



How to  
**RUN AND REPRESENT  
A PARTY**



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A Capacity-Building Handbook  
for Social Democrats

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# 1. RUNNING A PARTY

## INTRODUCTION

Social Democratic parties aim to change society in correspondence with the ideology. The bases for the parties are democratic grass roots movements and so their organizational focus is on developing strong local structures with active members. In a democracy, political parties play a specific role in the foundation of a broader civil society. It is important both for the parties themselves and for other civil society groups to understand this. Political parties, especially those in power, are often seen to represent the Cabinet and its politics but not the people on the ground. It is therefore fundamental for a Social Democratic Party to build truly democratic structures and to ensure that these work correctly, democratically and inclusively.

Political parties are the only bodies that 1) take part in law-making and other decisions that influence all citizens, and 2) can be held accountable for their decisions and be removed from power by the citizens in free and fair democratic elections.

There is an overall tendency in the world for parties to become election machineries rather than popular movements, meaning members and supporters are only active when election campaigning starts. In between elections their opinions reach the party representatives mainly through opinion polls and focus groups. This phenomenon needs to be evaluated carefully.

Modern technology (IT) has created a new world where information has become much more accessible. The Internet is often used for quick mobilization of interest groups for campaigns. Furthermore, politicians have gained another platform to communicate with voters. The down side is that politicians often have to sacrifice communicating with the people in order to spend more time responding to lobbyists and other pressure groups with specific agendas. We need to be aware of this, and see the opportunities IT opens for us as politicians to get our messages across, and to communicate and be nearer our voters rather than as a hinder in our work.

Information Technology has and will change politics and political parties. But this is still very much a challenge limited in large part to the developed world. It is important to remember that very few people in developing countries have wide access to the Internet and direct contact is by far the most efficient way to meet people.

There are many common challenges for Social Democratic parties all over the world and we can learn a lot from each other's experiences and practices. This manual deals with how

a Social Democratic party can build organizational and political capacity to be a strong democratic party with active members and inclusive structures and procedures. This requires functioning and well-defined formal organizational structures and a free and open climate for people to participate.

The manual focuses primarily on two party bodies: the branch – the party’s foundation and the home of every party member – and the elected representatives in the local government.

Political parties elect representatives for government bodies at the different levels that correspond to each country’s specific government structure – for example, parliament, province, region, local municipality, etc. For this reason, you will find that there may be differences in the party structures in your country. This manual presents models which are common but if you do not recognize your party’s model then you must translate the levels you have and explain why your party is organized the way it is.

A party’s strength to a large extent depends on how democratic it is and how well its organization functions. A democratic party with self-confidence and strength encourages debate, promotes members’ active participation, and encourages criticism and self-criticism. All progressive parties should strive to develop internal democracy. Most do but some are more successful than others.

We will start with an example that shows how a party can be structured from top to bottom. Then we will look specifically at the local level, where the party works directly with the people in the communities. Your party may have more or fewer levels and so your pyramid may look different, but the main idea is to build democracy from the bottom up and ensure that every level is built up from the levels below. You will find that at every level the composition of committees and procedures looks very much the same.



## 2. PARTY CONSTITUTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

### **THE PARTY CONSTITUTION**

The Party's constitution serves as the law of the party's structures and internal procedures.

The constitution can be changed by the National Conference which is the party's highest decision-making body. In the Party's constitution one will find the party's ideological foundation, its values and principles. The constitution also states the procedures for election of officials and leadership as well as how members can disqualify themselves or be expelled from the party.

### **NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

The national conference is the party's highest decision-making body. It determines the broad policies and the party's direction. The national conference also elects the national leadership. The delegates at the conference are selected by lower structures or directly by the members of the party. The national conferences are often only held every couple of years, most commonly every two to five years.

### **NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC)**

The National Executive committee is the party's highest decision making body between the national conferences. The NEC can set policy and programs in line with what the national conference has decided. The NEC consists of the party's key officials: the chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary general, deputy secretary general and treasurer. There are also a number of elected members which can differ from party to party but usually represent the party's different regions. Often the chairpersons of the party's youth and women's leagues sit on the NEC.

In some countries where the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions are in alliance, the unions will also be represented.

### **NATIONAL WORKING COMMITTEE (NWC)**

The NEC can within itself elect a smaller working committee to take care of the day to day management of the party. The NWC meets in between the NEC meetings in some parties. Other parties elect an executive board directly at the national conference.



## **NATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL (NGC)**

If it is necessary to consult the party – between National Conferences - to review policy and programs and make important decisions on new directions, the party can call a National General Council. The composition is similar to a national conference but is usually shorter in duration with only a few issues on the agenda.

## **PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES**

The party's provincial structure functions similarly to the party's national structure. The provinces hold provincial conferences every couple of years where policies and programs are debated, a new provincial executive committee is elected, and reports are received. The local branches are directly represented at the conference.

## **PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (PEC)**

The Provincial Executive Committee (PEC) is made up of the provincial chairperson, deputy chairperson, provincial secretary, deputy secretary, provincial treasurer and a number of additional members.

## **PROVINCIAL WORKING COMMITTEE (PWC)**

The PEC elects a smaller working committee to handle the party's day-to-day management. This is known as the Provincial Working Committee (PWC). As at the, national level, the officials plus the Chairperson of the Youth and Women's Leagues and a number of elected members form the PWC.

## **REGIONAL CONFERENCES**

A second level in the party called the party province, or in some countries the party district, is made up of smaller geographical areas which we call regions.

Like national and provincial levels, the regions also have structures and democratic procedures. A regional conference is held every other year or so to discuss regional programs and to elect a regional executive.

## **REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (REC)**

A regional executive committee is elected with the regional chairperson, deputy regional chairperson, secretary, deputy secretary, treasurer and a number of additional members. The REC is accountable to the PEC and its powers are delegated by the PEC.

## **REGIONAL WORKING COMMITTEE (RWC)**

The REC elects a smaller working committee to do the party's day-to-day management. It consists of the officials, the chairpersons and secretaries of Women and Youth leagues plus a number of other elected members.

## **BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (BEC)**

The Branch is the party's base structure and every party member must belong to a Branch. A number of people form a Branch. Usually the party sets an upper limit for the size of a Branch and forms a new Branch once that number is exceeded. The Branch holds a general meeting, usually every year, where members directly elect the Branch Executive Committee as well as other leaders and officials. We will deal with the Branch and its executive in detail.

## ***POWER IS A GOOD THING***

*Power is important for anyone wishing to right the wrongs of society. The sharing of power and responsibility equally between men and women is a matter of justice and democracy. A decision taken by men alone should be considered a non-decision and declared legally invalid.*

*Achieving gender equality is a joint task that demands the sharing of power between men and women. Half of the power in all decision-making bodies must be assumed by women.*

*Three specific actions can help achieve a democratic balance of power:*

- *make sure there are women in the election committee*
- *institute a rule under which there are always two lists: one headed by a man and one by a woman*
- *stipulate central responsibility for establishing an equal distribution of lists headed by both men and women*

Read more in The Power Handbook: <http://www.socialdemokraterna.se/Webben-for-alla/S-kvinnor/S-kvinnor/In-English1/The-Power-Handbook1/>



### 3. DEMOCRACY IN A PARTY

The following principles guide the development of internal democracy in our party.

#### **ELECTED LEADERSHIP**

Leadership – at all levels – must be elected regularly. The members must also have the right to recall any leader for disciplinary reasons between the elections.

#### **COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

Elected leaders are expected to operate as a collective. For example, in a Branch Executive Committee (BEC) all members are responsible for ensuring that decisions are implemented. Collective leadership has the advantage that you share skills, experiences and knowledge, all of which facilitate the development of new leaders.

#### **CONSULTATION**

The party members must be involved in the political processes with opportunities to make decisions, receive feedback, be consulted and participate in the development of programs.

#### **PARTY DISCIPLINE**

A party decision on an issue should be preceded by information, debates and consultations so that members have a say. When a majority decision has been made by a party structure, at whichever level, then that is the party's formal view. All members must abide by democratically taken decisions. Furthermore, decisions made by higher structures are binding on lower structures. A party must act coherently for many reasons. Every member must understand that this entails supporting and being part of a party where the majority sometimes makes decisions that individual members do not agree with.

#### **RESPONSIBLE LEADERS AND MEMBERS**

It is voluntary to become a party member, to stand for office and become an elected leader. Whether a member or a leader, one must take rights and responsibilities seriously. Leaders must understand that they are representatives and that they are not speaking for themselves as individuals. Leaders must be in touch with members and encourage them to communicate and express their views freely. Dedication and loyalty to the party can go

hand in hand with free, independent thinking and criticism. Decisions, popular or otherwise, must always be explained to membership.

## **BALANCE**

A party must find a balance that encourages free debate and criticism but at the same time maintains good party discipline. Members and leaders must respect the party's organizational code of conduct. This can only happen if infractions are followed up by a disciplinary committee.



## 4. PARTY LEVELS AND RELEVANT STRUCTURES

This section deals with the Party's organization and structure.

### **LOCAL - MEMBERS - BRANCH**

We start at the base because the local party structure is the most important; it is the party's root and the foundation. The stronger this foundation, the stronger the party as a whole is.

In any area a certain number of members can form a local party structure called a Branch.

The number of members in a Branch can vary, often consisting of between 50 and 1 000 members, sometimes more. The Branch formulates and proposes policies to higher levels. It also holds higher structures in the party to account. The Branch is the party's most important body. Branch members are the party's ear to the ground and also the best 'ambassadors' for the party since they are able to talk directly to people in the communities.

The key task for a Branch is to recruit members and activate them. The members' skills, energy and political insights are what form and develop the party's politics and organization. A Branch with active members and many activities that reach out to society are a party's best assets.

This manual focuses on the building of the Branch. Provided within are guidelines on setting up and running structures and meetings and tips on how a Branch can work in its community.

### **BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Party's highest decision making body at any level is the Annual General Meeting (AGM) where representatives from lower structures elect Executive Committees. At local level AGMs, the members elect the Branch Executive Committee (BEC) which consists of a number of portfolios.

The BEC is elected at the AGM and consists of a chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary, deputy secretary, treasurer and between three and ten additional members. The

most common mandate period for BEC members is one or two years, but this varies from country to country. In some countries, BEC members are elected every five years. The role of the Branch Executive Committee is to build, lead and guide the Branch. People volunteer to join a party and it is not always easy to find people that are willing to take on tasks that can sometimes be both time-consuming and exposed. We must welcome the involvement of members and support those who take on these responsibilities. Once done, though, members have the right and responsibility to hold elected leaders accountable for their work. It is an honor to be elected to represent the party membership. It is also a sign of trust and any office bearer must take the leadership role seriously. If leaders fail to fulfill their tasks, they must be held accountable.

The roles, responsibilities and powers of the BEC and its members should always be spelled out in the party constitution. You need to check your party constitution and read what it states on BECs.

The BEC makes decisions collectively, just like a Cabinet in Government. Tasks are performed by different portfolios and each office bearer has the responsibility to see that it is carried out in a way that can be accounted for. Openness, trust, respect and willingness to compromise between the BEC members are key characteristics of an effective committee.

The Branch is the lowest structure in the Party but the most important. Candidates for the BEC should be clear about what it implies to be a local party leader – both in relation to members and citizens, and in relation to other party structures. It is of course a great opportunity to make the party strong and to help it develop, but there are no short-cuts to these achievements.

Here is a short list of tasks for BEC-members:

- Build strong Branches – support and develop activists in the Branch.
- Initiate and perform Branch strategic planning and action programs.
- Assess the Branch's strengths and weaknesses.
- Be the Party's face and build partnerships with other groups in civil society as well as with business when it is in our interest.
- Have good knowledge and understanding of the dynamics in the community.
- Be well-read about general politics and society, its functions and dynamics.
- Be well-informed about the party: its history, developments and politics.
- Keep records of members.
- Collect the membership fee.

