

Title: Campaign Financing Systems

Subject: Money in Politics

Type: Workshop

Goal: To build student interest and involvement in the issue of campaign finance reform.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- List how money is spent in campaigns
- Discuss the influence money raising has on the political process
- Debate different campaign financing systems
- Explain how different campaign financing systems work

Materials: Flip chart, markers, handouts

Time: 90 minutes

Procedure:

1. Anticipation Guide (15 minutes) - As students enter the room, have them mark their response to a set of statements about campaign finance reform and politics in general (see attachment). Once everyone has filled out the guide see if there are any trends or commonalities in their group's responses. Where is there a lot of agreement? Why? Where is there a lot of disagreement? Why? Call on students to explain their responses.
2. Paired Sharing (20 minutes) - Ask the students to pair up with someone they don't know. In pairs they should discuss what kinds of things they would spend money on if they were running a political campaign. Give each pair 5 minutes to share with each other and then bring everyone back to the group and have the people share what kinds of responses they heard from on another (websites, staff, travel, fliers, commercials, food, etc.). Write their responses up on a piece of flip chart. Explain that nine out of ten congressional races are won by the candidate who spends the most money, buying the kinds of things the group just mentioned. Also explain that the average amount of money spent in a winning senate campaign is \$1.6 million. How they would go about raising the amount of money needed to run a competitive campaign. Take a couple comments from the group. Explain that there is a long history of how money enters into and impacts the political process. For people interested in affecting change on a variety of issues they need to understand the processes, trends, and developments in how our political system is structured and how the rules are set and implemented. When a game is not run in a fair way people are discouraged from participating in it. Politics is no different.

3. Group Brainstorm (10 minutes) - Ask the students if they are familiar with any laws or rules or buzzwords they relate to campaign finance (BCRA, disclosure, FENA, Buckley v. Valeo, 527s, etc.). Write their responses up on a piece of flip chart.
4. Small Group Work (10 minutes) - Break the students up into five, equal-sized groups. Give each group a campaign financing system handout. Each group will should discuss the pros and cons of a specific campaign financing system (specific questions provided on handout). Each group must also pick one person to represent their group for the beginning of the fishbowl debate.
5. Fishbowl Debate (20 minutes) – 5 chairs are placed in the center of the room. One member from each of the five groups sits in one of the chairs (in the “fishbowl”), while everyone else watches from the outside. The five people sitting in chairs start engaging in a debate over why their campaign financing system makes the most sense. The first group to start will usually have to take a little more time to explain the basics of the system they are supporting. Once the representative from a group has finished making his or her point someone else from their groups must tap them on the shoulder and take their place in the debate circle. (Optional) No one can re-enter the “fishbowl” until everyone in their group has been in it at least once.
6. Conclusion (15 minutes) – Ask everyone to step outside of their role as a supporter for the campaign financing system to which they were randomly assigned. Now, students get to express their own, personal feelings about which system they think makes the most sense in establishing the kind of democracy they want in America. Go through each system and ask people to show their support for it by raising their hands. Call on people to explain their reasons.

Anticipation Guide

- Feel free to switch out the statements to fit the nature of your discussion
- Have students put a check mark in the box that corresponds with their response to the statement

Statements:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Money has too much influence in the political process				
My government does an adequate job in addressing the needs and concerns of most Americans				
I would be able to run a competitive campaign in today's political system				

McCain/Feingold (BCRA) Campaign Financing System

The Bi-Partisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) – also known as McCain-Feingold for its Senate sponsors, Senator John McCain(R-AZ) and Russ Feingold (D-WI) – was passed in 2002. Its purpose is to curtail the growth of so-called "soft money" contributions – unlimited amounts of money that was not regulated by law and did *not* go directly to candidates but rather to political parties. BCRA reformed the rules and regulations of how different kinds of money financed campaigns. Below are some basic elements of BCRA and its ideas for reforming campaign financing:

- Donation limits
- \$2,300 limit per individuals on hard money donations given directly to candidate
- \$25,000 limit per individual on soft money donations to national parties
- \$10,000 limit per individual on soft money donations to state/local parties
- No limits on money given to 527's (issue based organizations)

As a group, your job is to formulate arguments to be used in the debate that promote this method of campaign financing. Please address the questions below to help formulate your arguments:

- How does this campaign financing system adhere best to the ideals of our democracy?
- How is this campaign financing system better than other options?
- What are some potential challenges to this system of campaign financing and how might you address those challenges?
- How can this type of campaign financing system benefit the progressive movement?

