have a wealth of such materials. Also ask to be placed on their invitation lists for public events and make the effort to read and track the views of the private sector. It will provide your party with a steady stream of new information and it will help them understand that you take their interests seriously regardless of whether or not you agree with their particular policy recommendations.

General public and the electorate – The third audience you need to actively solicit views from is, of course, the general public because the public will cast the votes that you are ultimately trying to attract. In dealing with the public, your data will come at a much greater scale and be less coherently organized than when dealing with party members, business associations, and think tanks. Do not let this deter you. Remember, at this point you are listening to your constituents and not yet trying to sway them. Soon you will be matching their concerns with solutions you have picked up from the private sector or developed yourselves. But first listen to them, in order to understand which messages will resonate with the electorate.

Another key difference in soliciting public input is that your data will be more quantitative than qualitative. In dealing with members of the public you may find that they are less likely to have thought these issues through, and you can expect their solutions to be vague or even economically unsound. Yet, it does not mean that their concerns are not important.

What interviewing the public can provide you with – that speaking with more select groups cannot – is a better sense of scale. A common mistake in even the most developed democracies is that politicians deal primarily with the elites of society and do not hear the opinions of the masses. Consequently, politicians can easily fail to understand why their messages do not resonate with the voters. Different constituencies have different sets of views. One way to open a dialogue with the public is to conduct open forums seeking their input on economic issues. You can both assemble pools drawn from the general public and meet with particular groups, such as a group of policemen to learn more about crime or a group of teachers to discuss improving education.

Remember that at these forums it is very important to have a member from the party act as a facilitator.

If you want to attract a good audience to participate in an issue-focused forum open to the public, it may be helpful to assemble a brief program featuring a number of speakers qualified to set the stage. However, it would defeat the purpose to present a lecture to the public; it is best to keep any speeches brief to allow plenty of time for comments from the audience.

The party's designated facilitator has an important role in ensuring that as many guests as possible get the opportunity to voice their opinion and that the forum does not degenerate into a debate. The purpose is not to decide whose ideas are correct, but to elicit as many different ideas as possible.

A second problem you may encounter at a public forum is the emergence of "groupthink" – the adoption of one position by the entire group without anyone willing to raise an alternative viewpoint. Your facilitator needs to make sure that the public forum does not coalesce

EXERCISE 2.5

What qualities should you look for in a good facilitator?

around one position; otherwise you are only gaining as much information as if you were interviewing one voter!

This means that it is imperative to choose your facilitator carefully; being a facilitator is a very difficult job, but one that can be learned with practice. It is also useful to have someone taking complete notes of all problems and solutions that are raised. You may want to make an audio recording of these forums so that they can be reviewed later.

Another method of gathering information from the public is to employ a professional public opinion firm to conduct a scientific survey of the electorate. A professional polling firm can produce a truly random sample of the public that will statistically represent the views of the electorate. Understanding the process to guarantee a statistically accurate outcome can be difficult and is the reason why political parties will hire professional pollsters. This is essential for accurate and meaningful polling. A polling firm will help you select good questions to ask in order to gauge public views on economic issues.

SAMPLE INVITATION TO A PUBLIC FORUM

The People's Party
cordially invites you to participate in our
Economic Issues Forum
to be held at the Hotel Pacifica
Thursday, November 7 at 6:00 PM.

The purpose of the forum is to discuss the most pressing economic issues we face so that the People's Party can address your concerns in next year's elections.

Your participation will ensure that our economic platform truly represents your concerns and will better enable our party to lead this country towards a brighter future.

Please call 555-876-4324 to make a reservation.

Although a professional public opinion firm produces superior information to public forums and questionnaires administered by your party, commissioning a scientific poll can be very expensive and is often beyond the means of smaller political parties. Also, polls take away from the public dialogue and engagement in the political process benefits of public forums.

Finally, not all data gathered from the public need to be actively solicited. You can learn a lot simply by monitoring public outlets such as the letters published in newspapers, public demonstrations, and postings on legitimate websites.

Setting Your Priorities

Once your party has reached out to its membership, to the private sector, and to the electorate, you will be overwhelmed with raw opinions on nearly every subject. Hopefully, many issues you had not previously considered have been brought to light.

The first task before you is to consolidate your findings. One can do so by making a master list of every problem that you have heard voiced, arranging them into related groups, and aligning them with all the possible solutions you have gathered.

If your political party has conducted scientific polling to identify economic problems or has successfully surveyed its members, the responses you received about “the biggest problem in the economy” will be a good guide to help you organize your data. For example, if unemployment was cited as the most pressing issue, then use that as a category and place problems dealing with the burdensome paperwork requirements for starting a business or the deficiencies of the education system under the heading “unemployment.” However, a problem could be associated with more than one category, so do not hesitate to also list the burdensome paperwork requirements for starting a business under “lack of entrepreneurship” and also “widespread corruption,” as appropriate.

There is no single “right” way to categorize your information. Many problems share causes or solutions. Problems can also be nested within other larger problems.

You and your party's leadership now have the very difficult task of taking a complex, highly interrelated web of connected issues and boiling those issues down into a coherent message. This simplification requires you to discard (or overlook) a large amount of the data you have gathered in order to focus on the issues that are most salient to the electorate. It is time for your political party to put its best foot forward.

At this point, it is often useful to go back and review the reasons to develop your party's economic platform. Which of these are priorities for your party? It is time to filter your raw data so that you find policies to include in your platform that meet the goals of your party in drafting an economic platform, honor your party's statement of principles, and appeal to the voters.

Meeting the goals of your party – Although all political parties exist to further the influence of their ideas, some hold goals other than electoral success, at least in the short term. Whether established or a new, some parties are interested in attracting and retaining members. Others are more interested in forming coalitions with other parties in an effort to advance their goals from outside the government. By far, most seek electoral success and participation in the government. Consider your party's goals carefully. It is very crucial that the party leadership agrees on the highest priorities identified because those priorities will become a tool to gauge the focus of the party.

Honoring your party's principles – Review your political party's statement of principles. This defining passage summarizes the member's shared beliefs. What are your party's goals? Which solutions, regardless of effectiveness, are simply philosophically incompatible with your party's ideology?

Appealing to the voters – As strong of a statement you wish to make, it cannot fall on deaf ears and still be effective. Your platform needs to correspond to the concerns of the voters. To be effective, you need to publicly address the issues that concern them. In a campaign, it is much easier to get an audience if you are speaking on issues that concern that group than to try to change the minds of an audience so that they agree with your priorities. Your message will be completely lost if you are competing with parties that are speaking to the concerns of the general public.

With these criteria in mind, your party's leadership – provided it is sufficiently diverse, broad-based, and representative of the whole membership – can take all available information and establish a prioritized list of economic issues it wishes the party to address prior to the next

NOTES

election.

Reaching consensus is in itself an internal party-strengthening exercise that builds cohesiveness and gives members “ownership” of the final product. And, as priorities are being passionately discussed, remember that the ability to say “no” is a characteristic of a mature party – and with economics being “the allocation of scarce resources”, the necessity of denying many requests when setting economic policy is a fact of life.

Once the party leadership has decided on which issues it will focus, the next step is to address the details.

3 | Finishing Your Platform

With a list of your party's top economic policy priorities in hand, dedicated working groups can begin to flesh out exactly how your party proposes to respond to economic problems.

