

# DECISION-MAKER ANALYSIS

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In campaign strategy development, decision-maker analysis follows your response to the three key questions:

1. What do you want?
2. Why do you want it?
3. Who has the power to give it to you?

In an advocacy campaign, success means moving decision-makers to give you what you want. Thus understanding decision-makers is critical to achieving success. Decision-maker analysis informs your answer to the next question:

4. How can you get them to give you what you want – or at least not stop you from getting it?

In short, decision-maker analysis examines what a decision-maker is able and likely to do and how you can shape both those actions and their impact on your success. Thorough decision-maker analysis allows you to devise non-lobbying tactics like

1. Communicating to key base constituencies of decision-makers;
2. Avoiding – or targeting – decision-makers’ personal “hot buttons;” or
3. Neutralizing opponents by revealing their inconsistency or unethical or incompetent actions.

## KNOW THE RULES

To target and prioritize decision-makers, you must know what they can and cannot do to give you what you want. In other words, you must know the rules dictating how change gets made in the system where you’re trying to make it – in a state legislature, for example, how a bill becomes a law and what role each decision-maker plays in that process.

### **Questions to answer for a single decision-maker or decision-making body include:**

1. What are the all steps that your desired change must pass through, such as committees; reviews of legal, environmental or budgetary impacts; checks that it meets equity requirements for subcontracting or access to services?
2. What policies allow you to take the steps that advance your cause and avoid steps that could hold you back?
3. Who has power at each of these steps?

4. What do they have power to do, such as stop your desired change, delay it indefinitely, gut it, or expedite it?
5. What is the exact mechanism by which they could affect your desired change and who would need to help them do it – for example, do they need a majority or supermajority vote, or do they need a committee chair to call on them to make a motion? Study the protocol for applicable meetings, such as how agendas are written and put in order, what role you may have in the meeting through such means as public comment, and how decisions are made – whether by Robert’s Rules or some other system.
6. If decision-makers take your goal off-track, what recourse do you have? In addition to litigation, often jurisdictions will have a mechanism by which proposals that have been killed in a committee can be brought to a vote by the full decision-making body.
7. Who will implement, allocate funding to, monitor and enforce your desired change if it becomes public policy, as well as defend it from efforts to weaken or reverse it?

**If the change that you seek is electoral:**

1. Research the steps needed to get your proposal in front of voters, such as who oversees the process of qualifying ballot propositions, who determines what ballot language is and not, and who issues ballots and administers the voting process.
2. Identify the margin of victory required – such as a simple majority, 55% majority or 2/3 majority.
3. Study who has power over your ability to win a majority of votes, such as who enforces campaign finance laws, voter rights and anti-voter fraud laws.
4. Obtain counsel to anticipate possible legal challenges if your proposal passes and where these would be adjudicated.

These steps will allow you identify important decision-makers in addition to the most obvious ones, the voters.

**If the change that you seek is not in public policy but in the procedures and practices of a system or set of organizations, you are likely to have many diffuse decision-makers.**

1. Make sure that you have answered the question “What do you want?” as specifically and tangibly as possible. What are the procedures and practices that you want to change?
2. Who sets these procedures? Who engages in these practices? Must they be changed a few authorities, a collective decision, or one individual at a time?
3. Who holds those setting procedures and engaging in practices accountable?
4. What are the policies and funding outside of their organization(s) that dictate what procedures and practices are possible and necessary, and who has power over these policies and funding?

## RESEARCH INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKERS

These questions are not exhaustive but give a sense of the range of important topics.

### **Sources of and threats to their power**

1. To whom are they formally accountable? How are they held accountable? (E.g. elected by voters in a district, hired and fired by a board of directors, etc.)
2. Who helped them to achieve their current position? (E.g. for an elected official, research their donors, endorsers, exactly which demographics supported them and who appointed them to their committee assignments and allocated funding for their office and staff)
3. What are their goals, including career ambitions? (E.g. for an elected official, research priority legislation they are co-sponsoring or trying to stop, why, and who has the power to make or break it. Research what offices they may pursue next as well as aspirations for their work or business dealings outside of their elected office.)
4. Which media cover them and/or their community and/or are read by their key backers? What are their relationships like with these media?

### **Nature and amount of power**

1. How much power have they demonstrated – i.e. success in moving policy?
2. How much money can they put towards this action?
3. How many people can they mobilize towards this action?
4. What technical knowledge of policy and/or capacity to research it do they have?
5. What communications capacity do they have?
6. How many staff members do they have?
7. What other organizational infrastructure do they have – e.g. office, meeting space, office equipment, entity into which they can fundraise?

### **Record**

1. What were the promises they made in coming to leadership?
2. What mistakes or legal or ethical breaches have they committed?
3. What losses have they suffered?
4. What honors or awards have they received?

### **Relationships**

1. Whom do they look up to?
2. Who are their core personal relationships?
  - a. Family

- b. Clubs, organizations and hobbies
3. How do other decision-makers influence them and vice versa?
4. What kinds of messengers do they tend to listen to, and whom do they ignore or react against? Any patterns in this (i.e. race, gender, age, sector, etc.)?