When your party is in power, the Branch is an important channel through which THE party and the general public can communicate. The Branch can inform and explain the government's policies and programs and it can pick up what people think about the government's performance and make sure the feed-back reaches relevant people.

## **BRANCH MEETINGS**

The most common method to interact with the members is the Branch meeting. In many parties today, Branch meetings have difficulties in attracting members. The reasons are many: members no longer feel that they have a real influence over party policy-making; people are too occupied with other activities; meetings clash with popular TV shows; etc. It is a key challenge for all political parties to find ways to communicate and interact in a modern world where there is so much competition for people's time and interest.

Still, it is necessary to hold Branch meetings and the meeting principles that apply to the Branch meeting apply to all levels of the organization.

Here are some tips for Branch meetings:

### **When and where**

Branch meetings should be organized and held on a regular day and time to facilitate member attendance, for example the first Wednesday in every month between 7 and 9 p.m. It is preferable that meetings be held in same venue every time.

### **Agendas**

Branch meetings must be prepared properly, have clear agendas and expected outcomes. The agenda is presented and agreed upon at the beginning of the meeting. A typical branch meeting can look like this:

1. Opening and welcome.  
In the beginning of the meeting the Chairperson should ask if there are any new members who are attending for the first time, ask them to introduce themselves and welcome them.
2. Apologies
3. Political input and discussion on topical issues
4. Brief reports from meetings at other levels of the party
5. Report on issues from Local Municipal (at least quarterly)
6. Report on Program of Action from Sub-Committees
7. Discussion on the way forward
8. Closure

## **Focus**

Chairing is the most challenging task in a meeting. To chair is to be responsible for ensuring that the agenda is followed, that debates focus on the issue - and not on a thousand other matters – and to make sure contributions are accurate, short, and to the point. To chair a meeting is not simply to pass the word around but to actively steer the members through a two-hour journey in a fair and efficient way. Party activists love to talk; they are often eloquent and can get carried away. A chair must also be sensitive to the potential for an individual or a small group to dominate the meeting, thus hindering others from speaking or disrupting the meeting. Chairing skills can be learned and there are good guidelines. A meeting that is focused and controlled stands a greater chance of being interesting and dynamic. Boring procedural matters have no place in a member meeting; those matters are to be handled in the BEC meetings.

## **BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The BEC (Branch Executive Committee) is the Branch's leadership and management. At the BEC meetings, the administrative and financial reports are presented, assessment of programs takes place and strategic discussions are held. BEC meetings should take place at least once a month.

A typical BEC agenda can look like this:

1. Welcome
2. Attendance and apologies
3. Minutes of previous meetings
4. Matters arising from the minutes
5. Secretary's report: dealing with all correspondence
6. Discussion on key political issues
7. Major program reports - the Branch's key events and programs
8. Portfolio reports
9. Treasurer's report
10. Planning for next Branch meeting

Reports should be followed by a discussion focusing on assessment and future strategy. This includes setting deadlines as well as allocating tasks and resources. Sometimes it may be necessary for the BEC to schedule a one-day workshop to plan and discuss strategies in more detail. In such cases, members who are part of relevant sub-committees must be invited so the BEC gets input from them. A subcommittee is a group of elected members who focus on a particular policy sector, such as housing.



The branch's finances are crucial and the Treasurer should report at least once a month to the BEC according to a specific budget. It should always include:

- funds available in the account
- income generated in that month
- total expenditure for that month
- remaining balance

Financial expenditure is best monitored by looking at the approved budget for each item in relation to a running total for the same item in order to see how much has been spent so far in the fiscal year.

The BEC meeting also plans the next Branch meeting, which involves setting agenda items and deciding on reports, speakers, etc. for that meeting.

### **THE BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)**

Most party constitutions stipulate that the Branch must hold a member meeting once a year called an Annual General Meeting (AGM).

#### **The purpose of an AGM**

The Branch AGM (which has many different names) is the Branch's highest decision-making body. This is where members elect leadership. The Branch AGM also hears and adopts organizational reports from the Branch Chair, Secretary and Organizing Secretary and a Financial Report from the Treasurer. The party constitution stipulates that you must have half of the Branch members plus one in order to elect BEC members or approve any reports. This can be difficult to achieve and AGMs must therefore be well publicized and organized far in advance.

#### **Agenda for the AGM**

An agenda for the Annual General Meeting is fairly standard:

1. Welcome and opening – Chairperson
2. Report of branch activities for the past year – Secretary
3. Financial report – Treasurer
4. Ward Councilor Report
5. Discussion on reports
6. Guest speaker – Current Politics

7. Questions
8. Elections – nominations and voting
9. Break with refreshments
10. Cultural item
11. Announcement of new executive
12. Brief input from new chairperson
13. Closure and vote of thanks

## **REPORTS**

Reports should be presented in a simple and clear way.

The Secretary's Report of Branch Activities should give an overview of the branch's work with a bit of detail about such issues as:

- the number of members
- the number of meetings held
- key campaigns
- election results (if there were elections in the area)
  
- any interaction with local government, the party caucus group and party representatives
- the party's participation in community issues
- the work of sub-committees
- the party's participation in other forums – attendance at conferences, for example.

The Treasurer's Financial Report also should be simple and clear in dealing with such issues as:

- overall income
- overall expenditure
- sources of income

- targets of expenditure and expenditure levels
- a balance of the branch's money and where the balances are
- future prospects for fundraising.

## **SYSTEM FOR ELECTION OF A BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

There is a specific process involved in electing Branch Executive Committee officials.

Prepare the election by making sure there are slips of paper if there is to be a secret ballot. Recruit volunteers and make sure there is an election officer from a higher party structure, such as the region or the province. Ensure there is a board or newsprint to write on and pens to write with.

The procedure for voting for BEC officials is straightforward:

1. Ask for nominations for one position at a time. Start with the portfolios: chair, deputy chair, secretary, deputy secretary, treasurer. This should be the order of voting.
2. As soon as a person has been nominated ask for a second on the nomination.
3. Ask the nominated person if she/he accepts the nomination. If they accept, and there is a second on the nomination, write the person's name on the board.
4. Vote for that portfolio before moving to the next. This enables a person, for example, that stands for chair and doesn't make it to be available to be nominated again for deputy chairperson.
5. Hand out a paper slip to each delegate. If there is more than one nomination for a position, they must write their choice on the paper, fold it and hand it in. If people cannot write their selection, volunteers may assist them.
6. Collect the ballots in a ballot box; it can be a simple cardboard box. Do this in front of everyone.
7. The counting of votes must take place in front of everyone. Separate the votes in different piles according to the names and count the votes. Ask the person who was elected to come to the front.
8. Move on to the next position on your BEC and follow the same process.

The procedure for voting for additional members of the BEC is similar:

1. Work out the number of additional members needed, for example six members.

2. Follow the same process for nominations as for the officials and get a list of names. Make sure members have the opportunity to nominate all those they want to. Write the names on the board.
3. During the voting process, delegates choose the additional members by writing down all the names of the people they are voting for on a slip of paper. They can vote for all additional members or less.
4. Collect the ballots and let people have a break. Meanwhile, use the volunteers to make a newsprint with all the names in blocks. Put it on a table with the counters around it. Split the ballots into piles and give one to each counter. Each counter opens a ballot paper and makes a mark next to the name on the newsprint. Make the marks in groups of five so they are easy to add up.
5. The election officer totals the number of marks next to each name. The six with the most votes are announced as additional members.
6. If two people have the same number of votes for the last position, and you have not elected the full number of people according to the constitution, ask the house if you can have an additional member since this will avoid conflict.

### **THE BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S ROLES AND TASKS**

The most important task of the BEC is to provide political and organizational leadership to the Branch. This is accomplished by:

- staying in touch with on-going political developments in the country
- discussing and defining the party's strategy in relation to these issues
- making strategic plans for the Branch - analyzing needs and priorities
- developing action plans with clear deadlines to achieve aims
- developing a strong activist core in the branch
- leading sub-committees and involving members in these sub-committees
- identifying stake-holders in the community and approaching them in a structured way
- raising the party's profile in the community
- being a visible party representative.

### **CONDUCT OF BEC MEMBERS**

Leaders are elected because members trust them. Leaders can have many qualities and different leaders with different qualities can complement one another well. That is why a

BEC must work to make decisions as a collective. Each BEC member has specific tasks according to their portfolio and they have to carry them out in a disciplined and accountable manner so that the whole BEC can take responsibility for and be part of all decisions made. A good leader empowers people, supports their growth, and never puts his/her interests ahead of the party's or the community's interests.

The conduct of BEC members should set the standards of conduct for all branch members by:

- treating all people with respect
- being honest and uncorrupt
- being punctual and reliable
- being open to criticism and responding to it in a constructive way
- respecting leadership without fear to question
- encouraging participation in party activities
- sharing information and expertise and passing on skills to others
- being well-informed about the local area and any local problems that need addressing
- being knowledgeable about the party's policies and programs and able to explain them to residents
- work hard to build the party.

BEC members should also be responsible and show good conduct by:

- remaining sober at party meetings or community events
- avoiding faction-building and conflicts
- handling the party's money and other resources honestly and with great care
- being reliable and always notifying if there is a change of plans
- understanding and respecting the idea that party support is voluntary and can disappear if not taken care of
- welcome any member who wants to contribute.

## **PORTFOLIO OFFICIALS**

The Branch AGM directly elects the BEC officials. The other portfolio holders are usually elected as additional members and the BEC can allocate their portfolios after election. Portfolios should be similar to the branch sub-committees; for example, there could be a media person who heads the media subcommittee.

## **BEC OFFICIALS' TASKS**

The BEC officials' tasks are as follows:

### Chairperson:

- to convene and chair all BEC and Branch meetings
- to draw up the agenda for BEC and Branch meetings with the secretary
- together with the treasurer, to take responsibility for the branch's money
- to build a strong and united branch and to deal with conflict, disciplinary issues and problems in the branch
- to plan, strategize and monitor the party's progress
- to represent the party in other structures and at a public level
- the deputy chair has the same role when the chair is not available. The deputy chair should have some specific responsibilities such as chairing a sub- committee on campaigns.

### Secretary:

- to co-ordinate the implementation of the Branch program of action
- to ensure that all BEC sub-committees are working, and to monitor them
- to send out meeting invitations and circulars
- to keep minutes of meetings
- to draw up meeting agendas together with the Chairperson
- to deal with correspondence and respond to invitations
- to write Branch reports and receive reports from higher party structures
- to remind people of their tasks between meetings

- to communicate with constituency, organizations and stakeholders

Treasurer:

- to open a Branch bank account
- to bank and record all revenues and expenses
- to collect and safely store all receipts and invoices
- to draw up financial reports or assist a bookkeeper to do so
- to look after and keep records of all Branch assets



## 5. RECRUITING MEMBERS AND KEEPING THEM ACTIVE

### MEMBERSHIP SYSTEMS

Certain membership criteria must be set up in the party constitution, such as minimum age. The membership should be linked to the Branch and be renewed every year.

If possible – and politically safe - it is good to have a national computerized membership database.

Recruiting members is a main task for any party and members should be trained and equipped for this task. The party at national level should ensure that there is a coherent system for recruitment. There should be prepared packs that include application forms, membership slips, procedural information for recruiters and any other information about party membership. Key information includes how the party functions and what membership means in terms of rights and responsibilities. Some parties have oaths for their members to make - a declaration that they understand and will follow the rules and regulations of the party.

One BEC member from each Branch should be assigned the task of membership officer. He or she is responsible for setting up a recruitment team which in turn will be tasked to work out a strategy. Every Branch must keep a detailed record of their membership so it can be followed up every year. Membership fees must be deposited into the party's bank account. Usually this is the party's main account but there are many different procedures for how the total membership fee is allocated to the different levels of the party structure.

The Branch should in all cases still have its own separate bank account for the Branch's finances and at least two people in conjunction are needed for signature.

When new members have been recruited, the BEC must take the responsibility to introduce them and induct them into the Branch's activities as soon as possible. It is vital that the BEC listen to their motivations for becoming members, gain clarity on what new members expect and ask what kind of work new members would like to be involved in. They are much more likely to remain members if they are positively welcomed and given a meaningful task. It demonstrates that the party needs them and views them as valuable and useful.



