

How to Know Your Political Landscape

It is very helpful to know the "political landscape" of the area if you want to be as effective as possible as an active citizen. Set out below are questions you should try to answer over time to gain an understanding of your area, what are and are not important issues in the area, what strategies and tactics would work best in the area, and where your particular area of concern fits into the picture.

1. **Geographical** What are the boundaries of the local federal and provincial ridings? What are the major population/industrial centres?
2. **The People** What are the chief industries in the area? How are they doing? What is the unemployment rate? What is the age breakdown of the area? Are there a lot of seniors? What is the population of various ethnic groups? What is the income distribution?
3. **What are the major issues on the area's political agenda?** Are there long-term problems? Where do the politicians stand on the issues, and what are they really doing about the problems facing the community?
4. **Politician Profiles** It is important to know about the people you are trying to influence so that you can know where they are coming from? Listed below are some of the things it would be good to know:
 - a) Education - Where did they go to school?
 - b) Residence - Where do they live?
 - c) Profession - Where have they worked? What do they and their family own?
 - d) Political History - How long have they been in office? By what margins have they won their past elections? What previous posts, elected or appointed, have they held? Do they belong to a political club, and if so, which one?
 - e) Record - What has their voting record been like over the past few years on key issues? What issues are the ones that they care about most?
 - f) Money - Who are the main contributors to these politician's campaigns?
 - g) Influence - Who do these politicians listen to?
 - h) Church/Social - What church, social/civic organizations do they belong to?
5. **Organization Profiles**

List all of the organizations which you or your group could possibly work with on any issue. Obtain the following information on each of the organizations:

 - a) Group contact information - name, address, key contact person, phone, fax and email and Internet site.
 - b) Type of group - e.g. Church, Union, Senior, Community, Political, Civic, etc.
 - c) Issue(s) - Which issues you could work on with the group.
 - d) Group size - How many members? Do they have staff? Do they have an office?
 - e) Group orientation - What is their main purpose? What types of issues do they work on? What methods/tactics do they use (e.g. lobbying, letter-writing, meetings, demonstrations)?
 - f) Group effectiveness - What has their impact been in the areas they work? How are they viewed by the politicians and the public?

Then try to look into some of the not-so-obvious organizations, they are the ones that we should also try to reach. One way to start is to look in the yellow pages phone book under the categories of "organizations", "associations" and "civic groups." The local government may publish a guide to local organizations, and also check with the Chamber of Commerce. In general, the main categories will be as follows:

- a) Seniors - either there are local senior centres, or nutrition programs; sometimes there are Gray Panthers, or local chapters of retired persons associations.

- b) Church - most churches of all denominations have some sort of social action committee; contact the local active minister, s/he should know; some areas have a Council of Churches which is made up of the local ministers.
- c) Unions - unions usually have locals, which are part of larger national organizations; they are also organized on the city-wide level, usually called the central labour council; most unions also have a province-wide body.
- d) Community Groups/Civic Associations of various types - usually focussed on very local problems/issues; often organized around blocks or neighbourhoods; many are primarily housing groups with government funding for that purpose.
- e) Political Clubs - they do exist, and we should know what they do; who is the local rep. from the club? do they like him? what do they do?
- f) Fraternal - Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus; usually meet weekly with a speaker each week; not very active politically as an organization but there might be some interested members.

6. Local Political Activities

One of the best ways to find out what's happening in a city/town is to attend the local government meetings. You should find out when and where they occur. For example, the meetings of the following groups:

- a) The City Council
- b) The various utility boards
- c) The Planning Board
- d) Local, provincial and federal politician office hours and constituency meeting times and locations

Many times, these events provide opportunities for the public to make statements. Take advantage of it.

7. Media Outlet Profiles

In general, you should scan each of the local daily and weekly newspapers to keep abreast of what is happening. Also, try to catch the local TV news and radio news. To be able to efficiently and effectively distribute information to the local media you should know the following:

- a) Newspapers
 - ___ the editors - editorial page/features/business
 - ___ the writers - local news/issue specialists/Québec City bureau
 - ___ publisher - who owns the paper?
- b) Radio
 - ___ Which is the most popular?
 - ___ Is there a CBC or CKO Network station?
 - ___ Do they have talk shows? Who is the host? When are they on?
 - ___ News editors.
 - ___ News writers/ reporters/ provincial capital reporters
- c) Television
 - ___ What are the local stations?
 - ___ Who are the General Managers?
 - ___ Who are the News Directors?
 - ___ Do they have talk shows? Who is the host? When are they on?

8. Create a database of the political landscape

You should create a file with all of the names/addresses/ phone numbers you collect. Set it up in two ways: 1. on a card file (Rolodex) or in a notebook so you can keep a record of contact; 2. on a mailing label list, preferably on computer so updates can be made easily. To collect this information:

1. Check the yellow pages phone book
2. Call the groups/offices/newspapers/stations
3. Try to get an initial contact at each group/office/newspaper/station