The party leadership can form separate working groups to address each policy priority and, ultimately, prepare the party's position for its platform.

It is advisable to have each working group headed by a responsible party member chosen by the leadership and accountable for getting the work done. Participation in the working group is typically open to all party members interested in serving. Take advantage of members with special knowledge or experience in the relevant areas. For example, in a working group on education it would be wise to invite teachers and students in the party to participate alongside employers, parents, and politicians. Make sure that there is diversity in each working group so that the group doesn't draft a policy serving one special interest that will not have the support of the full membership.

Remember that the working group is not a formal subcommittee. Leave the floor open to all those with something constructive to add to the dialogue, and whenever possible, make sure that decisions are made by consensus and not according to strict voting rules. This will help avoid contention, which could sink the effort of the working group when it is brought before the full party.

Ensure that each working group reviews the notes taken during meetings with party members, with private sector business associations and think tanks, and with the general public and that they do not hesitate to invite experts in to speak with the working group and provide additional guidance. Feel free to utilize this resource openly.

NOTES

As the members of the working group weigh the facts and evaluate the merits of the proposed solutions, it is of enormous benefit to challenge each policy in order to strengthen it. Some questions to be asked include:

Does this adhere to party principles?

What are the intended results?

Can this policy actually achieve these results?

Is this policy practical?

Does the policy have any potential negative side effects?

Is this approach cost-effective and affordable?

Will it garner the support of party members?

Which stakeholders would oppose this approach?

Who would support it?

Will the public be able to easily understand this?

Does it appeal to our target constituencies?

How unique is the solution?

Are other people/parties offering this idea?

Has this approach been tried before?

Does the solution solve the problem?

How much or how little does it address?

Is the policy's effectiveness contingent on passage of other laws?

If so, which ones?

This list of questions is by no means exhaustive. In fact, it is just the start of what is considered a rigorous questioning. It is crucial for the working group members to be well-versed in the country-specific intricacies of the policy areas they are elaborating and to consider the input coming from diverse constituencies. At the same time, successful political parties are also able to incorporate in their platforms lessons learned from others. By analyzing the successes and failures of previous national, regional, or local government policies – whether at home or abroad – you can gain valuable insights into which potential policy

EXERCISE 3.1

What other questions should be asked inside the policy working group as part of the internal vetting process?

solutions are most likely to achieve their goals. Economics is by no means an exact science and successful policies implemented in one place cannot guarantee the same results if they are simply grafted onto a new location and a different society. However, when adjusted to local needs and pre-existing conditions, policies already tried by others can guide informed decision-making about your own platform.

Drafting Your Platform

Once the working group has reached consensus on what approach the party will offer to solve the priority economic question it has been charged with, it can begin to draft the exact language to be included in the platform.

Pay attention to the actual language used in drafting the platform as it is very important to succinctly explain a problem and a solution and justify it to the public as the best approach. It will be used as a reference by other party members in explaining your party to voters during the course of the campaign. The task of changing policy into platform – digesting complex issues into simple ideas – is not easy. Here are some useful guidelines to keep in mind when drafting your platform:

Be clear and specific – Most of the time, when discussing policy to voters, you have a very limited amount of time to capture their attention. Therefore, it is vital that you be prepared to succinctly state your position in just one or two sentences that contain the best description possible of the problem you wish to solve, the reasons why this problem is important, your party's policy prescription, and what you hope to accomplish. Compare the following statements:

We will create jobs.

Because of the high rate of unemployment, we will create jobs.

Because the high rate of unemployment has led to an unhealthy reliance on government social services, we will create jobs.

Because the high rate of unemployment has led to an unhealthy reliance on government social services, we will create jobs by providing more technical education classes and promoting internships with local businesses in secondary schools.

Because the high rate of unemployment has led to an unhealthy reliance on government social services, we will create jobs by providing more technical education classes and internships in secondary schools with the goal of decreasing the unemployment of secondary school graduates by 25% over the next five years.

NOTES

Which of these statements offers voters the most compelling reason to support your political party? By defining the problem for the voters and offering your solution at the same time, you frame the public debate. You can set the terms of the debate so that people will discuss the merits of your plan, and not the underlying facts.

EXERCISE 3.2

Analyze the following statement:

“Because the high rate of unemployment has led to an increase in the crime rate, we will create jobs with the goal of decreasing the unemployment of secondary school graduates by 25% over the next five years.”

Being specific helps you avoid placing in your platform sweeping generalized statements for which the voters who cast a ballot for your party will later hold you accountable, but which in practice may be impossible to achieve – such as “We will eliminate unemployment.” Experienced parties find that their long-term political success is better served by setting realistic, achievable goals, such as “We will target reducing unemployment by 10 percent over the next five years by reforming the labor law.” Parties can later point out the fulfillment of those specific campaign promises to voters and have a much better chance of re-election. Even if the results fall somewhat short of the specific target, the party can still demonstrate more meaningful progress toward that realistic goal and attribute it to its particular policies than if the platform goals were entirely unrealistic in the first place.

Avoid jargon and acronyms – In dealing with economists and businessmen, you will become familiar with a whole new set of terms related to the economy. However, do not assume that the public will understand them or appreciate your use of technical terms. Sometimes you may find that the message will get across much better if you avoid technical terms like “GDP” and put it in terms that the average citizen uses.

Keep it people-oriented – Remember that policy is about people, and not only about facts and figures. Wherever possible, describe the benefits your policies will produce in terms of the individual or the average family,

and not in figures aggregated for your whole country. This helps people see the real dividends of your policies. For example, try stating that “corruption costs the average family \$400 per year, which could be used to buy groceries or pay for school” instead of “corruption creates a hidden tax on society that wastes 1.75 percent of our GDP each year.”

Use meaningful titles – Make sure you put thought into your titles and section headings. “Starting a Business” may be descriptive, but “Making it Easier to Open a Company” has a more attractive ring and is equally descriptive. Use positive words and accomplishment-oriented language to convey to the voters that you have a plan that will work. Similarly, do not overuse the word “economy,” as tempting as it may be.

Finalizing the Language

After the working groups provide their policy recommendations and language for the platform, it is best to have the party leadership review it together. It is not too late to revisit earlier decisions now that policies have been fleshed out. Seeing a near-final product may make people reevaluate their priorities. For example, a working group may have produced a very appealing and innovative solution that the party leaders recognize as having the potential to attract voters and thus will want to highlight it more than before. Or they may see that two different working groups have produced similar policy recommendations, such as cutting taxes, to address different problems, such as the low level of entrepreneurship and opportunities for corruption. If improvements can be made in the organization of the party’s policy recommendations, this is the right time to do so.

The party leadership should also consider trimming down the work of the working groups. Whereas the working groups have a natural inclination to be thorough, the final platform needs to be succinct. The party leadership has the responsibility to review the draft platform to ensure that it conforms with the party’s statement of principles, and also that it does not contradict itself with opposing recommendations. Finally, the platform should conform to one clear and simple style, tone, and form, as the final document needs to be understandable and easy to read. It does not matter whether the reader is a university professor, a tea shop owner, a farmer, or a housewife – your party’s platform must be clear enough for everyone to understand.