## **RECRUITMENT: STRATEGY AND PLAN**

Every political party wants to grow. For any individual who wants to contribute to the development of society in a certain direction, becoming a member of a party should be the best option. Party membership should give a person a more direct opportunity to influence what decisions are made than that given by the simple right to vote for a predetermined program.

A party becomes stronger and its policies more legitimate when its membership is a reflection of the society as a whole. When the Branch recruits new members it should have a strategy for recruitment that takes this aim into account.

Start by looking at your Branch's membership structure: what are the weaknesses – maybe this is a Branch dominated by pensioners? How do we reach other groups such as families with children for instance? How do we reach professionals?

The other crucial part of the recruitment strategy is the party's message. The Branch needs to decide on a short message to potential members answering one question – why should they join your party?

## **RECRUITMENT METHODS**

Many members need to be involved in the recruitment of new members. One method is to set up a task team, comprised of at least five people or more, that designs a recruitment plan and implements it. This plan should encourage current members to recruit new members. Recruiters need to be well trained as “marketers” of the party. They should be trained to answer the questions that people are likely to ask. They also need to be well equipped with resources like pamphlets and programs.

Recruiting members is an ongoing activity in the party. But there can also be special occasions with a focus on recruitment, such as “drives” or “blitzes.” Door-to-door work, election campaigns and public events are opportunities that should be used to recruit members. Other methods include information tables set up in public spaces and at events. Leaders can be present, walking around and making contact with people. If you have something to hand out like a pamphlet, direct contact becomes easier and more natural. More conventional methods include sending letters or e-mails. Remember that whichever method is used for recruiting, it needs to be well planned and structured to facilitate follow up.

## **KEEPING MEMBERS ACTIVE**

Many branches lose members as fast as they recruit them. This is a common problem for most parties. Branches should take a look at how they function and what kind of activities they offer new members. Are there long boring meetings with one person talking forever? Are there a few people doing everything – and deciding most things? Are the members seldom appreciated or seen? Are there few activities and projects for new members to join? If you answer yes to many of those questions, it is time to renew your Branch's activities –

or you will never get new members. People have a lot of choices on how to spend their time and energy. The Branch is competing and must be attractive.

Membership in the party must provide value beyond mere voting. We know that members are motivated when they feel valued by the party, that their contribution is important. Members want to learn about – and work with – issues that interest them. They want to be part of a team, to belong and engage in social activities with others in the party.

A Branch should work hard to keep its members. Certain strategies that can achieve this goal:

- Conduct an introductory workshop for all new members so they understand your party and can ask all the questions they have.
- Start every meeting with a welcome to new members.
- Establish training and development as a regular part of the Branch's work. Even a simple session at regular meetings can benefit everyone – especially new members.
- Encourage projects and make sure new members are involved. Give them tasks and team them up with experienced members.
- Thank people for work they do and have fun in your Branch. Organize parties or picnics or outings where members can socialize and get to know each other.
- Talk to new members and get to know them. It is imperative that leadership take part in this.



## 6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

One important task for the Branch is to organize education programs for the members and for the community. The goal is to empower people to become active contributors to the process of change in the community. Internal education in the party helps members to understand and contribute to the party's work. Education programs can benefit your Branch by:

- providing members with an introduction to party ideology, policies and programs
- teaching members skills that enable them to do their tasks better
- training members to analyze skillfully in order to better understand their problems and challenges
- enabling members to understand how to participate in debates, discussions and decision-making
- giving members and leaders organizational skills, such as planning, chairing, taking minutes, running a sub-committee etc.

There are many ways that a Branch can work in the broader community:

- make people aware of their legal rights; domestic workers, for example, could benefit from this information
- help people learn how to get involved in processes in the community that affect them, such as housing issues
- learn more about and discuss general political issues such as jobs, the environment and crime
- raise awareness about issues and campaigns that the branch is involved in
- teach concrete skills – for example literacy, carpentry or brick-making
- mobilize people to become volunteers in the community – in a clinic or school

The training and education can be in many different forms. Workshops or seminars or ongoing programs are often effective. A study circle is one example. In a study circle there is a facilitator rather than a chairperson or lecturer. Everyone contributes with their knowledge and experiences and the group together make conclusions. It is an informal, democratic way of learning which also teaches people to work together in groups, to listen to and respect each other's views, and to talk in front of other people. A study circle is informal and can be on any topic.

## **LIFELONG LEARNING**

In a progressive party and a progressive society, we want members and citizens to continually learn and develop as human beings and as party members. This benefits the individual and the society as a whole.

We have stressed the importance of and need for introducing and informing new members so that they are fully aware of, and understand, the membership and the party. But the political development in the party also depends on the upgrading and development of every member's political skills and understanding. Every member and every official at all levels need education and training from time to time. A party where this is recognized and integrated will be stronger and more coherent.

To develop, members need to actively participate in Branch meetings and party projects and all other activities. This includes participating in discussions, writing documents, keeping abreast of important developments and understanding the dynamics of politics in everyday life.

Every Branch should set up a Political Education Committee. The task of the committee is to identify areas in which Branch members would benefit from political education. Implementing debates on theory (Strategy and Tactics) or strategy (how to mobilize certain communities) can be excellent, as can discussions on organizational skills (how to run an effective project), or training on practical campaigning skills (writing a pamphlet or preparing a budget).

Draw up a political education program with a good balance between different areas and forms of political education and skills training. Experienced cadres or people with special skills can become facilitators. Gather material and information that can be used in the training. If you have access to Internet, use the net to find current debates and background materials from different homepages.



## 7. WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY

People who engage in political parties do so because they want to change something. For most people the challenges facing themselves, their neighbors and their community are the things that they want to address. Therefore, the Party at local level, i.e. the Branch, is crucial. It is on the ground – and between elections – that the voters are won. This section focus on how you in your branch can work to become successful in your communities.

### **UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONSTITUENCY AND COMMUNITY PROFILE**

Being politically active and a leader in the community, you probably already have a good knowledge and understanding of people’s living conditions and challenges. But remember that activists and leaders often tend to see the world differently from ordinary people. It is not enough to think that because you live in the area and are aware of all the problems you also know what the residents’ attitudes are, how they perceive the problems and how they think the problems should be solved.

### **OUTREACH WORK WITH YOUR CONSTITUENCY**

A political party must be serious and professional in its approach. General statements which have no facts behind them are weak arguments and can be easy for opponents to criticize. To do a community profile will supply you with useful and important information and knowledge and a good foundation for arguments.

There are many ways to establish a community profile. The following pages contain an example of a very simple community profile form. You may use this example or develop your own format. Make it in a way that is easy to update regularly. The community profile is a planning instrument and must be accurate to serve that purpose.

### **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

#### **1. Demographics** (get estimates from council or clinic statistics)

How many people live in your area?

How many of those are women/girls/men/boys?

How many people are under 18 / over 65 years?

How many of over-65s are women/ and men?

## 2. Facilities

How many of the following are there and what are the main problems?

	Number	Problems
Primary schools		
High-schools		
Crèches		
Clinics		
Sports fields		
Community Halls		

How far from where most people live are the following?

	Distance	Problems
Police station		
Post office		
Clinic		
Hospital		
Fire brigade		
Shops		
Banks		
Public phone		
Magistrate's court		
Pension pay point		
Other		

### 3. Employment

What % of adults is unemployed?

Men ..... Women .....

What kind of work do most women do? (Write all the most common things, the problems there are and the estimated pay for that kind of job and how many women do that type of work.)

Type of work	Problems	Pay	How many?
Ex: housekeeping	Low pay, long hours	\$30	42%

What kind of work do most men do?

Type of work	Problems	Pay	How many?
Ex: sales	Long hours	\$100+	62%

### 4. Water and fuel

Where do households get water from – write all the different ways in different parts of your community and the problems:

Area	Water Source	Problems

Which fuel does most people use for cooking? (ex: wood, electricity, paraffin, gas, coal, dung)

Area	Fuel Source	Problems

### 5. Housing

What kind of houses do people live in? Write the different types in different parts of your community.

Area	Type of housing	Problems

### 6. Transportation

What kind of public transportation do most people use and what are the problems? (think about the different problems men and women may have)

Type of transportation	Problems

### 7. Health, welfare, social and legal issues

What are the most common health problems for

Girls under 16	
Boys under 16	
Women over 65	



Men over 65	
Other women	
Other men	

What are the most common family problems?

What are the most common problems with crime and violence?

There are at least three broad areas you need to include in your community profile:

**1. People in your ward: what problems do they experience?**

- People: age groups, gender, employment and income status. Use official sources, interviews and meetings.
- Problems: housing, water, transport, education, health, environment, social issues, crime, violence, HIV-aids
- Hopes: what changes are people hoping for? What are their attitudes?

**2. The physical environment in the ward: what exists in the area?**

- Make a list of what exists, the problems and what plans exist for the future. Some examples are: housing, basic services, places of employment, roads, shops, schools, police services, community halls etc.

**3. Community life: what else happens in the community?**

- Make a list of all the organizations in the community and meet them to find out what their goals and activities are.

**COLLECTING INFORMATION**

There are different ways to collect the information you want for your community profile:

- official sources
- community meetings
- your own research

**OFFICIAL SOURCES**

Official sources can be excellent, but they are not the only sources that can provide good information. Finding other sources of useful data in the community requires creativity. Such sources might include:

- schools and crèches for enrolment figures and gender breakdowns
- hospitals and clinics for details of admissions and statistics of major health problems
- local police for crime statistics
- the municipality for registered voters, development plans, payment levels for services, population details,
- NGOs in the area may have their own studies that contain useful data
- councilors – they can always be asked for information.

### **COMMUNITY MEETINGS**

A meeting that focuses on a particular issue or problem gives the residents an opportunity to tell you their views. It is important to remember that it often is only the most active and mobilized people that will come and they may not necessarily represent the majority view. Therefore community meetings should be complemented by other information.

### **YOUR OWN RESEARCH**

To do your own research is necessary to get reliable information. You will have to go to people and ask questions about things. The questions must be listed and you must ask people the same questions so that you can compare the answers. This is called a survey. To go door-to-door is time consuming but it often gives very good and accurate insight into what people really feel and what their attitudes and needs actually are.



## 8. BUILDING YOUR PARTY PROFILE

Your party needs to become familiar to the people in the community. Members and leaders must be active and deal with the challenges that face the community so people can see that this is what the party is for. As a local politician you must meet with people and get to know them. This process, in return, will let them get to know you, who you are, and what your views and beliefs are. It helps them identify you with your party.

Residents can get to know your party through media, but at the local level that is often a very limited option. A party's strength and potential to grow and mobilize support will depend on how active and successful you are in reaching people and building confidence and support. That is what builds a long-term perspective into your party profile.

You can reach people directly and indirectly. The important thing is that you keep in touch and communicate continuously – not just once or twice and not only during election campaigns.

There are many ways one can get in contact with people directly. Door-to-door canvassing, street meetings, forums, information tables at shops or events, and handing out pamphlets are some good examples.

Most people belong to some organization, such as a church, a sports club or something similar. You should make contact with these organizations, and communicate with them. It is a good way of creating a network for gathering information about people's thoughts on different issues and challenges. Also, such a network is a very valuable channel when you want to get a message across to many people quickly.

It is important that people see party activists and leaders as ordinary people that have been given the trust and responsibility to represent them. A good politician needs to be a good listener, to be interested and to be able to answer questions, explain issues and handle criticism in a constructive way.

Your party's aim is to grow and become stronger and all activities should therefore be planned with the following questions in mind:

- How can we reach new groups and not just people that are already strong party supporters?

- Will this activity/event give us good publicity or directly reach lots of people? If the answers are no, you should reconsider your plan.

Below we outline a few methods that can be used for events and outreach.

## **MEETINGS AND DIRECT OUTREACH TO PEOPLE**

When organizing a public meeting, you first need to identify your target group and what financial resources you have. These two factors will determine what type of meeting you want to organize.

