

**Essential Questions:**

1. How do interest groups use propaganda to persuade people to their point of view?
2. How does the mass media and interest groups influence public opinion and politics?

**Design Your Own Interest Group**

**Directions:** This packet is designed to be a “reader” before you complete the assignment at the end. Please look through this for guidance.

**Introduction:** Americans may not be very passionate about joining parties, but they sure do tend to join interest groups. Consumer activist and Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader successfully created an entire public-interest group network. While you may or may not agree with Nader’s political views, his tactical approach to exercising influence is something any politico can respect. See if you can follow in his tactical footsteps and develop your own interest group. Keep in mind, though, if you want to have influence, you’ll need to raise money.

- 1.0 Overall: This project is designed for students to create interest groups. They will discover the process involved.
- 2.0 Knowledge: Students learn that interest groups play an important role in the development of laws and policies.
- 3.0 Understanding: Students will understand that interest groups can have an impact on the way congressional campaigns are conducted.
- 4.0 Application: Students will explore the development of interest groups and create their own.
- 5.0 Analysis: Students will use case studies to show their significance in legislation.
- 6.0 Synthesis: Students will propaganda promoting their interest group and calling other people to action.
- 7.0 Evaluation: Students will use consumer activist and presidential candidate Ralph Nader as an example of someone who developed an entire public-interest group network. They try to follow Nader’s tactical approach and create their own interest group domain.

## The Nader Procedure/Sequence

### Stage 1:

What issue would you like your interest group network to tackle? (use a broad issue to start – for example, Nader focused on consumer protection)

You'll need some seed money to begin. Nader got his by suing General Motors (they had hired private detectives to harass him when he was testifying before a Senate committee on the importance of requiring seatbelts). GM settled out of court, so the amount isn't public knowledge, but think in terms of tens of thousands of dollars. How will you raise your seed money? (You'll need to be imaginative)

Use your seed money to start your first interest group. Your goal with this group will be to lobby and influence public policy and legislation. Nader's example is Public Citizen, which advocates for consumers from a liberal/left perspective. What's the name of your lobbying-oriented interest group?

Is your interest group ideological, public-interest, business-oriented, based on a social movement (unionism, environmentalism, etc.) or based on a professional society (e.g., doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.)? (It can be a combination of more than one of the above).

What's the stated purpose of your interest group? [Why does it exist?]

How will you get people, businesses, or the profession you represent to join your interest group? What incentives can you offer, solidarity, material, purposive, or otherwise?

Fundraising time: Try to apply for foundation grants. If you're a left-leaning interest group you'll want to apply to liberal foundations for money (such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation). If you're a right-leaning interest group you'll want to apply to conservative foundations (such as the Scaife Foundation, Adolf Coors Foundation, and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation). Which type of foundations will your group be applying to? Most foundations have Web sites to consult.

This interest group will use an insider strategy, providing information to members of Congress. What types of valuable information could you supply to members of Congress on your issue?

### Stage 2:

Create a related interest group that provides some type of service(s). For example, Nader's Center for Auto Safety provides information about auto safety to the public. If you provide charity, social services, or run community projects, your group can potentially qualify for a federal government contract that will help keep your organization afloat. What services could your service-oriented interest group offer to the public?

What's the name of this new service-oriented interest group?

### Stage 3:

To get legislative action on your issue, you'll want to pursue an outsider, grassroots strategy in addition to your insider strategy. Come up with a name for a mass-membership, ideological interest group which provides a clear purpose and attract members.

Of course, if you want to be effective, you'll need to find more funding. It's time to run a direct mail / email campaign. Almost every group uses this technique. First, you'll need to buy a list of names, either from another interest group or from a research firm. Then you need to do the following:

- Create a slogan of some kind for your group
- Craft two key phrases that arouse emotion and create a sense of urgency in your target audience. Fear, a sense of threat, or demonizing a political figure who is likely to be unpopular with your target audience often work well (for example, Hillary Clinton is a typical "demon" for right-wing interest groups, as in "Hillary Clinton and the Looney Left think they can take America in 2006")
- Get some famous people who lean left or right to endorse your group publicly. What famous names could you solicit for endorsement?
- Grassroots groups typically try to mobilize letter writing, phone calling, or email contact campaigns to legislators, executive branch agency chiefs and key figures in business. What type of specific issue mass campaign would you like to start?

#### **Stage 4:**

All those idealistic young college students could sure lend a hand. It's time to create a presence on college campuses. Ralph started the Public Interest Research Groups this way – for example, WISPIRG at the University of Wisconsin. One of your group members will have to go out on speaking tours to galvanize support among students (and faculty!). Which group member wants to do this?

There are two ways to fund your campus organizations. You can do it through student fees, but this gets controversial because groups on the opposite side of the political spectrum will typically object. You can also do door-to-door canvassing – it's hard work, though! Which do you want to do? What do you want to call your campus organizations?

#### **Stage 5:**

Use part of the money from your grassroots interest group to create a think-tank – a public interest organization that does research on policy questions and disseminates their findings. Come up with a name for your think-tank. These names usually sound very neutral, for example, Nader started the "Health Research Group," which advocates for universal health coverage.

You'll need to get academics from various universities to participate in your research efforts. What major universities do you want to try to get academics from?

Fundraising time: Back to the foundations for grants. Which type of foundations will your think tank be applying to? (It should be the same political orientation as for your first interest group)

#### **Stage 6:**

Using the funds from your grassroots interest group again, you're going to create a public-interest law firm. This type of interest group provides specialized legal services finding people who have been harmed by public or private policies. Public-interest law firms bring suit on behalf of injured parties, file briefs supporting someone else's law suit, provide moot courts, and help support similar suits that make it to the Supreme Court. The fees you earn when you win a case will help keep this group afloat, since your lawyers don't really make much. List a policy or two that you could bring suit against.

You should come up with a name for your public-interest law firm (for example, one of Nader's is the Public Citizen Litigation Group).

You may work alone or with ONE other person to complete the following:





7. Mission statement (an “about us”) [What is your overall goal / mission?]

8. Funding? [membership, government aid/grants, 5K run] Explain.

9. Promotion [aka Propaganda] needs to include but not limited to each of the following:

a. Logo

b. SWAG (Stuff We All Get AKA Bumper Sticker, Hat, Shirt design)

c. Member Benefits

d. Other Advertising [Choose one of the following or let me know if different]

i. 30-60 second TV, Radio, Internet commercial

ii. Billboard (poster)

iii. Website/Facebook Page

iv. Magazine

v. Other...