Review of the platform is not just limited to the party elite. Make sure to circulate it in draft form to those who participated in its development – including outside stakeholders – for comment. Convening focus groups of party members and select external audiences will help you gauge the effectiveness of your product as a campaign tool.

The critical question to ask is: Does this platform address real problems with real solutions? If so, does it accurately reflect the will of the

NOTES

party? Finally, will it appeal to voters and differentiate your political party from competing parties?

Once these questions have been answered satisfactorily, your political party can now formally adopt a platform according to your party's internal rules. For such important measures, requiring endorsement by a broader group than your party's central committee will add to its strength as the defining campaign document for the party. A special party convention is a popular way to adopt crucial materials such as the platform (or a candidate list).

Print the final, ratified party platform professionally and also, if possible, post it on your party's website, with other information about the party included: the party's statement of principles, its official history, and a list of the party's accomplishments. You may also want to include information about the process the party went through to develop its platform so that others can see your party's proven interest in the thoughts of the voters and other stakeholders.

As you begin distribution of the platform, focus on increasing your

EXERCISE 3.3

What steps can your party take to make the process of drafting future platforms easier or more efficient?

internal education efforts so that party members are well-versed in its contents and the ideas behind them. It is this document that will come to define your party and get voters to support you. It is this document that will allow narrowly-defined parties to grow beyond their traditional regional, tribal, sectarian, or religious bases of support. It is important that every member of the party feels ownership of your platform, even if he or she does not agree with every policy recommendation in it.

Remember, your platform is not just a printed sheet of paper. It is an interrelated set of ideas addressing real world problems and proposing real solutions. The ideas embodied in the platform need to be owned by all party members, and the party leaders, representatives, and candidates can use it to communicate their vision. Just like a vision is not confined to a piece of paper, neither is your platform. The platform does not define the political party; the political party defines the platform.

4 | Building a Winning Coalition

Coalition building refers to the process through which many groups unite in order to achieve a common goal. Groups that share common interests and purposes form coalitions. By forming a coalition they combine their resources and their numbers to create a greater impact than if they operated individually.

Just as political parties often form coalitions in order to govern, a political party can form coalitions with outside private sector groups in order to win votes, exert influence, and lead more effectively. Private sector organizations such as business associations and think tanks are not just valuable in forming economic policy; they can be an integral part of your party's electoral victory strategy.

Your party's economic platform has the ability to act as the glue that unites various groups into a winning coalition. As you know, economic policies cover a broad range of topics. Each topic or section in your party platform offers another opportunity for your party to reach out to the private sector and build coalitions to further everyone's common interests.

These private sector organizations are also referred to as stakeholders, because they hold a stake in the outcome of particular policies. Stakeholders come from many segments of society. All stakeholders are affected one way or another by tax policy, labor laws, trade and business regulations, interest rates, and the amount of capital available for investment.

Importantly, building winning coalitions does not mean that all coalition partners agree on all issues. In fact, they likely will not agree. As a political party, you have the opportunity to reach out to private sector groups based on common interests; by finding common ground where you agree, potential coalition partners can often overlook issues

of disagreement because those issues may be of lesser priority to both your party and the stakeholder. However, sometimes they cannot. This is normal; there is not always sufficient common ground to forge a strong coalition.

The Benefits of Building Coalitions with the Private Sector

The benefits of building successful coalitions are important for those who wish to attain and maintain power and influence. For a political party, coalitions win elections with their votes, aid campaigns with their resources, spread news through their networks, lend respectability with their endorsements, and fuel further development of the party.

Coalition building allows political parties to wield greater influence, and as will be shown later, can enable a small political party to garner more votes than much larger political parties. The right approach to coalition building can literally make the difference between winning and losing an election.

Among the benefits of reaching out to private sector groups using the economic policies of your platform are:

Electoral support – Coalitions will give your party access to large groups of voters it might not otherwise be able to reach. By stressing how your political party advocates positions similar to those of the potential coalition partner, you will be able to win the support of the partner's membership. Remember, elections are not won with ideas or with money; they are won with votes cast by individuals on election day, and it is vital that the voters feel motivated to come to the polls. It does not matter if people support you in principle if they do not bother to cast a ballot for you.

Campaign resources – Coalition partners provide an excellent field from which to recruit new campaign volunteers. Volunteers who help during election season are one of the most difficult resources to attract, and it is hard to find a substitute for the personal element volunteers provide during voter outreach activities. The private sector is also the prime source of funding for political campaigns in most countries. Based on local election finance laws, coalition partners may be able to provide you with financial and material resources to aid in conducting your campaigns. If they cannot directly transfer resources to political parties, they may still be able to contribute through their own expenditures and efforts on issues related to advocacy.

Communications networks – Effective business associations and other private sector groups maintain extensive networks to communicate with their members and interested parties. The same newsletters, membership meetings, e-mail lists, websites, and magazines used by associations to

carry the organization's news and information can carry your party's message to the same membership. By tapping existing communications networks, your party avoids the expensive, time consuming, and often impossible task of duplicating them. Additionally, people tend to be more receptive to messages when they come from a trusted source. Therefore, your message will have a greater impact if delivered by a business association to its members than if they had received the message directly from your political party. Even organizations that do not want to become coalition partners with you may still be willing to pass on your economic platform as a service to their members, either just for one party or for several parties. It does not hurt to ask if they will convey this information to their membership, and if they will, it gains you access to a broader group of individuals. Also remember, strong coalitions are a very effective mechanism to advertise the benefits of your party for free.

Endorsements – If an organization wishes to formally endorse your political party or its candidates, it will lend your campaign additional respectability. Voters (and other potential coalition partners) look for clues about your party that are independent of your own pronouncements or those of rival political parties. Many people view stakeholder groups as trusted third parties that have expertise in specific fields. Receiving and highlighting endorsements from outside organizations can help differentiate your party in the eyes of voters from other parties that may have similar positions.

Ideas – Just as you turned to business associations, think tanks, and other private sector organizations when developing your political party's economic platform, coordinating with these same groups during a political campaign strengthens the symbiotic relationship. By bringing such groups into regular consultation, your party will be better informed about current economic developments and be in a strong position to address them quickly. This gives you an edge over other political parties that may be forced to react to these same issues with little warning or time to prepare a response.

Political leverage – Finally, after the election, coalitions are helpful to continue to support your party's initiatives by pressuring other parties to vote for your legislation. This helps you govern successfully, which in turn helps you get re-elected in the future.

The benefits of forming coalitions do not solely profit the political parties in the relationship. There is a trade-off. In return for continued support, your coalition partners will hold you accountable for enacting (or at least advancing) the policy proposals that drew each of them into the coalition in the first place. If your political party is not responsive to its

NOTES

stakeholders – either by repeatedly failing to deliver on promises or by not gaining enough political might to influence any policy – they will leave over time and seek out other political parties that demonstrate a greater ability to produce results. In that sense, your coalition partners will act exactly like the electorate in general. This accountability is healthy for the political process in general and for your political party in particular.

EXERCISE 4.1

Which specific private sector organizations carry the greatest political weight in your country? Why?

Identifying Coalition Partners

Your political party will not have something substantial in common with every group, organization, and constituency. Some of your policy positions will be similar or identical to those of competing political parties. How do you decide who are your best potential coalition partners?

Usually, a first step requires developing an initial list of potential stakeholders for the different major economic policies in your political party's platform. Then you will objectively determine which have the greatest potential for teaming with your party. Finally, plan to approach each of them and make your case.