The preparation of public meetings follows a fairly standard checklist:

1. Determine the target group
2. Decide the type of meeting to be held
3. Plan the program
4. Secure the venue
5. Confirm the speakers
6. Brief the speakers
7. Publicize the event – use posters and other publicity
8. Organize the transportation
9. Organize the sound
10. Organize the security and fire marshals
11. Organize the catering
12. Organize the decorations
13. Organize the tables with party information
14. Pay all the accounts

## **RALLIES**

A rally is the most expensive and among the largest of political events and should primarily be used to motivate already strong party supporters. Rallies are not very useful for informing or reporting, or for consulting your community or mobilizing new support.

## **REPORT-BACK MEETINGS**

Your branch should regularly organize report-back meetings to inform people about what is happening in the municipality. At these meetings the ward councilor should inform the community about key council plans and programs for the area and people should have the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. It is a good opportunity for the branch to note all important issues that people raise and find ways to report back to the people who raised them. The party's parliamentarians should also be involved in report-back meetings.

## **COMMUNITY FORUMS**

In a community forum the party invites people to come and talk and raise their concerns. The party's main role is to listen. Community forums appeal to both strong

party supporters and to people who are interested in the party but not enough to go to rallies or more formal meetings. To get the most out of a community forum it is best to target a specific group at the time – for example the elderly and pension problems or teachers and education policy.

Preparing and presenting a successful community forum is fairly straightforward:

1. Target a specific community or group.
2. Get a local leader, councilor or parliamentarian to attend.
3. Advertise the forum with posters and announcements.
4. Brief the speaker about the area and the concerns of the people.
5. Start on time and introduce the people on the platform.
6. Explain how the forum will work but do not make long speeches.
7. Invite the audience to ask questions or present their problems or concerns.
8. Let the people speak and ask them to be brief. After a few speakers, let the leaders reply.
9. At the end, the chair summarizes the main points.

## **HOUSE MEETINGS**

House meetings target people who are not strong party supporters or who are undecided. They often target specific groups, such as teachers or undecided voters in a specific area, a street, hostel, village etc.

Generally, house meetings are quite informal with attendees numbering around 20 to 30. They are often held at the home of a person the target group knows. Speeches are short and de-emphasized – the aim is to have a discussion. Use councilors or local Members of Parliament as speakers if possible.

The organizing of a house meeting follows a standard protocol:

1. Find out beforehand who the target group is, what their issues and concerns are.
2. Confirm that the MP or councilor is available.
3. If not, make sure another local leader or councilor participates.
4. Brief the MP or councilor thoroughly, give them the names of the host and make sure they can find the house.
5. Confirm with everyone involved on the day the meeting is to take place.

## **FUNDRAISING EVENTS**

In some countries it is common for parties to organize events to raise funds. In other countries parties have other funding cultures. Your country's national legislation will determine which fundraising methods are permissible. Fundraising events can be dinners, parties, sports competitions or similar functions. If you are organizing fundraising events, remember they must be professional.

## **MEET-THE-PEOPLE EVENTS**

The main method to meet people in the community is canvassing – door-to-door work. This should be ongoing work for the Branch and not just something you do during election campaigns.

A Blitz is when a group of canvassers – which are members that have been trained – spend a day going door to door in one specific area.

Street canvassing involves targeting all residents in one street.

It is valuable to use parliamentarians and councilors when canvassing. Informing the media that a canvassing event will involve ranking party members can garner extra exposure in the community.

## **PUBLICITY TABLES**

Publicity tables are set up in shopping centers or other public places where many people pass. These tables serve as points of contact for talking to people and handing out information pamphlets. Though the primary aim is to talk with as many people as possible, engaging in endless debates with party opponents should be avoided. MPs and councilors should participate in publicity tables.

## **FACTORY GATES AND TRANSPORTATION STATIONS**

You can meet voters in places where lots of people pass during rush hours like train stations, bus terminals and factory gates. These are great opportunities to hand out flyers and pamphlets. Most people will be rushing and will not have time to talk, but they will accept something handed out to them that they can read on the bus or take home. Ask taxi drivers to make announcements and have a batch of pamphlets for their commuters.

## **POPULAR EVENTS**

Concerts and sport events like soccer matches are other opportunities to be seen. Set up publicity tables and have MPs or councilors there before and during intermissions to make contact with people. It is often easy to approach someone if you have something to give them like a flyer or a pamphlet.

## **OUTREACH TO ORGANIZATIONS AND SECTORS IN THE COMMUNITY**

Your party has to stay in touch with what is happening in your community. Branch executives or members should, on an ongoing basis, participate in forums and meetings that affect the development of the community. Sometimes it is not easy for party representatives to get direct access to other organizations' members so it may be better to use a ward councilor, for example, to speak to schools or workers at their workplace.

Certain strategies can be very effective at reaching new community members:

- Attend meetings, be visible and show interest.
- Meet with leaders of other organizations. Contact everyone identified on your contact sheet and discuss their problems and programs
- Arrange for your ward councilor or MP to visit problem areas in the community to gain greater awareness.
- Intervene on local issues and development. The Branch should participate in local campaigns and get involved in solving problems. It is good for the party to cooperate with other organizations and to be seen working on solutions to people's problems.
- Help other organizations by assisting with activities. Use the party's influence of the ward councilor to help the organizations access people that can support them.
- Co-operate with other spheres of government. Depending on how decentralized your government is, resources may be allocated to these spheres.
- Target a sector of the community such as churches, specific welfare organizations or high schools. Find the contact person and ask them to allow a Branch leader to come and address the group. Or invite a group of their leaders for

a small discussion on their problems. Check which events the sector has planned and make sure you attend wherever possible.

**NETWORKING**

Staying in touch on a regular basis with organizations and key individuals in the community will make you very informed and help you build a good party profile. The purposes of networking are many: to build partnerships that you can cooperate with, to build alliances that will support you and make you stronger, to be informed about developments in your area, and to give you an opportunity to influence and mobilize support for your issues.

Networking should be systematic and part of you ongoing work. Gather all the names of organizations and individuals and their contact details. Divide them into categories or topics.

On the next page is an example of a system you can use:

EXAMPLE: HIV/Aids Network list

Sector	Organization/name of person	Issues they deal with	Contact person	Contact details	Network code

Under the “sector” column you should think about all the different sectors in your community and put in the ones that you should network with on a particular issue. The issue in this example is HIV/Aids. In each sector row you will then have to list the relevant organizations or individuals. For example under the health sector you may want to list the clinic, the municipal health committee, the local Red Cross society and local doctors.

Sectors might include political groups or parties, unions, religious groups, education functions, health, welfare, business, credit clubs, sports organizations, burial societies, service organizations, cultural organizations, etc.

Fill in the third column to record what issues or areas the organization or person works on. This will help you to network with the right group on the right issue. Networking works



best if you have individual contact people you work with in each organization. This will ensure that faxes, newsletters and other information reach the right person. It will also help you if you build a relationship with an individual who understands your work and is sympathetic to your issues. Put the contact person's details in the fourth and fifth columns.

In the last column you should put a code for the kind of networking you do with that contact – for example if you should send newsletters to that person, write N, if you should invite them to consultation meetings, write CM, if you can involve them in your campaigns, write C.

Meet with the leaders of these organizations and make sure they are represented in forums and in consultation meetings. Have consultation meetings with their members to discuss their problems and campaigns. When you develop your communication strategy for a campaign, make sure that information goes directly to these organizations.



## 9. COOPERATING WITH TRADE UNIONS

Social democracy and the trade union movement share the fundamental ideology of justice, freedom and solidarity. To join forces in this struggle has been, and still is, important.

But what is trade union–political cooperation and how does it work? How do we join forces and still remain independent from each other? In some countries social democratic parties were born out of trade unions. Workers decided to form a political party as an instrument for political engagement and decision making to shape society in the interest of the workers. Many decisions that influence workers’ lives are made at political levels and cannot be settled in negotiations between employers and employees. Therefore it is natural for trade unions to try to influence the political decisions of government that affect people’s lives.

Such cooperation also benefits the politicians. We get insights into the conditions in workers’ lives such as poor safety, unemployment, low salaries, shift work, and insecure employment – this helps us make better decisions.

Sometimes the cooperation with us only primarily applies between blue collar worker unions and social democratic parties, while white collar worker unions prefer to be politically non-aligned. Sometimes there are several blue collar unions affiliated with different left parties. And again there are many instances where all progressive workers, blue and white-collar, join forces behind one party.

### **SAME GOAL – BUT DIFFERENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The party’s role is to take responsibility for the development of society, to have an understanding of all issues in society and to make policies and priorities that are based on the values and ideas we represent. It is important that we politicians select representatives that reflect the citizens and the social democratic voters. Politicians with roots in the trade union movement are a valuable resource and contribute the perspective of working life to our policy making.

The trade unions’ role is to represent and work for their members’ improved conditions – in the work place but also in society. Both trade unions and parties are necessary. It is the trade unions’ responsibility to inform members and to mobilize around different issues that are relevant to the members. Political consciousness is a high priority. By acting jointly both become stronger.

Cooperation is part of the process. To find joint solutions, to have open debates, meeting forums must be found. It can be at the local level where representatives meet regularly. It

can entail the appointment of contact persons to ensure that cooperation is structured and continuous.

The different roles are truly different, and the joint efforts are based on common interests for common good. The cooperation is not a negotiation process but an exchange of ideas, of information, and of debates. It must rest on mutual respect and understanding.

There are different ways to establish cooperation between the political party and the trade unions. Some people are active both in the trade union and in the party but in today's complex world few have time to engage actively in both.

To reach groups that are organized by trade unions that we do not cooperate with, we as local politicians can organize seminars or meetings around issues that are relevant to and prioritized by those trade unions. The unions' views are important sources of information for us.

### **HOW TO WORK WITH TRADE UNIONS AS A LOCAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE**

Here are some ideas outlining how you can organize your contacts and cooperation with trade unions:

- Appoint a trade union contact person in your branch and make sure that you as municipal councilors include and engage this person in your portfolio planning. Use your common sense, and reach out to other contacts when necessary.
- Contact the trade union's representatives and members amongst the staff in the municipal workplaces.
- Map which trade union organizes in which municipal workplace and in your ward.
- Network with Social Democratic party members that are active in trade unions.
- Visit workplaces – not only during election campaigns but on a regular basis. Interact with workers and discuss their issues and problems.
- Make the roles clear and explain why you want the dialogue. Their expectation of what you can do for them must be realistic.
- Set up a joint committee to plan joint activities, to exchange experiences and to share information.



## 10. REPRESENTING YOUR PARTY

The second part of the manual deals with party-elected representatives in local government structures: their roles and responsibilities in decision-making processes and the importance of transparency, and accountability.

### INTRODUCTION

To be a party representative (councilor) in a municipal council is a most rewarding and challenging task for a politician. It is the party representative closest to the citizens; policies and decisions in which councilors take part directly influence people's lives. If you as a councilor do your work well, people will have confidence in you and trust your party. You will help engage local people who want to develop their community. You will see results and feel satisfaction. There are a number of questions we should ask ourselves:

- Why are we Social Democrats? Was it the fundamental ideology or the values? Was it a particular political issue? Was it camaraderie and the dynamic of a social group?
- How do we respond if a neighbor asks: "Why are you a Social Democrat?"
- What is it we want to achieve as local politicians? What is it that I particularly want to engage in?
- What particular issue is most important to me – and what change do I want to achieve?

Write these questions and answers down and take them out every now and then during the election period and check: is the development in the municipality going in the right direction? Is it possible for you to do what you wanted to do, are there reasons to revise what you wanted to achieve?

To be an elected representative can also be frustrating work that does not show results as fast as you would like. As a councilor you often have to deal with a slow and suspicious bureaucracy that resists change and innovation. This is what we must expect and prepare ourselves for. We need to be clear about our role and expectations, and what our voters expect from us. We were elected to represent people and have a responsibility to live up to the confidence the voters put in us.