Libertarian Campaign Financing System

The general Libertarian philosophy is that the less government involvement/intervention the better. Therefore the Libertarian approach to elections sees government as taking a hands-off approach as to how campaigns are financed. Below are some basic elements of the Libertarian campaign financing system:

- No donation limits
- Candidates can receive as much money as they want from any individual, committee, group, coalition, business/corporation, and/or party
- There is no cap on how much money each candidate can spend

As a group, your job is to formulate arguments to be used in the debate that promote this method of campaign financing. Please address the questions below to help formulate your arguments:

- How does this campaign financing system adhere best to the ideals of our democracy?
- How is this campaign financing system better than other options?
- What are some potential challenges to this system of campaign financing and how might you address those challenges?
- How can this type of campaign financing system benefit the progressive movement?

Clean/Fair Elections Public Financing System

The Clean Elections public financing system first came to existence in 1996 at the state level in Maine. One goal behind this system is to free candidates from the burden of having to raise money from wealthy, private interests that in turn require legislative favors in return for those campaign contributions. The other goal of this system is to ensure that all people have an opportunity to run for elected office regardless of their access to money. Below are some basic elements of this campaign financing system:

- Voluntary system of full public financing
- Qualifying candidates have their campaigns fully publicly financed
- To qualify for full public financing candidates must prove to the state/federal government that they have broad public support by gathering a set amount of signatures and small donations (no more than \$5)
- “Clean” candidates cannot raise or spend any private money
- Other candidates can choose to opt out of this public financing system and run their campaign using private money
- There is cap on how much money candidates will receive from the public treasury and hence be able to spend on their campaign

As a group, your job is to formulate arguments to be used in the debate that promote this method of campaign financing. Please address the questions below to help formulate your arguments:

- How does this campaign financing system adhere best to the ideals of our democracy?
- How is this campaign financing system better than other options?
- What are some potential challenges to this system of campaign financing and how might you address those challenges?
- How can this type of campaign financing system benefit the progressive movement?

Matching Funds Public Financing System

The Matching Funds public financing system first came into prominence during the 1970's and was established as a way for presidential candidates to not have to rely so heavily on raising exorbitant amounts of private money that oftentimes came with strings attached. You are probably familiar with the presidential public financing check box on your tax return asking if you would like a portion of your taxes to help fund this system. Both Barack Obama and John McCain said that they would use this public financing system if they made it to the general election and if their opponent also used this public financing system. Below are some basic elements of this campaign financing system:

- Voluntary system of public financing
- Other candidates can opt out of the system and choose to run by raising and using only private funds
- Candidates receive an equal amount of public dollars to match every donation that is \$200 or less
- There is cap put on how much money a candidate can raise and spend

Your job, as a group, is to formulate arguments to be used in the debate that promote this method of campaign financing. Please address the questions below to help formulate your arguments:

- How does this campaign financing system adhere best to the ideals of our democracy?
- How is this campaign financing system better than other options?
- What are some potential challenges to this system of campaign financing and how might you address those challenges?
- How can this type of campaign financing system benefit the progressive movement?

Socialist Campaign Financing

Some version or another of a socialized campaign financing system exists in a variety of European countries. The general idea behind such a system is that all candidates should be given the same resources to use in their campaign. In addition, a socialist system believes that private money should not fund the campaigns of politicians who will be elected to represent the public. Below are some key elements to this kind of campaign financing system:

- All qualifying candidates must be fully publicly financed
- Candidates cannot raise or spend any private money
- All candidates are given the same amount of money to run their campaign
- There is a cap on how much money can be spent on a campaign
- All candidates receive the same amount of free radio and television ad time

Your job, as a group, is to formulate arguments to be used in the debate that promote this method of campaign financing. Please address the questions below to help formulate your arguments:

- How does this campaign financing system adhere best to the ideals of our democracy?
- How is this campaign financing system better than other options?
- What are some potential challenges to this system of campaign financing and how might you address those challenges?
- How can this type of campaign financing system benefit the progressive movement?