Begin by going through your platform line by line and create a list of stakeholders that have a vested interest in each section. Unlike the list of potential stakeholders you created to draft your platform, make this list far more comprehensive and attempt to list as many potential stakeholders as possible. The larger you can build your coalition, the greater chances of success you stand to have on election day. A good place to begin looking for other stakeholders is by asking the ones with which you are presently working. For example, if you worked closely with the chamber of commerce in one city in developing your platform, use it now to locate other chambers of commerce in other regions.

You will soon see that there are many sections of your platform that appeal to the same set of stakeholders. This means there will be more than one reason for these stakeholders to support your party. Once you have a good list of stakeholders in each part of your platform, rearrange the list so that you have each organization listed once followed by all the parts of the platform that you believe it will support. Identify any natural groupings by industry, region, or issue.

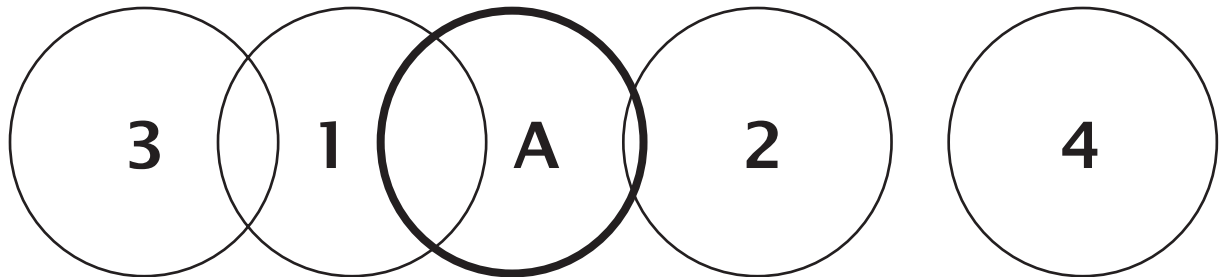
EXERCISE 4.2

Which specific private sector stakeholder groups do you think have the greatest tendency to align with your party? Provide some examples of common issues.

The likelihood of a private sector organization becoming a coalition partner with your party does not depend exclusively on how much you have in common. For example, a labor union may side with a large party that participates in the government over a smaller party that advocates for almost all of the union's policy positions. Remember, you participate in a competitive political market; for coalitions to form, they need to advance the interests of both groups.

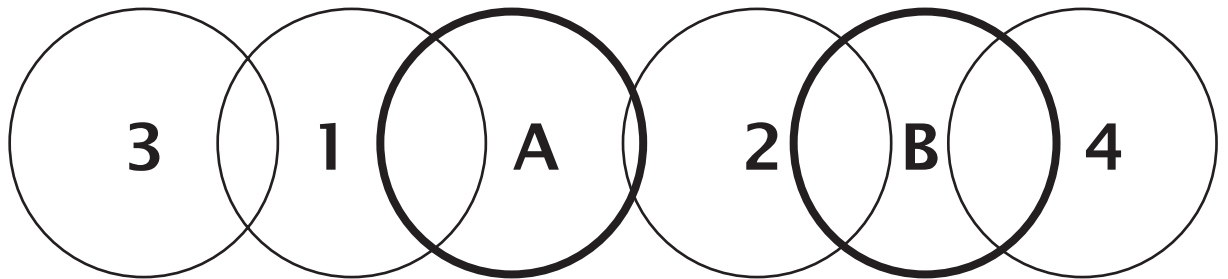
In the following diagrams, each circle represents a member-based organization – political parties with dark circles with letters and private sector association with lighter circles with numbers. Where the circles overlap, the members of the different organizations have common interests; this is where policies in your platform are supported by private sector stakeholders. These diagrams illustrate the strategic thinking necessary to determine who your most natural and most important coalition partners are – and exactly how you will be competing for votes with rival political parties on the basis of the issues.

In this first diagram, your political party's economic platform, represented by the circle labeled "A," includes a substantial deal of the policy agenda of private sector stakeholder 1 and has a little in common with stakeholder 2. In this example, stakeholder 1 is a very promising coalition partner and stakeholder 2 is a less likely ally even though there is

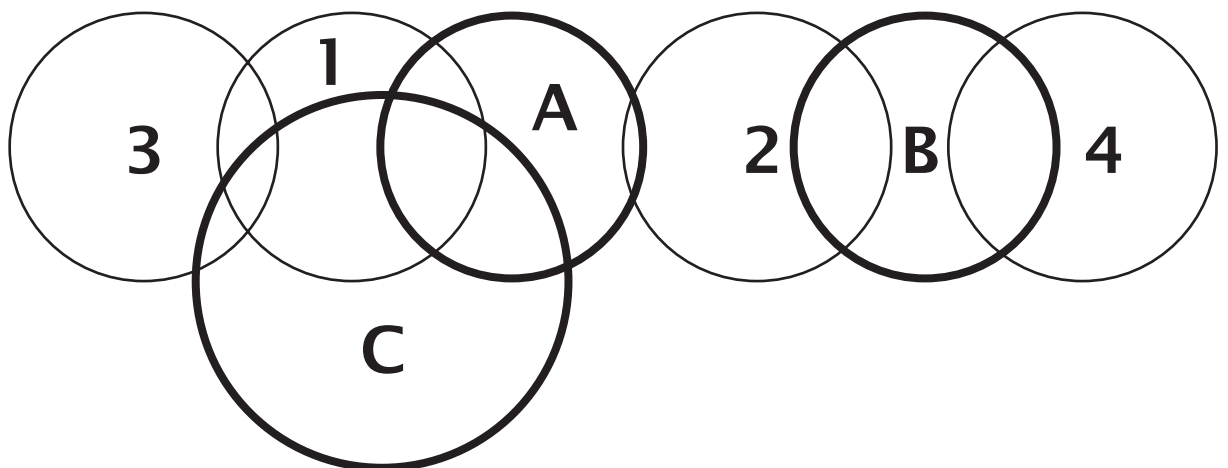


some common ground. Neither stakeholder 3 or 4 is a suitable coalition partner because there are no common interests. Notice that although stakeholder 1 is a natural coalition candidate and it shares points of agreement with stakeholder 3, there is no overlap between the political party and stakeholder 3.

In the second example, a second political party enters the picture to remind you that you are competing for votes. In this case, a rival political party's platform makes it more appealing to stakeholder 2 than your party. The new political party also attracts support from stakeholder 4, which is out of your range.



In the third illustration, a larger political party labeled "C" challenges your ability to form a coalition with stakeholder 1 because this larger party happens to have great natural overlap with not just stakeholder 1 but also with your political party!