## **THE CAUCUS**

A caucus is a party's group of elected representatives in a government. Its role is to ensure that the party's policies and programs are converted into political decisions in government. The caucus group members inform each other about what is happening in different policy areas and committees where they are representatives. The caucus must have a close relationship with the party headquarters – and to the Cabinet, when the party is governing – to ensure that there is coherence and efficiency.

## **THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE**

A portfolio committee consists of elected representatives from different parties that are selected by their party to represent specific policy areas. Portfolios can be housing, finance, social policy, justice, etc. The party with most seats will chair the committee. This section deals with both the caucus – the party group – and the portfolio committee – representatives from all parties.

The elected councilors and the party Branch should be working closely together and we will deal with this in more detail further on. Councilors must remember that their mandate derives from the voters and the policies they are set to implement derive from the party. It is important to have close communication for inputs and report-backs. The Branch has to go back to the voters to communicate why, or why not, decisions have been made by the party's councilors. The councilors also need the party structures for support and as channels for campaigns and information.

## **HOW ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES DEAL WITH ISSUES**

Elected representatives must deal with the following issues and entities:

- The political task – goals and strategy
- Caucus and portfolio committees
- Being in opposition – opposing and being opposed
- Relationship with the party organization
- Relationship with the citizens
- Relating to the media
- Relationship with the trade unions
- Relationship with public servants (municipal officials)
- Gender equality
- Integration and non-discrimination

- Evaluation

## THE POLITICAL TASK – GOALS AND STRATEGY

What is the local politician's task in society? And who are our constituents? Our fundamental task is to meet the citizens' needs for security, health, education, housing, work, transportation and decent living conditions – to mention but a few. That does not mean that the local councilor's task is to meet the citizen's every need, or that every need is to be met with a municipal activity.

Following are some principles that should guide the way politicians do their work:

- We meet people's needs together with them, not for them. The municipal programs and projects should be based on democratic decisions and people's participation. It is important that we welcome citizens, make them part of the municipality's development and show that we are open to their concerns and comments.
- We meet people's needs based on our Social Democratic values of freedom, justice and solidarity and according to the vision we presented in our election programs and meetings with the voters.
- We meet people's needs in an efficient way and we economically use financial, human and environmental resources.

In our party caucus we must share a vision of what we want to achieve in the council and for whom we want to do it. This is the basis for our short- and long-term political planning. The party caucus in the local council is usually the place where more detailed planning takes place. Basic instruments that you need for a planning process are:

- **Mapping:** Mapping means gathering information to create an accurate picture of the realities in our area. This includes identifying problems people experience in terms of services as well as social, economic and environmental issues. What are the main issues that the council is dealing with currently? Who are our political opponents? What issues are on their political agenda? Which interest groups and stakeholders are active in our municipality?
- **Goals:** What are our political goals? What exactly do we want to achieve? How do we describe our vision and goals – short and long term – to the citizens? What is our political message?
- **Target groups:** Who are our primary target groups? How can we contact and communicate with them?

## MAPPING

It is crucial that we know the citizens' needs. What is most important to them? What services or other activities are they satisfied with, or critical of? What changes do they want? We need to gather this information in a structured, systematic way and keep it up to date. This way we can assess whether there is change or development in the community.

All party representatives in the caucus must have access to the information and we must share what we know with each other. It constitutes the information “bank” on which everyone bases their political work. We must also have good knowledge and understanding of the following areas:

- The political debate: What are the key issues debated in the community and in the media? What are our political opponents’ views?
- Ideological differences: What are the ideological differences between us and our opponents in the particular area of work, for example housing? Does it mean anything in practice? Can we cooperate?
- Interest groups: What other groups have presented ideas or proposals regarding the relevant issues? NGO’s, parent groups, relatives etc.
- Overview of the portfolios: Members of a portfolio committee must have sufficient knowledge, if not detailed expertise, to be able to set goals for municipal activities and any desired changes to be achieved during the period for which they are elected.
- Self-perception: How do the citizens and our target groups perceive us? We must be honest and self-critical. Do we represent change and development? Or stagnation, bureaucracy and pessimism? Are we seen as listeners or autocrats? Which groups benefit from our policies and which do not? What results can we demonstrate to the citizens? What are our strengths and weaknesses?
- Political will: A party’s political will and vision is expressed in programs and manifestos that are presented to the voters in elections. Councilors must know and relate the local political program and planning to the overall policies and programs of the party. National policy programs decided by the party congress may have huge implications for the local municipal program. When a party makes election promises, we have to make sure our local government programs implement them.
- Cooperation with other political parties: Our political program is the foundation and guide for our work. But sometimes we cannot form our own majority in the local council. We have to make a choice between making compromises to achieve some of our objectives, or nothing at all. This is a difficult situation and all sides involved will have to be willing to make real compromises. We must discuss amongst ourselves in the caucus what we can accept. We need to be sensitive and listen to each other’s arguments. Compromise is often called a betrayal of principles, but research indicates that voters respect and appreciate that parties try to find ways to compromise rather than spending all their energy on political squabbles.

## **GOALS**

A goal is the future state we want to achieve. To reach goals we need to have a clear vision of what our goals are. The overall goals that we present in the election manifesto need to be translated into concrete, defined short- and long-term objectives. Means and goals are often confused. An important rule is that we express a goal as a description of what we want to achieve, not how we are going to achieve it. The goal shall express a future state:

“in 2020 all pensioners get 2 hours daily home services. Do not formulate a goal like this:” we are going to employ 20 000 home caretakers”. This is not a goal; this is the means by which the goal is achieved.

A goal should adhere to SMART principles and have the following characteristics:

- **Specific:** the goal must be clear and easy to visualize, not open to misinterpretation.
- **Measurable:** we must know when a goal has been achieved, or to what extent we have achieved it.
- **Achievable:** we must be able to take specific actions to achieve the goal.
- **Realistic:** we must feel that it is possible, with available resources, to achieve the goal.
- **Time-based:** We must have a deadline for when the goal should be reached.

There are different types of goals. Some express how we want the reality to look at the end of our term in office. Other goals may strive to change people’s attitude or views, which can be equally important. To measure if such goals have been reached, we need to gather information using questionnaires, attitude surveys or other methods.

When formulating goals it is useful to do so at different levels such as:

- Vision goal
- Long term goal
- Short term goal (to be reached in a year or two)

We want to communicate our goals for our term in government. Therefore we must formulate them in a message about our program that responds to the question: “what do you want to achieve”? The answer to that question must be focused, concise and known to all in the caucus. It should be a prepared message that must be used at all times and by everyone. Interested citizens will soon know and recognize the answer. The message should summarize:

- What we want to achieve
- For whom or what we want to do it
- Why we want to do it
- How we want to do it
- What differentiates us from other political parties



Remember that how we formulate the message – which words, sentences, and perspectives we use – will reveal a lot about us and our party and determine how people will perceive us. We must make this easy. It is a good opportunity to make people feel that we are ordinary people who listen to them and work for them. We are not “The Power” speaking abstractly to them from above.

## **TARGET – CONSTITUENT GROUP**

In a democracy the citizens elect the politicians directly or indirectly. Citizens are the constituents and we are working for them. Politicians are elected to represent the citizens in government and to make the laws, policies and programs that the administration (public service) must implement. It is a simple principle, but in practice it is often not that clear. Politicians’ view of themselves has changed and so has the citizens’ view of politicians. It is tempting and easy for a politician to identify with the administration and you often find politicians rather representing the administration to the citizens than the other way around. The border between officials and politicians has become a grey zone, and politicians are often ruled by officials rather than the other way around. The gap between people and politicians has increased and the sense of “them” as distinct from “us” is common in all countries. This is a serious problem and an issue of survival for Social Democrats and democrats in general. It is also a serious problem for the political system as the way we form, develop and regulate societies. Each of us has a responsibility to clarify the roles and demonstrate whose side we are on. To do so we need to know more about our constituents, our target groups and how we can communicate with them. When we deal with any issue we should ask:

- Which groups are most affected?
- How can we reach them to get their views and participation? Are they organized in any way?
- Who are our friends and allies? Are there groups that share our views and can they assist us in reaching groups that we cannot access easily?

## **OUR CAUCUS**

Every party in a local council has its own caucus. In the caucus we decide our politics. We are amongst party associates where we can have open discussions and test arguments freely. We know that what is discussed stays between us.

The councilor’s role varies according to which position you hold: a local mayor is not the same as an alternate member on a portfolio committee. Regardless of position though, being a councilor means taking part in the building of the society, and the developing of the country. It can also be a very exposed position, with risks for conflicts; indeed, in some parts of the world, the conflicts can be violent and dangerous.

To be as strong a party as possible, we need to work closely together in the caucus, to ensure that each and every associate is included and can contribute. If every representative in the caucus can also develop as a politician and a person, it makes us stronger as a party

and a collective in the decision-making process. We also need to build morale to address challenges such as public disgust and disappointment with the political process or our own frustrations when we see no clear return on our efforts or feel we do not have enough influence to effect change..

Issues that we should discuss in our caucus might include:

- **Anonymity:** Few citizens know who their representatives are and this worsens the sense of “us” and “them” and the disgust people have for politicians. Traditionally, Social Democratic parties go to elections on party lists, where the individual candidates are primarily party representatives and secondly individual politicians. We need to find a balance where our candidates become seen and known, as ordinary people, flesh and blood, living in the neighborhood. That means that individual politicians must be allowed to have more of their own profile, be seen and heard as individuals at the same time as we also maintain the collective strength of our party.
- **Conflicts of interest:** The conflict between a comprehensive view and particular interests can be problematic. In your ward it will be natural for you to promote the interests of the residents in that particular ward. But in the local council there may be other balances and priorities you may have to consider. Citizens often find this difficult to understand. Why their ward representative cannot fight for his/her ward may be perceived as a betrayal. There is no right and wrong on how to balance different interests so it is important that you are aware of them and discuss which conflicts can occur and how to solve them.

## **WHEN WE IN THE CAUCUS DISAGREE**

Normally the party rule is that all Party representatives must follow the Caucus majority’s decision. We should always strive to achieve unity in our caucus group. It makes us strong and able to have real influence on development. But there may be occasions when we need to discuss how far we stretch this. Belonging to the same party doesn’t mean we always have to think the same way. Sometimes we need to accept that we may come to different conclusions and that this may win more support and respect with voters, and also counteract anonymity. If there is a broad majority for an issue it is not a problem, democracy will still be achieved.

When the group cannot unite we must discuss beforehand how to handle the situation. We must identify conflicts that will occur and discuss how we deal with them both within the group and externally, including the media.

## **ETHICS AND MORALITY**

Misuse of public funds always makes headlines – and rightly so – regardless of what kind of misuse it is. The caucus group must discuss and clarify which ethical and moral rules shall apply. It is no good to meet criticism by saying the rules are unclear or that they can be interpreted in different ways. Who respects that? It is never acceptable to confuse political and personal interests and to use taxpayers’ money in an inappropriate way. Some basic rules apply:

1. Rules for representation must be followed studiously.
2. Act in a way that you can always face citizens openly and account for what you have done with confidence.
3. Never ever mix your own personal interests with those of the citizens/municipality. Any conflict of interest should be discussed openly in the group. Neither should the Party's interests be mixed with the municipality's interests.
4. Openness and honesty must be obvious. Never hide information or the truth. Not only because it will always be revealed but because it is the right thing to do.

The issue of private morality is just that, private. But as representatives of a political party, our behavior isn't just private and what we do may harm the party and politics and politicians in general. As party representatives, we need to understand that we must live up to high moral standards; we are role models. To determine what is acceptable and natural for us in our positions, the caucus should discuss and decide.

The best way to decide if something is ethical is to apply the "Front page test". How would you feel if your actions appeared on the front page of the local newspaper? Would you be proud or ashamed? Never do anything you would be ashamed of.

