

## Teeter-Totter

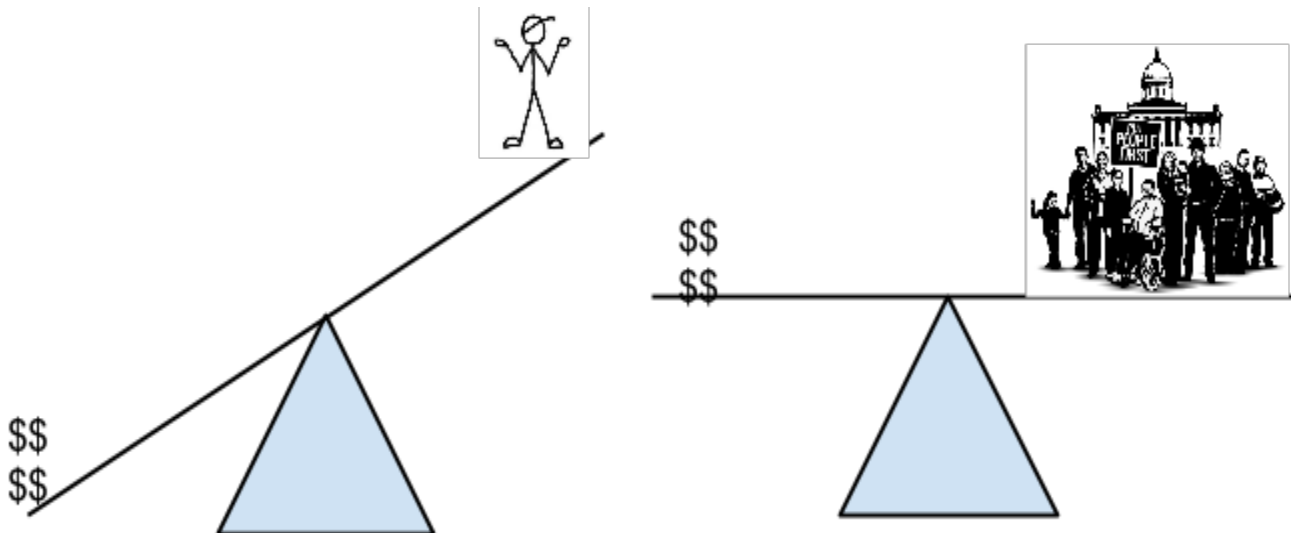
**Purpose:** A fundamental piece of organizing involves an analysis of power. In order to both understand that decisions about our lives are made by people, usually not us, and that we do have the power to shape those decisions, we need a basic understanding of how power relationships work. This exercise allows us, in a simple way, to both articulate and visualize how decisions are made in a current system and how that changes when we organize.

**When to Use:** The teeter-totter can be used in a one-on-one organizing conversation, at an OC or "Get Involved" meeting, or as part of a longer workshop about organizing, power, social movements, etc. It is a good one to use at the beginning.

**Flow at-a glance:**

- Who makes the decisions?
- What can you do by yourself?
- What happens if we organize?
- Inspirational ending and call to action.

**What the Diagram should look like:**



How Decisions are Made Now

What Changes When we Organize?

### **Before beginning the exercise:**

It is *imperative* that you start out by drawing out or having some sense of the issues that the person or people you are talking to cares about so that you can refer to this as a specific example in the Teeter-Totter. The exercise won't really work if you don't first identify issues. This could be done by asking people to say one thing they would change about their lives/communities or a problem they see during a go-around or introductions. It could also be done by asking someone about a specific area that you already know they are concerned with (for example, with students you might ask: "who here has student debt?" or "who thinks its hard to afford higher education?")

### **Part I: Who makes decisions:**

In this section, we are asking people to realize that *there are* people who make actual decisions that cause the issues that they identified before. We point out these people on the heavy side of the teeter totter.

You want to start by asking a series of questions to draw this concept out:

Possible Questions:

- Who is actually making decisions about this issue?
- Has anybody asked you how you think this should be? So if its not you, who is deciding?
- Do you know any of the people making this decision?

**\*\*Facilitator's Note:** Especially if you know you will be talking about a specific issue, it is helpful to have certain decision-makers in mind that you want to draw out from the conversation and make sure that you have questions that will help get at those. (for example, with student debt, to get at Banks being stakeholders you might want to ask "who makes money when you have a lot of student debt?")

Additional Qs to push

- What kind of clothes do they wear? Where do they live? How much money do they make? Who do they hang out with? Do you think they are as worried as you about meeting their needs? (or about the specific issue you are discussing)

### **Part II: What can you do by yourself:**

The purpose of this section is to show people that individual actions are not effective at addressing the problems or issues. Even if they change the issue for one person, they don't change the whole teeter-totter, or the systemic issue of power/who makes decisions. These individual actions are the one person alone on the high end of the teeter totter.

Questions:

- What can we do as individuals to change this issue?
  - Has anybody ever tried doing something to change this? and How did that go?
- \*\* We want to draw out that we've tried to do things...

\*\* Facilitators Note: Just like before, you want to think ahead about some of the individual actions people try to take to address the issue you are talking about, so that you can ask about that specifically and show people that they have tried to change this, but were ineffective. (for example, with student debt you might ask, "who has tried to get a scholarship or a deferment on your loan?" or "who has written a letter to the dean about the cost of tuition?")

### **Part III: What happens when we organize?**

The purpose of this section is to propose that if we organize and come together, we can be more effective in having a say in these decisions that affect us.

- Do you think anyone else is also struggling with XYZ?
- What do you think would happen if you and everyone else who is dealing with XYZ did that ABC thing you told me you did by yourself?
- Would it be more effective if everyone did that thing together?
- Right now this person is jumping on the teeter totter alone, and not really getting anywhere, but what would happen if we all jumped on it together?

\*\*It can also be helpful to ask or point out that there isn't necessarily a guarantee that we will be able to change this situation- but we do have a guarantee that if we don't organize, it can only stay the same or even get worse. You can also point out that nobody is going to change things for us, the people who have the power on the teeter totter right now are not going to wake up one day and decide they don't want that power anymore-- the only shot we've got is if we organize to change it.

### **Part IV: Inspirational Ending and Call to Action**

This is the basis of everything we do at the VWC. We work with our community to identify common challenges and then get organized around these identified issues to build power and have more of a say in the decisions that impact our community.

Do you all agree that the most effective way that we can address XYZ issue is to get organized? YES!!! Hooray!! We are the best!!

Will you join us?