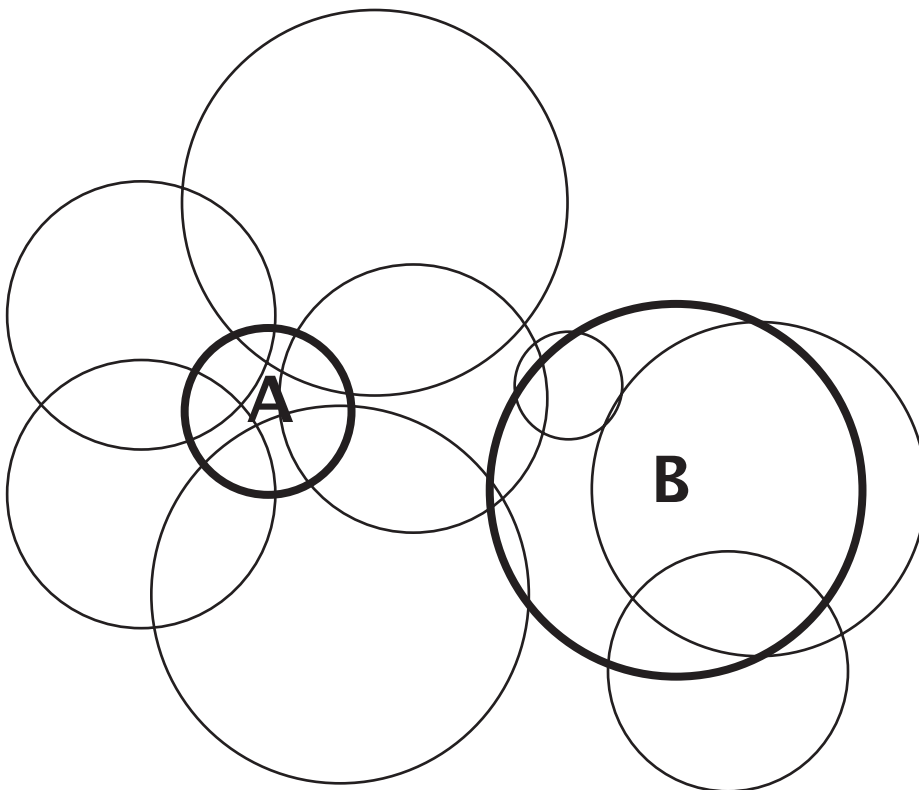


This third example clearly demonstrates the value of not just using your party's platform to define your party but to make sure that your party differentiates itself from other political parties.

However, please note that although the great overlap of interests between your political party in this example and the larger political party makes it much more difficult for you to form coalitions and attract votes, that same union of interests makes your party a likely partner in government with the larger party after the elections.

If you included a sufficient number of representatives from private sector organizations in your policy drafting process, the final product would appeal to a number of those groups. As you repeat the process of drafting a party platform, you will probably give greater consideration to how you can write a platform that appeals to outside groups. Often this can be done without changing the party's identity, through simply emphasizing and highlighting sections that differentiate your party from others and appeal to private sector groups.

Remember, through building effective coalitions a smaller party can earn many more votes and compete with larger parties. In this final diagram, the smaller political party has a chance of building a winning electoral coalition because its platform is in the center of the agendas of several private sector organizations and consequently is more attractive to more people than the platform of the larger party.



Approaching Coalition Partners

Once you have identified a promising coalition partner, ask for their support. This entails developing a message specifically targeting the group, identifying the best people to convey that message, and then requesting that the group take specific actions to support your party.

Begin by developing a “sales pitch” customized for each prospective coalition partner. To prepare for meetings with representatives of these interest groups, develop a brief list of talking points. Talking points are succinct statements that convey the strongest arguments you have; talking points are customized for their intended audience and appeal to their interests. For this reason, reviewing your notes from the initial meetings held during the policy drafting stage is a good place to start. Which issues seem to be their biggest concerns? What are their organization’s goals and specific objectives? How is the organization structured? Take their concerns and customize your message to fit their needs. Your talking points might not include the factors you consider paramount and they probably will not encompass all of your objectives, but they do not have to. Remember, you are appealing to common interests.

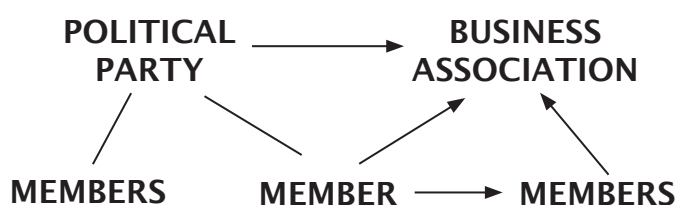
Experience shows that efficient political parties prepare packets of information to leave behind with each person with whom they meet. (It is often a good idea to send over such a packet before the meeting to give others the chance to review it – but be sure to bring copies to your meetings.) The packets typically contain certain basic information including a copy of your platform, information about your party, letters of endorsement, and newspaper clippings that show your party’s activities. Make sure to also include additional information customized for the stakeholder with whom you will be meeting. This includes a personalized cover letter thanking him or her for discussing opportunities with you, summarizing your talking points and materials, and highlighting your party’s interest in the particular stakeholder’s key issues.

When reaching out to stakeholders such as business associations, it is a good idea to first attempt to contact its executive director or other senior staff member. Always keep the organization’s self-interest in mind and communicate that it has something valuable and important to contribute. It is also useful to acquire a list of members of the board of directors for the organization and, if possible, major financial contributors. These represent alternative points of contact who hold influence over the stakeholder’s decision-making.

Select a well-regarded and trusted member of your party to approach the leadership of each potential coalition partner to present the reasons for supporting your political party and the benefits for them. If you have party members familiar with a particular organization or its work, definitely include them in your delegation. For example, if you are going to meet with the head of a medical association, find a doctor who is active in your party to accompany you. Alternatively, if any party members

have a special connection to one of your contacts – if they originally come from the same small town, if they attended the same schools, if they are neighbors or social acquaintances – exploit those relationships by having that party member make contact.

If you have party members who are also members of the association you are courting, armed with your talking points, ask them to talk with their contacts within the organization about supporting your party and pass your requests to the organization's leadership. The executive director and the board of directors will want to hear from their own members before making a decision; they will feel more comfortable placing the organization's support behind a political party that they know already has support among its members.



Finally, formally and specifically ask their organization to support your political party and the election of your candidates. It is not enough for a private sector group to passively support your party's economic platform; make sure the group will be an active supporter and visible member of your coalition. Make specific requests for the organization to distribute your literature, recruit volunteers, allow party representatives to speak at the organization's meetings, and open a dialogue about what specific assistance it both can and is willing to supply. Take notes and be clear about your expectations.

Most often, you cannot accomplish this with just one meeting with one person. You will need to speak with many different members of the organization over time. Remember to use talking points that appeal to the organization's own self-interest.

Coalition building begins with recognizing shared interests and ends with reaching those goals. Crucial to building an effective and lasting coalition is demonstrating that there is a common interest among the group. It is in everyone's self-interest to participate; working together will improve the chances of achieving the goals set forth. An economic platform is exactly the type of mechanism that creates a common interest that can result in a large coalition that will support your political party.

5 | Marketing Your Solutions

Your economic platform distinguishes you from other political parties. If you properly developed your platform with input from private sector stakeholders and built a coalition to support your platform, then you should receive big dividends when you begin to market your platform to a wider audience – especially if this comes during a campaign.

There are two key aspects involved in communicating your campaign message: the strategic aspects that will determine how you frame your key messages and the tactical aspect that dictates which mechanisms you will use to communicate your message.

Remember that political parties are essentially competitors in the marketplace of ideas. Your party must use all of the tools at its disposal to market its ideas. The voters – both as a whole and in important special interest segments – are the target audience of the party’s communication efforts.