## **THE CAUCUS – STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

The caucus group is made up of individuals with different experiences and competencies. The more efficiently we use our skills and knowledge, the stronger the caucus will be. To do this, the group needs to document each representative's personal background, political background, and experience in local politics and organizations. Knowledge of one's portfolio, political debate, the party and its politics, external networks, and general knowledge of the municipality should also be documented.

One way to do this is for each representative to fill in a form. The total information can be analyzed and the caucus' strengths and weaknesses identified. With this as a basis, the group can prioritize necessary complementary information and knowledge. It is also a way of getting to know each other and building a team.

To complement the group's knowledge the caucus can ask the administration to organize study visits, or the caucus can ask the party to have a seminar or training course. Each member of the caucus should make a plan for his/her own development as a politician, based on what has been identified by filling in the form.

## **WORK IN THE CAUCUS**

How the work in the caucus is planned and structured is very important for the results and for how citizens perceive politics. It also determines how well we as local politicians manage our roles.

It is important for the caucus and the portfolio groups to have a discussion and agree on the work culture, for example openness - where each and every one feels free and welcome to

participate, present ideas and question what is being said. No one should be dismissed. Everyone must participate actively; it must never be just a few in the group who do all the work.

Caucus work is long term; it is not just about the issues that will be decided at the next local council meeting. Planning often calls for one- or two-day meetings maybe once a year.

The Caucus must remind itself often that it is working on behalf of the people; the citizen is always at the center.

This is the structure for a typical Portfolio or Caucus meeting:

1. Go through all items on the Council Agenda and discuss the Party position. Check how this corresponds with our Municipal Program.
2. Get access to all research and information on any important issue that is on the council agenda.
3. Prepare proper inputs for the Caucus meeting so well-informed discussions can take place. Consult groups in Civil Society that are affected by the decisions, such as the PTA, housing committees, and environmental groups.

At the Caucus meeting, discuss issues thoroughly using good input and information prior to formulating motions, proposals, and statements. Proposals often are oral but it is an advantage to have them in writing.

In Section II, on page 71, there is a form that the Caucus Group can use to discuss how to build capacity and improve both the individual politicians' performance and that of the group.

## **RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LOCAL MUNICIPAL CAUCUS AND THE LOCAL PARTY STRUCTURE**

The local party structure and the local councilors have different roles. It is important that they cooperate and coordinate their efforts. Both have a responsibility to ensure this happens efficiently.

The party makes policies and determines overall programs. Councilors represent the party in local government and are meant to implement the party manifesto and programs. At the same time councilors have powers according to the laws and constitution and are accountable to voters. This dual accountability of councilors to party and to voters sometimes causes conflict. It is important to develop clear mechanisms for accountability and monitoring between councilors and party.

Councilors have the responsibility to inform their party about their work in the municipal council and to bring key issues to the local party structures for discussion and decisions on party position. The party structure must get the opportunity to influence decisions, and the local party structure is responsible to ensure that members' and citizens' views are

forwarded to the councilors. The party must work with councilors to give clear guidelines and straight responses.

The basic principle is that the party structure establishes principles and guidelines for local politics through a local political program. This should be done in the structures that correspond with the local level of government, and should have maximum input from branches.

The party may also have special programs for certain issues/areas, for example a Local Housing Policy Program which is presented during the election campaign. These programs constitute an important foundation for the caucus work.

Needless to say the elected representatives must work to realize the political programs and make council decisions that translate them into concrete activities – and results. The party must ensure that their representatives have good knowledge about the programs and understand them. Election promises and programs should be assessed at least once a year to determine what has been achieved, what goals will not be reached, and what we need to reconsider

The programs are the starting points for the councilors' discussions on policy-making within local government. Deviations from the programs must be discussed with the party, and all key matters must be discussed on a regular basis.

Not only the programs, but also single issues can become politically charged and should therefore be coordinated with the party organization at an early stage.

## **THE VALUE OF POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP**

A main reason for many people to join a political party is because they want to influence politics and the development of society. As local councilors we have a responsibility to contribute, and to ensure that individual party members have this opportunity as well. To do so we must create two-way communication between councilors and party members that is open and sincere and allows members to be part of the policy making. It is ultimately the Party's responsibility to look after members but local councilors must contribute by participating in meetings, providing information, producing material for discussions etc.

Meetings and seminars are the most common ways used to interact but informal contacts are also important. Sometimes active members in branches are critical when their representatives prioritize the local council work over the branch work. They see their councilors only participating in a branch meeting when it is nomination time for the next election. This is not an acceptable situation. It can lead to further gaps and conflicts between groups in the same party. To be active in the local party work is the best way for councilors to have close contact with the people on the ground and to link party and municipal politics.

## **WHEN WE HAVE TO CHANGE OUR MINDS**

Our task as elected councilors is to implement the policies we presented to our voters. However, our political program is a map and sometimes it doesn't fully correspond with

reality. As local representatives we therefore must be able to take initiative and be responsive to changed conditions, and find solutions that still correspond with what we want to achieve. We cannot always get answers and clear direction from the members or the party; sometimes we cannot even demand it. We must be able to act independently while at the same time staying within the broad guidelines and programs of the party

What happens when we have to change our minds? What happens when we are unable to realize our program? Or when changing conditions make it totally wrong to do pursue it? Sometimes there are good reasons for a change, such as:

- Financial restrictions
- New laws and regulations
- Technical evolution
- Better proposals or alternatives subsequent to program initiation
- Changing needs

A change of political program must be discussed thoroughly with the Party in order to establish a new position and formulate a strategy to handle the change. Such a discussion should happen well in advance but in today's world that is not always possible and decisions often have to be made rapidly. This often causes discussions – both within the party and in society – that the party is “letting voters down”. This is why it is crucial to have a strategy in place for how to handle such a debate. All spokespersons must be informed of the strategy and understand its arguments. A good rule is to be open and declare why we changed our minds. We must be able to defend our change and give the reasons why. Citizens more often respect clear straight answers even when they are negative, to answers where politicians deny what is obvious to the individual citizen.

## **A VISIBLE PARTY**

Our party must be visible and known in the community. It must be clear to the citizens that it is the Social Democratic party that engages in their problems, that listens to them and accomplishes the positive changes in their lives.

## **RELATIONS TO THE CITIZENS**

The individual citizen must be at center of every politician's life. Otherwise how can we claim that we represent the people? To ensure this we must work hard to plan and organize activities to interact with citizens on a regular basis. And we must truly believe that the people are important.

Remember that we are elected to express the will of the people through our political control of the administration of government. We have to oversee the officials and make sure they meet the people's needs.

The political will must exist at all levels to prioritize building good relations with the people. It is very easy for local representatives to become caught up in meetings, reading documents, listening to officials' presentations and making decisions. Often elected councilors become better officials than the officials themselves. But to become a good councilor we must get out of the meeting rooms and meet the people, in a planned and structured way.

When you organize contacts with the people, it is important to be clear about the purpose of the contact and to have a clear plan for what you are going to do. As a starting point, answer the questions below:

- **Aim:** What do I want to achieve with this contact? Am I trying to consult people and hear their views, inform them about council issues, or gain their support for our party position?
- **Message:** What do we want to say to the people we meet? Are our messages coherent and logical or do we say completely different things and confuse people? What impression of ourselves do we want to convey?
- **Target group:** Who is affected by the particular issue? How many are they? Are they organized? How can we best reach them?
- **Method:** What is the best method to use? Meetings, home visits, media, visits to work places or organizations?
- **Time:** What are our timeframes and who will do what? It is important to plan and share work with the party and between councilors in the caucus.

Some of the common methods to establish contact are:

- Civil society organizations: Meet the executives, try to write in their newsletters or homepages, and ask if you can come and visit their meetings or conferences to speak.
- Arrange your own meetings:
  - Make sure everyone gets an opportunity to speak. Don't hold lectures. Have several smaller meetings rather than a few big ones.
  - Find the citizens; don't expect them to come to you.
- By telephone: This is a quick and efficient way to make contact. It needs to be planned well. Whom do we call – numbers often from white pages – and what do we say? We need a simple script that all people who staff the phones can follow. We must note the calls, who is interested in what and any questions and answers.
- Materials: It is useful to be able to offer to send interested people a pamphlet or information letter.

- E-mail and letters: We can reach many through mail, but miss the direct personal contact. When using e-mail and letters, try to convince the receiver to contact you.

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE**

The municipality or politicians cannot provide everything like jobs, housing, education and services. This is especially true in countries where there is a huge lack of finance and other resources. There are many good examples of how people get organized and take initiatives to develop their communities and to create a decent living environment. It is of course vital that we as elected representatives are involved in, and supportive of, these initiatives, whether they are in education, community development, welfare projects, youth development or other activities.

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MASS MEDIA**

Today, most people know about a party's politics through media and they get to know or "meet" politicians primarily through media. Many politicians also use the media since it is an effective way to reach huge numbers of citizens instantly with their messages. The relationship between politicians and the media is therefore crucial for politicians and politics. It is often a complicated and finely balanced relationship. We need to understand how media works and how we can prepare ourselves to get the most out of the media.

The media may not always treat us well, but we gain nothing from dismissing media as biased, unprofessional and constantly suspecting journalists of having their own agendas. We ourselves may be suspect and unprofessional, neither recognizing nor respecting the different roles that politicians and journalists have.

In our contacts with media, we should be open, honest and accessible. It is in our interest to build good, long-term relationships so that the media becomes a positive instrument – not an annoying threat to our political work.

To start with we must understand that political parties and media have different roles in a democratic society. The democratic system is built on the notion that different ideas and proposals should be freely presented, debated, criticized and compared. Our role as politicians is to initiate, spread and rally support for our ideas, arguing and convincing citizens to support them.

A journalist's professional role is to present and critically scrutinize proposals so that citizens have access to more information, thereby increasing their potential to make informed decisions. The journalist's task is to report news happenings and to critically scrutinize what goes on in society, especially matters that affect people's lives.

Politicians often perceive critical questions and insistence on answers from journalists as intrusive, aggressive and personal and it is very easy to become defensive. That is a natural human reaction. In those moments we must be professional and remind ourselves that it is the media's job to scrutinize politicians and that this is a sign of a healthy democracy.

Always remember that when you speak to or react to a journalist, you are speaking to the people. The journalist is just the vehicle for communication.



We politicians are often experts on our specific political fields and we find journalists ignorant and lazy. We are right to expect journalists to have a good and broad basic understanding of how society works. But a journalist must be knowledgeable about a broad range of issues and we cannot expect him or her to know every detail. Most journalists, except for those working at big newspapers or media companies, have to cover anything from politics to traffic accidents.

## **WHAT IS NEWSWORTHY?**

If we understand how the media works we can prepare ourselves and build a good relationship with it. The basis for all reporting is news. But what is news? Here are a few characteristics of news from the media's perspective:

- **Surprise:** A news story should contain something unexpected. For example, a dog biting a man is not news, but a man biting a dog is.
- **Identification:** News should touch the reader, so that he feels that this story could be about him personally, or his family or his friends, or familiar places, a familiar organization, company etc.
- **Emotions:** News should evoke emotions – positive or negative – and catch the attention of the reader.
- **Conflicts:** Anything that shows contradictions and conflicts qualifies as news.
- **Small versus Big, Weak versus Strong** – the small person versus the authority or power.
- **First:** A news story becomes more valuable if the journalist believes it is exclusive to him or her.

So how is this useful to us as local politicians? If we filter our activities through a screen made up of the above characteristics, we will be able to identify what is news-worthy, what we might try to persuade the media to report about. This is something all of us as politicians should constantly think of and improve on, especially people with communication portfolios. We politicians often think differently from the media and do not always search for the news in what we do. We discuss in general terms, we forget that our discussions and debates are news to people outside the meeting rooms and that our disagreements with political opponents are interesting conflicts that people want to know about.

To work with media systematically we need a **MEDIA PLAN**. Your media plan should communicate the main message you want to get across to your voters.

