

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY

a toolkit to help you make change happen



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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization that builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

Access this material online at http://www.civilrights.org/action_center/toolkit.

Dear Friend:

This toolkit was created with you in mind. Its purpose is to educate, equip, encourage, and empower you to make change.

Our goal is to provide you with the basic structure and strategies needed to plan and carry out an effective grassroots public education or advocacy campaign. It's possible to write an entire book on each of the areas covered in this toolkit – in fact, many have been written. But you don't have to read half a dozen books to put together a strong campaign.

What you need to do is establish your goals, create a strategy, make a step-by-step plan, and mobilize the people, partners, and resources to make it all achievable. This toolkit is meant to be a concise guide to accomplishing that. And we include plenty of suggested resources if you want more in-depth information.

The Leadership Conference and The Education Fund provide leadership and coordination to coalition efforts and support the work of national and local partners by providing strategic and technical assistance, preparing materials, offering training, and identifying resources to support coalition efforts. Information on training for grassroots advocacy is provided by The Leadership Conference; information relating to education and coalition building is provided by The Education Fund.

We believe in the power of coalitions to bring people together for a common purpose. History shows that change can be made when diverse voices unite around a shared goal. We hope you will consider us your partners in making needed change happen. You can learn more about our work at www.civilrights.org. You can also reach The Leadership Conference field staff at 202-466-3315 or at grassroots@civilrights.org.

Onward!



Ellen Buchman, Vice President, Field Operations
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
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ORGANIZING YOUR COMMUNITY

Our campaigns have no power unless our communities are organized. Successful organizing requires building knowledge of a need or issue, developing a shared understanding of who has the power to make the desired change, and motivating people to take the actions necessary to influence those in power. Crucial to any successful organizing effort are messages that resonate with the people you want to engage, trusted messengers, and opportunities that make it easy for organizations and individuals to participate.

Listening is an important skill for an organizer. Take time to hear and understand the concerns that are motivating the people you want to organize.

You can reach people through in-person engagement, such as one-on-one networking, door-to-door canvassing, and public events, and through tools such as the mail, phone, email, and social media.

Starting Small

Holding small informal meetings early in your campaign can help you learn about people's values, needs, and priorities. Small gatherings allow organizational and community leaders to learn about your campaign, share their concerns, and ask questions they might not feel comfort-

TIP:

You can save money if other organizations co-sponsor the event, share costs, or provide materials or refreshments. Often, local businesses and coalition partners will provide in-kind resources, space, food, and other commodities if given the opportunity to be listed as a cosponsor. You might be able to make a deal with a local copy shop and get free copies in return for advertising its name on the back of your brochures and flyers. Be creative!

able asking in a large public setting. They may also alert you to challenges or resistance you might face or help you identify people willing to serve as messengers and campaign leaders.

Integrate small educational events into existing programs and activities. If your organization hosts classes or regular information-sharing sessions, have campaign materials available and encourage people to take part. If a group of service providers has a monthly meeting, ask to talk about the campaign and ask for input and participation.

Reaching Ready-Made Audiences

Take advantage of public events that will give you visibility and access to groups of people you want to engage in your campaign. Block parties, music concerts, and cultural festivals may give you good opportunities to set up information tables or have volunteers distributing information.

Here's a checklist for working public events:

- Understand the ground rules for setting up a table or distributing materials (for example, you may need to rent a table or get a permit to set up in a public space).
- Make sure the space is accessible for people with disabilities.
- Create engaging visuals: banners, signs, recognizable t-shirts for your volunteers.
- Ask everyone who shows interest to give you their contact information. Give people an easy way to take action, like signing a postcard or petition.
- Offer candy, stickers, or other small give-aways to draw people to your table.

- ☑ Prepare materials: fact sheets, flyers, palm cards, postcards that people can send to public officials, etc.
- ☑ Budget for the cost of renting a space, if any, as well as the cost to produce materials and provide refreshments for your volunteers and people who stop by.

Creating a Larger Community Event

One way to raise awareness of an issue or build energy and enthusiasm for a campaign is to organize a larger-scale town meeting, panel discussion, public debate, or more informal event like a block party. Here are things to consider as part of your planning.

Budget

An event doesn't have to cost a lot of money to produce, especially if you have access to rent-free space and equipment. But producing an event will take some money. Plan for the costs of space, food, materials, promotion, sound system, staff time, and parking.

Timeline

Develop a timeline of steps needed to plan, promote, and carry out your event. Give yourself enough time to get the word out once you've nailed down the time and place. Work backward from the date of the event and see where certain deadlines fall, such as being listed in a community calendar or having materials printed. Assign staff or volunteers responsibility for getting each task done.

Space

Identify a location that is convenient for the people you are trying to reach that has free parking; is accessible for people with disabilities; can accommodate a sound system and maybe some video. Make sure the space is a good fit for your expected turnout. Turning out 100 people is a big accomplishment but won't feel that way in an auditorium that holds 1,000. Consider whether the location feels like neutral or common ground rather than being associated closely with one leader or group.