Communication is a never-ending process of selling your message over and over again. At every opportunity, party officials, candidates, and other designated spokespersons should incorporate your party’s messages developed from your policy platform into the major communications efforts the party undertakes.

Marketing your message is a process made up of many elements that continually support one another. These elements can be best separated into three distinct categories. One category is paid advertising and the second is “earned” media. Paid advertising, as the name suggests, consists of paying the media directly to promote your party’s message. Earned media, on the other hand, consists of media coverage that you do not pay for directly, but that still garners considerable attention for your party. Finally, the third

category, direct outreach, describes efforts by political parties to directly contact voters with a campaign message.

Remember, you are communicating a message. Your campaign should convey a vision of the future. It is not just a list of action items your party intends to undertake, and it is certainly not the printed document detailing your platform. You need to share with voters the vision that is held by party members.

Reaching Your Audience with a Clear Message

A successful communications strategy begins with identifying the target audience. During your coalition-building efforts, the target audience included specialized private sector organizations for whom you developed industry-specific talking points before approaching each potential partner. At this stage, most often your audience will be the general electorate. However, it might also be a key subset of the electorate. For example, you may be presenting what your party has to offer that particularly benefits those living in poverty. If there are indicators that your party is underperforming among women, you may want to conduct outreach activities targeting them.

Different audiences require different messages, or at least different emphases within your message. Some audiences will expect you to delve into greater detail on certain issues; make sure you plan accordingly.

Blanketing the entire electorate with the same message is not as effective as tailoring your message or presentation for each targeted audience. It is something of which you should always be aware as your party tries to make the maximum impact.

It is important to understand that the general public will not be able to digest your entire economic platform. Therefore, in communicating with the electorate at large, you should reduce your message to its most salient points, meaning three or four key issues. Most people cannot focus on more than a few issues at the same time, and if you try to communicate too many subjects, you risk losing your audience's interest. If you have adequately researched the issues that concern your target audience, you will know which three or four issues should be included in your main talking points.

Again, exactly which messages you feature most prominently will change based on the particular audience you are trying to reach. However, it is important to adhere to a few selected themes in your materials so that all party members will be conveying very similar messages. This is called staying "on message," and this branding helps distinguish the identity of your party. It is important to use the issue or issues that most concern voters as a way to draw attention to your platform and show how your proposals can improve their lives.

Producing Materials

As you begin planning your political party's communications strategy, you should also be developing the physical materials you will need to conduct it.

First, you should produce general campaign literature with your party's campaign message. Your literature can be a simple black and white photocopy or an expensive, professionally produced full color brochure. However, whatever its format, materials must be brief, clear and informative. The attention span of the general public is short – especially when it comes to political messages from candidates. Your three or four most salient issues should be featured so prominently that they almost jump from the page. Do not try to provide too much detail, and be sure to use images – including photographs or charts – for greater impact. Remember to use small focus groups to make sure that the message audiences receive from your literature is the one you intend to convey!

Next, you should develop one page going into greater detail on each of your themes. These will essentially be talking points, so party members need to be very familiar with them.

The process of developing these literature pieces will also help you hone your message. If you cannot state what your party has to offer in just a few sentences, you need to further refine your campaign message. This is often painful to do, and although it may seem like the antithesis of the long and detailed policy development process you have gone through, it is not. Your policies remain intact; you are just reworking your presentation to make them more understandable and palatable to your target audience. Don't worry. Interested voters will ask questions and seek additional information.

Before commencing your outreach efforts, you might also want to think of what additional materials you will need. Banners and signs are essential to any event your party sponsors, and they should always feature the party's name and any relevant slogan that can help reinforce your message. Banners provide an ideal backdrop for press conferences, and signs will be needed to make it is easy to locate and identify your events. It will be important to make sure signage is included in any earned media efforts that might garner television coverage or a photograph in the newspaper.

Also, you should produce a thorough list of all media outlets. Before you can plan a single earned media event or issue your first press release, you need to put together a good media distribution list so that you know where to send press releases and invitations to press conferences. Your list should include all pertinent information for every television station, radio station, newspaper, and magazine that you want to cover your events. Organize it so it is easy to sort by geographic area, media type, and audience type. Remember to include specialty publications such as magazines produced by business associations or newsletters issued by think

tanks. Do not forget student publications or internet websites. Television and radio programs often have their own producers in addition to those of the larger station or network, so be sure to also include a contact for each news program.

It is better to have too many outlets on your media list than too few. Nothing can drive that point home more than comparing how much it costs to buy a 30-second commercial on television versus what it takes to generate 30 seconds of coverage on the television news. Remember, it is easy for the recipients of your press releases to ignore them, and if someone wants to be removed from your distribution list, by all means oblige them. Do not worry about having too many people on your media list. Worry about having too few.

Finally, your party will need to develop a press kit similar to the packages of information you prepared for prospective coalition partners. A press kit is usually a folder that includes a copy of your party's platform, past press releases, any endorsement letters you may have from organizations or experts, samples of favorable news coverage about your party, and any editorials you may have that favorably describe your platform. This press kit should be handed out to reporters and to any other individuals who seek to know more about your platform.

Direct Outreach to the Public

Direct contact with voters remains an essential element of communication – even when you are also utilizing earned or paid media. You are undoubtedly familiar with the “on the ground” aspect of campaigning – going door-to-door or visiting all the businesses along major streets. This is, of course, the essence of politics. There are numerous opportunities for direct contact with the voters that should factor into your political party's communications effort.

EXERCISE 5.1

How many specific media outlets can you name that should be included on your media list? Which ones are the most important? Why?

Speeches and Events – Business associations, civic clubs, universities and other groups can host events where your party has an opportunity to speak about your platform. Most of these entities hold regular meetings and usually they are looking for good, topical speakers to help them attract a crowd and draw attention to their organization. Contact such groups and arrange for your party members to speak at their meetings. Even if only 20-30 people attend a meeting, such events give you an opportunity to promote your party and its platform beyond its usual audience, and anyone who listens to your message can share it with others not in the room. You can also use these speaking engagements as opportunities for media events. Ask the sponsors if it is acceptable for you to invite reporters to attend and cover your speech; most groups will gladly agree because they are also seeking greater visibility in the media. If you invite the media to cover a speech, do remember that that your audience likely will extend far beyond the people in the room, possibly to hundreds or thousands who will learn about it through the media. Also, remember to provide reporters with a text of the speech just prior to the delivery.

Debates and Candidate Forums – Debates between candidates are a traditional staple of political campaigns, and there are many different formats for debates. They can be sponsored by private sector organizations, civic groups, universities, media outlets. Or a variety of other entities. Questions can come from a panel of experts, journalists, the audience, or from the debate participants themselves. A debate might cover a wide range of topics or it might be limited to topics of interest to the sponsoring organization, such as economic growth, education or health care. You should encourage private sector stakeholders – especially those close to you ideologically – to sponsor debates and candidate forums as a way to educate voters. Most importantly, your platform provides you with a ready-made starting point for your party representatives’ answers to questions about positions the party takes on important issues of the day. Such forums will also give you excellent feedback on the suitability and persuasiveness of the arguments you have assembled to substantiate your platform’s positions.