Start by identifying in your program what can be made into news stories

- **Long term news** - how do we describe our work for the whole elected period

- Short term - decide what is going to be the news of the month

Answer the following questions:

- **What** do we want media to report on?
- **How** do we inform media about this?
- **What** do we think media will report on?
- **Which** comments should we prepare?
- **What** do we think our opponents will report to the media about?
- **What** should be our responses to questions that press us and appear to attack us?
- **Whom** do we want to represent us in the media?

When this is clear in our media plan we need to move to step 2: how do we communicate our news to media and make them interested, and the choice of methods we use. We almost always underestimate our possibilities to interest media, - they need news to survive and look for new stories all the time.

## **PERSONAL CONTACTS**

The most efficient way to contact mass media is to get to know the journalists, to approach the same persons regularly and give them tips for news. If they find our information newsworthy they will appreciate us as a good source for news, and they may start contacting us not just for news but also for articles. They may contact us just to chat to keep informed about what is going on in the political arena. It is important to remember that this is not a friendship you are building, there are strict boundaries between the politician and the journalist, the confidence and respect for each other's roles must be reciprocal. You should avoid "off the record" conversations with journalists; never communicate something that you would not be prepared to say publicly.

## **PRESS RELEASES AND STATEMENTS**

Every day the news desks are flooded with material and, though it is an important and easy way to contact media, we must be aware that our particular material is competing with hundreds of other pieces of news. The material we send media must be in a format that the journalist can use more or less untouched.

## **PRESS RELEASES**

This is information about something that is going to happen or a comment on something that has occurred. Send by e-mail, fax or letter. Press releases should follow these guidelines:

- **Short:** A press release must not be more than one A4 sheet.

- **Most important things first:** Put your most important facts in the first paragraph – it must say what the issue is and must tempt the reader to read the rest of the statement.
- **One topic:** Focus on one issue and keep your text short and powerful.
- **Sender:** Make it very clear who the press release is from, when it was sent, and contact details of a person who can respond to questions. **This person must be accessible** or you make yourselves look like media amateurs.

## **BACKGROUND MATERIAL**

Sometimes we want to present facts and explain our reasoning regarding a problem. To compile a report or a background paper with facts makes the journalists' work much easier and is often appreciated.

At local level, it is crucial to present facts with a local angle that focuses on how the local community is affected, in order for it to make news. Journalists can be suspicious and hesitant to use reports from political parties. They often see this as propaganda. To increase the credibility of the report we must write in a way that is clearly marked where there are political comments and where you present known facts such as statistics. You should also source your facts in such cases.

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

We as local politicians can write Letters to the Editor for local newspapers. It is a very popular and frequently read page. A letter to the Editor must be short – no more than 10-15 lines and very punchy. If people respond, we must also respond quickly.

## **DEBATE ARTICLES**

Debate articles are longer articles that deal with specific issues and clearly set out the facts, our analysis and our proposals. They are read by very few people and are mostly a way for the political parties to try to set the political agenda and force opponents to respond and deal with our issues. If we are lucky this works and other media will follow up and make their own stories. But we cannot publish debate articles all the time. In your media plan you need to target selected issues for debate, and determine when and who writes the articles. Remember to write them in a simple way that people can relate to. Writing in a very academic manner stops most people from reading beyond the first paragraph.

## **PRESS CONFERENCES**

A press conference should only be arranged when we respond to a very newsworthy issue, or when we want to present a new or more comprehensive program or want to show something like a model. Make sure the press conference is well prepared by doing the following:

- **Message:** We are clear what we are going to say, we have it written down. We have a list of questions that we think may be asked, as well as our answers.

- **Invitations:** Send out the invitations the day before.
- **Timing:** Set a time that is convenient for the local journalists' working hours, deadlines etc.
- **Venue:** Choose a venue that also offers possibilities to take interesting pictures and do not always use the party office. Think creatively.
- **Implementation:** The presentation must not take more than 15 minutes. After that give the journalists time for questions and pictures. Give them prepared materials and written comments, to make their job easier.
- **After:** Call the media that could not make it to the press conference and send them the documents.

## LIST OF MEDIA

In our media plan we need to make a list of all media that we can work with. The normal channels – newspapers, radio stations, TV, etc. – are usually well known. But are there newsletters, magazines, web pages and other media that we can access? Have a discussion and let everyone come with suggestions. Today the internet offers many new channels for information and we should make sure we are part of this. You can set up a Facebook page or use Twitter to stay in touch with your constituency. The party should also have a web page where people can get information, party news, find out how to join or donate money.

## WHEN MEDIA CONTACTS US

Whenever we are contacted by media we should ensure we are prepared. If we are not, we must tell them we will call back. We do not have to concede an interview immediately; even a journalist with a deadline will give us 15 minutes to get our facts ready. Also, before we accept, we must find out exactly what the interview is about. The journalist may be irritated since she or he may not have their questions prepared. But we must be informed about the main theme for the interview. To prepare for an interview we should follow these steps:

- Formulate the message we want to communicate in a few short, punchy sentences.
- Identify what the weaknesses in the message are. Imagine if we were the journalists what would our questions be? Do a quick role-play if there is time.
- Usually journalists are interested in what we want to avoid so be prepared for tough follow ups and formulate answers to the difficult questions.

No one can be forced to do an interview, but be careful before you simply refuse. Interviews are an opportunity to present our politics and if we refuse we will be seen as trying to hide something. The journalist is likely to write the story anyway, often saying we have refused to comment.

Some politicians find it uncomfortable to be interviewed while others enjoy it. Whichever category you are in, it is good to practice. Most serious politicians today do media training, especially before election campaigns. There are some rules that seem very simple but when you watch interviews on TV or listen on radio, you often think the interviewee had never heard of them.

- **Never lie:** There are enough examples of politicians trying to lie themselves out of situations only to find themselves in trouble because the truth always comes out.
- **Stand up for what we say:** If we don't know something, we must say so. We do not have to know everything. It is a strength not a weakness to admit that.
- **Admit mistakes:** Bring it up yourself, rather than waiting for the journalist to raise it.
- **Simple and straight responses, stick to message:** Don't start talking about all kinds of issues. Economize your language; keep it simple and straight.
- **Do not be provoked:** It is fruitless to get angry at the journalist even if we don't like the questions. If you are aggressive the journalist will get all the sympathy.
- **Answer all questions:** Even the tricky and uncomfortable ones. We can correct inaccuracies and stop speculation.

## WHEN ALL GOES WRONG

Rule one – don't create a conflict around inaccuracies. When there is something that you want corrected, first call the journalist and explain in a positive way what is wrong and how he or she can correct it. When it is a serious mistake we should contact the editor and demand that a correction is made public.

Countries have very different rules in terms of public access to government information, or the right to corrections. They also have different institutions dealing with media legislation. Find out what applies in your country and what your rights are.

## CONTACTS WITH PUBLIC SERVANTS

In a local municipality the division of labor between the politicians and the public servants is clear: politicians make the political decisions and draw up the policies and guidelines whereas public servants supply politicians with the basic data upon which their decisions are made. Public servants then implement the politicians' decisions.

This is in theory how it should be. In reality it is more complicated. In reality the roles often get intertwined resulting in public servants in fact making the decisions and politicians formally confirming them. Remember that you are the representative of the people. It is important to keep the roles separate. Any confusion will influence how the residents perceive their local politicians – are they their representatives or do they represent the administration, the authorities? The latter is very common and one of the

reasons why citizens are more and more critical and suspicious of politicians. To be a ruling party, especially if you have been so for a long time, increases the risk that citizens will see you as part of the system, as bureaucrats administering government, rather than decision-makers creating better living conditions for people. It is easy to slide into the role, and we must actively differentiate the roles and demonstrate who we are. As local politicians we must be aware of this dilemma and ensure that our behavior does not enhance the perception of us as “the administration.”

We should ensure we have the necessary tools and conditions to be good decision makers. We need to find a balance in our relationship with the civil servants so we do not find ourselves completely dependent on them for direction. It is natural that those with detailed expertise of an issue have the advantage. But we as local politicians must not seek to become better experts than the public servants – that is not our task. We must remind ourselves every day that our task is to represent the citizens and their interests and make sure the administration meets their needs.

We need to make the line between us and the administration clear through good communication and relations with:

1. The residents – we represent their interests.
2. Our party organization – party policies are the foundation upon which our decisions made.
3. The public servants in our municipality - through them we can receive an accurate and relevant picture of reality and ensure that good implementation plans are developed.

We must never let public servants push us to make decisions we are not comfortable with. We must demand full information, ask questions, ensure that we have all the background, analysis, and alternatives available, before we make a decision. We politicians can never blame someone else; we must be able to defend our decisions to the citizens. If the administration dislikes a decision, they can provide new facts or information and ask that a decision be revised.

The possibilities to be the real decision-maker are often limited by external factors:

- Municipal activities have expanded and become more complex, making it more difficult for a local councilor to have an understanding of all the issues.
- The rapid development in the world leads to constant reassessments, new ideas and reforms.
- The economic and financial constraints demand policies that are overwhelmingly negative for the citizens.
- Citizens have less trust and confidence in local politicians being their representatives and see them primarily as part of the government administration.

- Our role is often limited to formulating political targets; the details – and their micromanagement – are left to the management of the municipality.

There are many different types of systems for developing municipal planning and direction. We as local politicians must ensure these systems give us real possibilities to provide political direction, monitor implementation and evaluate results.

## **PRACTICAL WORKING CONDITIONS**

The real possibilities to rule and control to a large extent depend on our practical working conditions. We need to have routines and systems that are functional. We must make reasonable demands and be able to comment on the running of municipal programs. In addition to what we said earlier about planning and steering systems, there are a few other important points to consider:

1. **Comprehensible documents:** All documents should be accessible in good time prior to meetings. They must be correct, brief and have clear proposals. If they are more extensive they should also include a summary.
2. **Briefings:** If documents are handed out in good time beforehand, oral briefings may not be necessary. Instead there can be additions and questions only, which will make meetings much shorter.
3. **Meeting times:** Your caucus and committee meetings should be at a time that suits the local politicians. It is wise to have a deadline for the meeting so people can plan.
4. **Special planning workshops:** Besides ordinary meetings, it is necessary to set aside time for planning where local politicians and the municipal management can do long-term planning.
5. **Monitoring progress with implementation:** The municipal management should present a report on progress made and problems encountered regularly – every quarter or so – in order to review plans and change them if needed.
6. **Study visits:** For newly elected local politicians it is important to become familiar with the municipal activities by visiting different institutions and taking part in various activities. This we should do regularly.
7. **Study days** can also be used to give an opportunity to study a particular political field in depth, for example child care.
8. **Fact File:** Every local politician should have a fact file with relevant data of his or her portfolio.
9. **The administration** should, within reasonable limits, supply basic data when needed. They should also participate in meetings and present basic facts when we demand it.

## **MAKE SURE THE BUREAUCRACY PERFORMS**

The citizens have a right to demand good service, simple and comprehensible rules, an efficient use of resources and to be met by people who are professional, helpful and friendly. The municipality is for its citizens, not the other way around. Taxpayers pay for the municipal salaries and activities. We as politicians must continuously and visibly fight corruption, wasting of resources, unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape in our municipalities.

The municipal administration should use its resources efficiently. Again, good systems for planning and monitoring are key factors. Certain other measures can greatly enhance efficiency:

- People's participation and experience, are most valuable. We should strive to create an organization which utilizes the experience and ideas of the individual staff members and gives them space to find the best solutions. This is much more efficient than micromanaging every decision and making prescriptive rules.
- Ensure there are possibilities for staff to influence how they best do their own work, based on the citizens' needs and political decisions and guidelines.
- Focus on results. An efficient organization is focused on the results, not on processes. This allows staff members to think for themselves and use initiative and creativity to solve the problems.
- Listening to the citizens. An efficient organization listens to how the citizens perceive the municipal services and activities. It is open to criticism and proposals and realizes that its task is to meet the citizens' needs.
- Ruled by tasks, not by rules. One solves problems best when not hindered by unnecessarily detailed rules.