### **Personality**

1. Do they do what they say?
2. What are their “hot buttons?”
3. What makes them feel bold in advocating a position? Look at what types of arguments do they tend to make to support their points/positions.
4. What motivates them or gives them personal satisfaction? Does ego matter?
5. How risk tolerant are they? Are they averse to conflict?
6. How do they react to feedback and being challenged? What do they get defensive about?

### **Values**

1. Where do they go for reflection, inspiration and values-based community (e.g. a community of faith, a book group, spending time outdoors)?
2. What formative experiences have shaped their worldview and values?
3. Where do they make their charitable donations or volunteer?

### **Relationship map**

Mapping the target’s relationships can help you understand both how to influence their actions and who else may do so. Draw a circle in the center of a sheet of paper with your target’s name. (A lot of free software, such as mind mapping programs, also allows you to do this kind of diagram electronically.) Start by considering their most important relationships and sources of power – both personal/family and public. Note each of these in a bubble near your target and draw a line connecting each to the target. These form the target’s “first ring” of relationships. To identify their most important sources of power, take into account the research questions above, focusing on

1. Authority – who can hire or fire them?
2. Money – how do they earn it and/or who donates to them?
3. Mobilization – who voted for them? Who turned out voters/volunteers?
4. Research/policy – where do they get their information?
5. Who is key to their ability to get their message out?
6. Who is on their staff?
7. Who can increase, decrease or take away their organizational infrastructure?
8. Other power sources?

Next, map the second ring – the key relationships/power sources for those in your target’s first ring. Then map the key relationships and backers of the second ring and so forth. Be sure also to note opponents in a different color. Opponents that you have in common with your target’s network may be valuable to your strategy, as may natural allies of yours who are opponents of your target and/or those in their network.

## RESEARCH DECISION-MAKING CONSTITUENCIES

If your decision-makers number by the thousands – like the voting public or employees of a system that you aim to change – you will need to research not only individual decision-makers but decision-making constituencies. Key questions include:

### **Their stake and ability to act**

1. How are their direct and immediate self-interests affected by your proposal?
2. Among the constituency, who is likely to take action – such as frequent voters or those engaged in workplace leadership?
3. What barriers to action might the constituency face? Examples are real or perceived disenfranchisement of former prisoners or perverse incentives affecting the practices of social service providers.

### **What action they are likely to favor**

1. What does opinion research tell you about this constituency and how it views your issue? Can you conduct your own polls, surveys, focus groups or interviews?
2. How have they voted in the past? How have they supported or resisted past system change?
3. How will they perceive the effects of your proposed change on other constituencies? For example, if they perceive the proposal as pro-immigrant, will that incline them for or against it?

### **How you can influence their action**

1. Opinion research should also study ways to gain decision-makers’ support.
2. How are they organized into subgroups, such as by geography, demographics, political party affiliation, or profession?
3. What are the demographics of the constituency?
4. What organizations move them to action? Examine the role of such organizations as congregations and civic groups for voters and labor unions or professional associations for employees. Research individual decision-makers who lead these organizations.

5. What individuals move them to action? These may be formal or informal leaders, or those who tend to make others run the other way. Interviews with constituents can point you to people who play roles like trendsetters and channels for information and relationships. Research these individual decision-makers.
6. How does information spread through this constituency?

## INFORMATION SOURCES FOR RESEARCHING INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKERS

For current information and information sources and trends in target analysis, visit [www.vrresearch.com/blog](http://www.vrresearch.com/blog).

- Voter participation history
- Property ownership, litigation, liens, judgments & other adverse filings
- Depositions
- Genealogical websites and records, local historical societies
- Business & non-profit records: Corporate filings, SEC filings, IRS 990s, permits, licenses
- Donations to charitable organizations (IRS 990s and organizational websites, newsletters, and other publicity)
- Professional licensing & oversight agencies: Legal, medical, insurance, environmental, education, building/planning permitting and code enforcement, health and safety, OSHA, labor and wages, etc.
- Military service personnel records
- Lobbyist disclosure filings
- Campaign contributions
- Economic interest statements
- News clips: Newspaper, magazine, newsletters, professional and academic journals, other periodicals and Internet-based articles
- Find online content created by target
  - Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
  - Blogs and personal web sites
  - Verify claims and identify vulnerabilities
- Canvass records related to elected office
  - Financial disclosure statements
  - Campaign finance records
  - Voting history & bill sponsorship
  - Voting with/against party
  - Attendance/absences & committee membership
  - Minutes & agendas
  - Office budgets & expenditures
  - Privately financed travel and reimbursements

## PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

The following table provides a framework for using research as a basis for a brainstorm of tactics and next steps. The most effective tactics usually stem from using multiple facts.

<b>Fact</b>	<b>Follow-Up Questions</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Implication/Action</b>	<b>Anticipated Reaction</b>
E.g.: Decision-maker is Catholic	Which church does she attend?	Fr. Jon ask Fr. Mateo	Ask the Bishop to write a letter to her	If we asked her priest to speak to her, she would complain to the Diocese – start with the Bishop instead