The Internet – Not all direct contact with voters occurs face-to-face. The Internet continues to provide new opportunities and, despite varied levels of usage in different countries and regions, is sure to grow in importance for political actors. While your party may not presently utilize the Internet or other high-tech modes of communication, there is no doubt that your party – and its competitors – will increasingly rely on it in the future. It is simply too powerful a medium to ignore, and therefore, we feel compelled to address the issue for you here.

Modern political parties today – and, increasingly, individual candidates – have websites on which they post relevant information about themselves. The internet is a very useful way for anyone – voters, business groups, or reporters – to get information about your party. Your party should put its message at the forefront of your website but it must also place its full platform on its website for easy access for everyone. Simply seeing your party’s platform conveys to people that you are a serious party with the interests of the country at heart.

If you have not already, you should create an e-mail list for the party. This is not only the fastest way to spread information about your party, its activities, and positions; it is also one of the cheapest. You should have a place on your website where people can provide you with an e-mail address so that they can keep up with your party’s future activities. You can solicit e-mail addresses from members of your coalitions. At your public events, you should place a sign-in sheet to collect the names of people in attendance and their contact information. Don’t send press releases only to your media list. Send them to the entire e-mail address directory you establish.

Finally, the internet continues to develop and offer new and innovative ways to spread your message. Some of the more recent developments include the creation of “pod casting,” the use of web logs or “blogs,” and the rise of social networking sites. Their utility as political tools holds great promise, and more developments are on the way.

You should regularly update your website to ensure that it carries your party’s campaign message. Remember, voters will come to your website looking for different information than do party members. Be sure to look at it from the perspective of the first time visitor. Is your website “on message”? Is it easy to find basic information and then to find additional detail? Does your attention focus on the parts of the website that you want viewers to see or does it drift to less compelling material?

Earned Media

Earned media is a way to make news and gain publicity for your organization without directly paying money for it. Earned media does not usually require a significant expenditure of funds – unlike television and radio commercials, newspaper advertising, direct mail, bumper stickers, and billboards. However, it does usually require a great deal of planning and forethought. Earned or “free” media is not exactly free; it requires assertiveness, time, perseverance, and hard work. Essentially, you are creating a newsworthy event that the media will want to cover on its own merits. The objective is for your party to receive good publicity out of the resulting coverage or that the story will promote one of the major themes or positions your party espouses.

NOTES

Earned media is important for three reasons. First, media coverage gives you a degree of credibility not usually obtainable from paid advertising. Studies show that citizens believe what they read in the newspapers and what they hear on the broadcast news programs. They are more likely to take a cynical view towards paid advertising, although obviously paid advertising remains overall a very effective method for projecting your message.

Second, the cost of paid media can be prohibitively expensive. While many parties in developed countries may possess sizable budgets that can support aggressive paid media campaigns, most political parties in the developing world are not so fortunate.

Third, the average person receives thousands of media messages every day. The only chance you and your party have of breaking through the clutter is through repetition and persistence. Even if your party is able to purchase some paid media, you will need earned media to supplement and reinforce those efforts. Also, your paid media effort is likely to be concentrated in the final weeks before an election; earned media is a way to keep your party in the public eye throughout the year.

A successful earned media effort employs several complementary elements including:

Press Releases – Press releases provide the backbone of your earned media effort. Press releases are essentially news stories or announcements that your party provides to the press. A release is usually a one- to two-

EXERCISE 5.2

Write the opening sentences for three different sample press releases.

page document that you e-mail, fax, hand deliver, or mail to the media. Because they are easy to produce and cheap to distribute, press releases are the workhorse of the public relations industry.

Nearly every other element of your earned media efforts – press conferences, media events, etc. – will require issuing a press release. And

you should look for these opportunities. Do not wait for news to happen; make it happen! Not every release will contain what other people would say qualifies as a news story; therefore, you must learn to write creatively to frame whatever you are announcing as news. For example, if your party is announcing its jobs creation plan, it is news, though of a low priority to most journalists. However, you can also “re-release” the same program if there is another news story that provides you the opportunity to “piggyback” on it, for example, the government’s release of unemployment figures.

Journalists have certain expectations about press releases, and adhering to their professional expectations will help your press releases be taken seriously. First, design separate stationery for press releases and include a designated person and his or her complete contact information for reporters to use for follow-up. Make sure your releases are labeled “News Release” and are marked “For Immediate Release” (or “Embargoed until”) and include the date.

As far as style goes, several details will make your releases more useful to journalists and editors. First, whenever possible limit your release to a single page. Enforcing brevity is good discipline; remember, reporters will follow up on a story by asking questions. Although brevity is important, be sure to include all the basic facts of “who, what, where, when, and why” as early in the release as possible. Use newspaper style. A good way to think of your release is as if it were a newspaper story itself. Stick to facts in your text and provide specific details rather than generalities, but use quotations from individuals to present opinion. Good quotations add an automatic human element to the story and allow you to highlight “the big picture.” Your press release on, for example, the publication of a report commissioned by the party, should not be a restatement of the report’s findings. If someone wanted that, he would read the report! Your press release must explain why the report is important, why it was conducted, what the next steps are, and only then mention the key findings.

A good headline is extremely important. Journalists and editors, like most people, begin reading at the top of the page and work down. They will stop reading where they lose interest. Therefore, make sure your headlines are clear, informative, entertaining, and strong. Do not hesitate to draft several different headlines and ask people for their opinions.

The same can be said for the opening paragraph. The first line of your press release should contain the one single thought you want people to take away from your release. It must be strong enough to make the reader want to know more, or failing that, leave them with a positive impression of your party nonetheless. Make it as strong, concise, and informative as possible. One of the major mistakes people make in writing press releases is that they follow chronological order. You should never open a press release with a line like “Today, a meeting was held.” Instead, jump straight to the outcome of said meeting. Was a decision made? Was conflict

NOTES

resolved? Was something new created? Lead with an attention-getting declaration that conveys your message succinctly and with authority.

Finally, you should always prepare your press releases in advance. If you know that you will be issuing one following your party congress (and you should), write it in advance. If you hold a press conference, you must always prepare a press release covering your announcements to hand out at the conference. It also allows you to send it out as quickly after the event as possible rather than returning to an office, sitting down, and beginning the drafting process. In all instances, you should issue press releases as

EXERCISE 5.3

List ten interesting settings for press conferences and/or media events. Indicate the issue area(s) that could be associated with each.

early in the day as possible so reporters have time to review it and write their stories before their deadline.

News Conferences – A news conference is one of the most important vehicles of an earned media program. It serves the basic purpose of relating information and allowing the media to ask questions on the spot. A news conference also puts you or your spokesman in the enviable position of being the focus for the delivery of the information as an expert on the topic. News conferences generally raise the expectations of journalists. Where you can use press releases to cover day-to-day happenings and can be creative in framing your message as news, at a news conference you will be expected to produce news. Press conferences should be reserved for major announcements by your party. If the topic does not provide substantially newsworthy content, you probably should not be holding a press conference – otherwise, the media will probably ignore your future press conferences as not likely to produce information worth covering.