The contacts between the municipal administration and the citizens should be as non-bureaucratic as possible. Small things can play a huge role in this aspect:

- Simplified language: Documents, forms, letters and conversations should be easy to understand.
- Accessibility: It must be easy to get in contact with the right person in the administration, whether it is a politician or a public servant. Offices, opening hours, telephone switchboard and websites must all be easy to access, accurate and functioning.
- Registration of complaints: A complaints system should be set up to receive residents' problems and concerns. Summaries should be presented to the committees regularly and should be used as information to make improvements.
- Quick response: Complaints and problems should be dealt with as quickly as possible and results should be reported back to the person who complained.



- Understandable and logical rules: Rules should be simple and logical. Those that do not have a practical function should be scrapped.
- Meet citizens in a friendly and correct way: This is important for how citizens perceive everything the municipality and the party does.

## **LISTEN TO THE CITIZENS AND USE THEIR COMMENTS**

Make sure that comments, ideas, etc. from the citizens are documented systematically. If the comments are given to you as a politician, make sure the civil servants get access to the information – and the other way around.

Use questionnaires, interviews, meetings with citizens, mail-boxes in public places, and the municipality's web page to allow citizens to comment on services. Councilors need to have discussions to decide what we do as politicians and what we leave to the municipal administration.

## **CONTACTS WITH THE ADMINISTRATION STAFF**

We local politicians will meet with the Head of the Administration who is responsible for the daily running of the Municipality. We must never take the role of managers of the Administration but be very strict about the different roles. That does not mean we cannot have contacts with other municipal employees. We need them to give us a true picture of the everyday reality on which we can base our decisions. It also gives us the opportunity to express our appreciation for their work, ideas, experience and engagement. Contacts with employees should be carefully planned and not only take place during coffee breaks or election campaigns.

Map all municipal workplaces, how many staff in each place, what they do, which trade unions organizes their workplace, etc. Set a goal for your contacts, for example all workplaces should be visited once a year. Book study visits and make sure you have enough time to talk to the ordinary staff not just the managers. We can also organize thematic meetings and invite different groups. Everyone in a portfolio committee must share the task of meeting with municipal staff. This allows us to meet as many of them as possible.

Be clear about what our purpose and messages are, before we meet with staff. You must also be able to briefly present our program even if the main purpose of the visit is for you to ask and learn.

For us Social Democrats it is natural to have good contacts with the trade unions and to listen to their concerns and priorities. But again – we as local politicians must be careful not to enter into an employer role on all levels. The management of the municipality must deal with their staff.



## 11. GENDER

Men and women have equal value; this is ideologically fundamental to Social Democratic politics. This equality should be reflected in all spheres of politics and life so that we build a fair and equal society. But we all know that reality does not reflect such equality. Women are discriminated against formally and informally, consciously and subconsciously, everywhere.

As elected representatives of the Social Democratic party we have a responsibility to ensure that the decisions we take part in support the development of gender equality. We must look at every problem, every challenge, and every decision through a “gender-filter”. To share power and responsibility equally between men and women is a matter of justice and democracy. Men and women each constitute 50% of the population and should therefore also share responsibility and power – an obvious goal for gender equality.

Many of us proudly say we live in countries where gender equality exists. Our constitutions are very progressive and guarantee women and men equal rights. This is always a myth and if we believe it is true then it may make us blind to the discrimination that exists. The Nordic countries are often described as “gender equal” but there exists no such country in the world. If we take an honest look at attitudes, values, and the discrepancy between what we say and what we do, we will see that discrimination still exists. Women are paid less to do the same task or to hold the same position as men. Jobs with mostly women employees have lower status and pay than jobs mainly occupied by men. Where the power is, you will usually find the men and the money. Women take more responsibility for home and children. These are facts that any national statistics will verify.

Gender equality is about the relationship between men and women and about using everyone’s full contribution to the development of society. If we want our society to develop and become more equal, both sexes must take responsibility and show each other mutual respect. It is a joint task to achieve gender equality.

### **THE UN CONVENTION FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

The UN former Secretary General, Kofi Annan, stated a view that is shared by many countries. He said: “All my experience tells me that the most important issue for the world’s development is women’s rights”. In 1979, the UN adopted a Charter - The Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW - to work against discrimination against women since the Human Rights Charter did not focus enough on discrimination against women. More than 90% of all countries in the world have signed the Convention. That is, however, a deceptive figure since many countries do not support the whole Convention but only parts of it. Many countries have

reserved themselves from some of the 16 Articles arguing that they are in violation of national legislation, national culture, tradition and religions – a reflection of how these countries see and value women. This clearly weakens the Convention and those human rights applying to women. Cultural and religious motives may never be an excuse for human rights violations.

Since 2010 the UN has a special department for all women's issues, called UN Women.

## **LOCAL POLITICS WITH “GENDER GLASSES”**

We politicians must contribute to gender equality by working systematically at adopting a gender perspective. What do the politics in our respective portfolios look like from a gender perspective?

Here are suggestions of some areas to focus on:

- **Elderly care:** Do single men and women receive the same support and attention?
- **Education:** Do boys get more attention and time than girls? How do schools work with gender equality – at all levels from pre-school onward?
- **After school hours:** Does the municipality give more resources to traditional boys' activities than to girls' activities?
- **Housing and development:** Do the plans meet both men's and women's needs?
- **Women's health:** How much focus is there on women's health? Is there a difference in care content and extent between men and women?
- **Abuse:** How do we take care of abused women and how do we help both men and women concerned? Do women have a safe place to go to and what do we do with the perpetrators?
- **Wages:** What is our Human Resource policy in our municipality – are there discriminatory differences in wages and conditions?

We need to work systematically to map and analyze gender perspectives. One tool that can help us to know more about how men and women are affected by a municipal program is called 3R. Use the three Rs below to assess:

- **Representation:** How are men and women represented at different levels and in different activities
- **Resources:** How are the resources divided between men and women in terms of money, services, space and time
- **Reality:** What are the different realities of men and women's lives?

We need to answer these questions if we are to integrate gender equality in municipal activity. What must we as elected Social Democratic representatives in municipalities do? We need to work at different levels at the same time. Overall we must spread the UN Convention of Women's Rights and make it an instrument for our political work. We must scrutinize the municipal programs and describe reality. Gender divided statistics for all activities are useful. The following actions are key:

- For every decision we make we must ask if the decision will have different consequences for men and women and if it perpetuates unequal gender relations.
- Every decision we make must be just and derive from the basic value that all humans are equal.
- We must introduce and discuss methods in our work that increase gender equality and strengthen the work for gender equality.
- We must follow up and evaluate our activities and ensure that they are fair and equal.

## GENDER AND ATTITUDE

It is one thing to understand gender equality intellectually and to have ideas about how gender equality should work. It is another thing to take the fight for it into our everyday lives. To take responsibility for the culture and attitudes we all have and to strive to change these takes courage, respect and consciousness.

We can start with our own work. How does our portfolio group work? Is it organized to suit both the men and women and how do we relate to each other and treat each other? There are many ways of exercising power. The Norwegian gender professor Berith Aas has presented five ways in which men – consciously or subconsciously - leverage their power to subjugate women and women's culture:

1. **Make invisible:** When one avoids listening or speaking to another person - by going to the toilet, reading paper, or texting on the phone – that person is made invisible. The person feels unimportant, humiliated and uninterested in engagement.
2. **Ridicule:** To make fun at other's expense.
3. **Withhold information:** In this way you keep people ignorant. Decisions are made elsewhere – on the golf course, the pub, the sauna - where not everyone is present.
4. **Double punish:** Whatever you do is wrong. This creates a feeling of being inadequate.
5. **Impose guilt and shame:** The one who is subject to assault blames herself. When the environment blames the victim, it is likely she will do so herself.

This is actually much more common than we think. Be observant in meetings and you will recognize some of this behavior.

Read more in a report about the five techniques of domination:

<http://www.socialdemokraterna.se/Webben-for-alla/S-kvinnor/S-kvinnor/In-English1/The-Power-Handbook1/>



## 12. ASSESSING PROGRESS THROUGH EVALUATION

The goals we formulate in our political programs are often forgotten in everyday political life. But goals and plans are the maps that provide direction for our work and must be taken seriously.

To make goals meaningful we must systematically assess progress and evaluate whether our decisions contribute to the development we want to see. We need to measure the pace of development and to what degree we are fulfilling our goals. To enable us to work like this we need to have goals that are formulated in a manner that can be measured and assessed. Evaluations must always be an integral part of our planning processes.

In this chapter we will look at how we assess the fulfillment of our goals and our work, not just in terms of the activities in our portfolio but also how successfully we as local politicians plan and execute our work.

### **MEASUREABLE GOALS**

Goals should be formulated so that they describe what we want to achieve, “a future state we want”, “when we have done this, reality will look like this.” The goals must be clear and realistic, aimed at activity, and limited in time. We must ensure that progress towards achieving our goals can be measured or at least be evaluated. If this cannot be measured, the goals will not function as steering instruments. We have to be able to determine whether or not the goals are being achieved.

It is not easy to construct measures (also called indicators) that are reliable and relevant. It is easy with financial measures such as incomes and spending, or other quantitative measures such as number of worked hours, number of children in schools, etc. It is much more difficult to construct qualitative measures. For example if we want to achieve a healthier child population, we will have to find ways to measure whether we are making progress. We could use a quantitative measure like child mortality and compare progress every year. Clearly, we must know how we are going to evaluate the goals when we formulate them.

### **EVALUATION OF BUDGETS AND FINANCES**

The finances are central to all political activities and we are quite used to thinking in economic terms in our evaluations. Material is found in financial reports and other

statistics on a continuous basis. It is usually easy to say what we have spent or where we have increased spending.

But for politicians, qualitative evaluations are equally important. These evaluations concern what quality we deliver to the citizens rather than how much money is spent within each portfolio.

We need of course to have quantitative measures for delivery, such as number of people who have services, children in child care, air pollution, recycling, energy consumption, etc.

The picture we receive is a good start but it is not enough to give a full understanding of the citizen's perception of what we deliver. Are people content? How well do they think different services function? What is bad? What is not functioning? What do they want to change? How do the citizens grade the municipality? How do they grade us as local politicians and the work we are doing?

By answering these questions we can assess to see if we have reached a goal such as "80 percent of the citizens perceive the municipal service as good or very good." Measuring attitudes can be done through different forms of questionnaires, surveys or studies or through interviews with service clients. It is important that such evaluation is done in a reliable and relevant way and that the same measures are used over a longer period of time.

## **EVALUATING OUR POLITICAL WORK**

Our own goals as local politicians must also be formulated in ways that allow them to be measured. These can be goals targeting:

- Contacts with the citizens, service client groups, NGOs, organizations
- Attitudes towards us from different groups
- Contacts with media, participation in local media
- Contacts with municipal staff

Our planning should consist of both quantitative and qualitative measures. Furthermore, we should take stock at least once a year and see if, and what, we may need to change. Mostly we evaluate on the basis of our day-to-day interaction with people and our work, but of course we can also utilize a questionnaire if it is relevant.

**SECTION II: OUR CAUCUS GROUP**

Fill in the following form. Discuss using your own experiences in the caucus and in the municipality.

**1. WE IN THE GROUP**

- a) The pressure from public and media on politicians. Do we identify problems or needs in terms of:
  - o Our practical working conditions
  - o Suspicion towards politicians
  - o The political content
  - o Lack of influence

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**2. WHEN WE DO NOT AGREE**

- a) What rules apply to us?
- b) How do we in the caucus group handle disagreements amongst us?

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**3. MORAL AND ETHICAL RULES**

- a) What rules apply to us?

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**4. WE IN THE GROUP**

- a) Mapping of our experiences, skills and knowledge
- b) Strengths and weaknesses

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**5. MAKE DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR EVERYONE IN THE CAUCUS GROUP**

- c) How do we complement experiences, skills and knowledge to increase the group's political capacity?

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**6. WORK IN THE CAUCUS GROUP**

- d) How do we want our work characterized?
- e) How are our political meetings? In what specific ways can they be improved? Refer to different aspects of the meetings in your answer.
- f) How do we delegate tasks and responsibilities?

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