There are several critical elements to a successful news conference beyond simply producing news. You must make it appealing for reporters

to cover it. Do you have a suitable location? Is it relatively easy for people to reach? Consider holding your press conference at a location that reinforces your message and provides a good visual for television cameras. For example, schools, factories and markets offer very good visuals and can be linked to just about any issue: taxes, jobs, trade, and the environment. To enhance the draw of your news conference, you can also feature prominent or sympathetic people at your event. This could be the head of one of your coalition partners, a businessman affected by the issue you wish to feature, a government official sympathetic to your cause, a celebrity, or simply an average family affected by the issue you are highlighting. However, be sure that anyone featured at a press conference you are hosting is a suitable spokesman and knows to stay on message. If the people involved in the press conference are not adequately prepared, do not hold the press conference! The results of putting unprepared people in front of inquisitive reporters can be disastrous from a public relations standpoint.

And, as has been mentioned before, make sure your conference is held at a convenient time and place for the members of the media, have plenty of supporting materials ready to hand out, and have your press release about the news conference already written and available on-site.

The purpose of a news conference is not to release information; it is to generate positive news coverage of your political party. To do that, you need to have reporters there. To ensure a good turnout, be sure to send out a “media advisory” well in advance of your event. A media advisory is a form of press release which is used to announce an upcoming event. A media advisory will provide members of the press with the basic information on time and location of the event – perhaps even mentioning prominent guests who will appear – but it does not give out all of the details concerning what will take place at the event. That is the purpose of the press release. Once the media advisory has been issued, place follow-up telephone calls directly to reporters to ensure that they received it and are aware of the event. On the day before the event (or in the morning if it is an afternoon event) place a second round of calls to remind the press corps of your conference and ask who will be attending. Even some who will not be able to attend may be interested in writing a story about it (presumably, using your press release), and this is your opportunity to encourage him or her to do so.

Media events – A media event is very similar to a press conference, though its focus is on an activity instead of an announcement. For example, the opening of a political party’s headquarters would be a press event, as would having the party leaders gather on election day to cast their ballots at the same time. However, just as people are wary of overt political messages directed at them, your media events have a greater impact the less they seem that they were planned for that purpose! For

NOTES

example, you could send a number of your elected officials or candidates to volunteer at a local school to demonstrate the inability of the current educational system to prepare students to participate in the global economy after graduation. Or you could sponsor a community health screening in an under-served community to highlight the disparities in access to health care that your platform addresses.

In many ways, media events are theater, but they are designed to send very serious messages. It is easy to stand at a podium and announce that you will solve problems; it takes more effort to demonstrate your willingness to take a hands-on approach – and for that reason, media events are more newsworthy than simple press conferences.

Interviews, actualities, and media availabilities – You should always be looking for good interview opportunities. This means scheduling party leaders, officeholders, candidates, and official spokespersons for one-on-one interviews with reporters, as well as being scheduled on local public affairs programs or call-in talk shows.

One simple way to increase your visibility is to offer up party members for “media availabilities.” Reporters try to balance their stories by incorporating dissenting viewpoints and try to provide perspective by seeking comment from independent authorities. You may not like this practice when you see your critics appearing in stories about your news conferences, but it is not just professionalism on the part of journalists, it is an opportunity for you. As other events make news, you send out a “notice of media availability” to your press list naming one to three individuals associated with your party who are willing to speak on the record about a topic. Be sure to provide their direct contact information. And make sure they are actually available to be reached by media at the expected time! The individuals need not always be party leaders; you can also offer credible experts from within your rank and file. For example, after a city releases its crime statistics, you could offer a police officer or prosecutor from your party to provide comment. In another example, as other parties release their electoral messages, your party leader will want to be quoted as responding. There is no guarantee that you will ever be contacted, but given the ease of sending out a notice via e-mail and fax and knowing that reporters often work on short deadlines, it is definitely worth the effort. As an added benefit, the press corps, seeing your willingness to offer up experts to discuss policy issues, will come to perceive your party as being serious about applying policy solutions to society’s problems.

Another way to get included in a radio story is to provide an “actuality,” which is quite convenient to do. When you listen to a radio news broadcast and the announcer cuts away to the voice of a candidate, an expert in the field, or a man on the scene in another city, that’s usually a radio actuality. An actuality is a voice recording made in advance of

a broadcast so that listeners can actually hear the newsmaker on the news program. Radio stations love to use them because it makes their broadcasts more real, and it breaks up the monotony of listening to only the announcer's voice. There are two basic ways to provide a radio station with an actuality. The first is simply to call up the station, ask for the news director, and offer your comment. The other way is to offer the station a recording of a message, something that can easily be done by posting it on your website and sending a link to your radio list.

Editorials, guest columns, and letters to the editor – Occasionally a newspaper will agree to print an opinion piece or guest column from you or one of your experts on its editorial page. In most instances you will have to initiate the placement of such columns. Find out what the paper's policy is on such pieces and make sure you conform to the paper's specifications, that is, don't write 1,000 words if the paper wants only 500 words. Many of the same style guidelines for press releases apply to good opinion pieces, especially the importance of opening with a strong, clear statement.

As with all elements of your earned media campaign, you should employ your coalition partners. Newspapers sometimes hesitate to print the views of one political party in an effort to appear unbiased. However, those newspapers might be more than willing to publish the same views if they were voiced by a civic leader such as the head of a business association!

Editorials are a useful way for many of those stakeholders who support you to get their views out to the public. These editorials by third party experts can help the public trust your message. Encourage business leaders, economists, and others to write articles about the benefits and merits of your economic platform and help them get these articles placed in the papers.

Letters to the editor are a great way to defend or promote a party position, or to critique the views of other parties. The letters to the editor section is one of the most highly read sections of any newspaper. Check with any newspapers you wish to contact to determine what format they prefer for these letters (e.g., any length limitations, deadlines, and information they require about the authors). These letters provide a great way to involve rank-and-file members in your communications strategy.

In the end, earned media must be earned. You should train yourself and your party leaders to be constantly aware of media opportunities. There are no limits to your creativity.

If you are at an event and see a television camera or a radio reporter, you should approach those media representatives because there is no guarantee that they will come to you, and given the cost of paid advertising on television, the opportunity is too great to let slip by.

If you are making an announcement, you can make it a local story

NOTES

by simultaneously announcing it in several cities through different party leaders. It will increase your coverage, make the message accessible to many more reporters, provide a local news angle, and amplify its importance.

Alternatively, you can “roll out” your platform by unveiling it piece-by-piece, thus creating more opportunities over time.

Positive media coverage is no accident. Political campaign managers that become skilled at creating their own media opportunities have mastered a talent that money cannot buy.

Paid Media

In most developed countries, political parties and individual candidates purchase their advertising directly – be it on billboards, radio ads, or television ads. Thus, such efforts are termed “paid media.”

Since money for political parties and campaigns is generally much harder to come by in developing countries and nascent democracies, we have chosen not to spend much time on this subject in this handbook.

Suffice to say that if you have enough money to purchase significant television or radio advertisement time for your party or candidate(s), you probably can also afford to hire a media consultant to help you discern the best strategy for getting your message out.

Conclusion

The ability to communicate your party’s well-crafted message – whether on economic policy or any other subject area – begins with self-examination of the party’s core values. Then, the party works with external partners and public feedback to develop the specific policy proposals that become your party platform and then to build a winning coalition. The process should be as inclusive as possible so long as your party maintains its distinct identity. Remember that your party’s platform is a living entity. It is not a set of ideas written on paper; it is a set of ideas drawn from the beliefs of the party members who own it, who internalize it, and who are your country’s future.

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NOTES



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