Publicity and Outreach

Media publicity is helpful, so you should approach local columnists for coverage, ask community newspapers to include the event in the calendar sections (be aware of lead times!) and see if local radio stations will run public service announcements or let you come on the air. But individual contact is the most essential element to getting good turnout. Create flyers and have them distributed at the offices and service centers of local community organizations. Encourage congregations to publicize your event in their newsletters. Create a Facebook page for the event and encourage members of participating organizations to promote the page to their friends.

“Encouraging Words”

Don't be afraid or ashamed to ask for money. You believe in what you're doing and people will respond if you let your passion come through. Don't be discouraged if some people don't respond right away, or can't give at the moment. Asking for money gets easier with practice. The more people you ask, the more will give.

One of the most important things you can do is ask coalition partners to commit to turning out a certain number of people. And make sure all your sponsoring organizations make phone calls. When the Washington Interfaith Network held a town hall meeting with the new mayor to address issues of jobs and affordable housing, the meeting started with a representative of each organization or congregation stepping to the microphone to say how many people they had committed to bringing to the meeting, and how many were actually in attendance. That's accountability!

Format

How your space is set up physically will affect how people can interact. For a presentation or discussion among a small group of people, use a square or U-shaped conference table. For a larger event focused on presentations from speakers or a panel, set up a head table with the audience in rows, in a theater-style setting. If you want to encourage discussion among participants, or plan to have them break into small groups to discuss issues or strategies, set the room up with tables like a banquet room, with speakers at a head table. No matter how your room is set up overall, be sure to have tables near the door where people will sign in when entering, and sign up for future actions or take materials when leaving.

Agenda

Think about your goals as you put together your agenda and speakers. Are you representing the diversity of your coalition and community? Is your event designed to draw people into your campaign? Include speakers who can energize people as well as educate them. High-profile community leaders and local “celebrities” can drive up turnout.

TIP:

- A flyer or poster advertising an event is meant to get someone's attention and stir interest in attending.
- It's not meant to explain the issue in-depth—that's what the event is for. Keep the text minimal and make it eye-catching.

Sample Event Agenda:

11:30 am: (30 minutes)

- Set up tables, chairs, signage, food, etc. Make sure AV equipment is set up and working, name placards and water are on the table for the speakers.

12:00 pm: (5 minutes)

- As participants arrive, have them sign in and provide name tags.
- Direct speakers to their seats.
- Coordinate people getting food and getting seated.

12:05 pm: (5 minutes)

- Forum leader introduces moderator and key organizations involved.
- Moderator thanks everyone for coming. Thanks organizations who helped co-sponsor this event, outlines the agenda for the event and gives a brief background on why the coalition organized event.
- Moderator introduces panelists.

12:10 pm: (15 minutes)

- Panelist A speaks for 5 minutes.
- Panelist B speaks for 5 minutes.
- Panelist C speaks for 5 minutes.

12:25 pm: (30 minutes)

- Moderator leads Q&A discussion session with audience.
- Coalition members should think of a few questions in advance just in case people are too shy to ask questions at first.

12:55 pm: (5 minutes)

- Forum leader wraps up with key messages, a call to action (what people can do in their community), and thanks all for participating.

1:00 pm:

- Conclusion of forum.
- Clean-up.

Materials

In addition to basic fact sheets about the campaign, you might want worksheets for small group brainstorming, a suggestion box, flyers for upcoming events, and palm cards for participants to distribute.

Engagement

Give people something to do before they leave the meeting. Have them sign a petition or postcard, sign up to volunteer for a campaign committee or task force, or pledge to distribute information.

Canvassing

Sometimes the best way to reach residents of a particular neighborhood or electoral district is through door-to-door canvassing. Canvassing is a labor-intensive effort that requires good planning, careful organizing, and serious attention to the recruitment, training, and management of volunteers. Members of your group or coalition who have taken part in political campaigns may have experience in setting up and overseeing a door-to-door

operation. If you don't have that experience among your core group, you could ask local elected officials or political party activists for suggestions on people who have experience in running a canvass.

Key things to remember:

- Have training sessions for volunteers to make sure they understand your campaign's key messages and know how to handle any difficulties that may arise.
- Set up a plan to cover the neighborhood and a record-keeping system to track which households you've contacted. Canvass on weekends or late afternoons when families are most likely to be home.
- Try to recruit volunteers who live in the neighborhood where you are going to canvass.
- Try to recruit bilingual volunteers in neighborhoods where many people speak languages other than English.

TIP: Increasing Turnout

- Attend community meetings and ask permission to make announcements about your event.
 - Get coalition partners to publicize your event in their newsletters and other communications with members or constituents.
 - Submit listings to newspapers and radio stations with community calendars and columnists.
 - Create a Facebook page for the event and ask members of participating organizations to invite their friends.
 - Ask coalition groups and allies to make specific commitments to turn out a certain number of people and follow up with them to make sure they are planning to do it.
 - Call your own members, constituents, and supporters and ask for commitments to attend. Try to get people to commit to bringing one or more friends with them.
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- Consider a block party or other event to launch a neighborhood canvass, recruit volunteers, and let people know that someone may be contacting them.

Virtual Events

You can also create events that don't require people to leave their home or office by setting up conference calls or webinars.

Conference calls

Conference calls can reach a large number of people in order to hear a motivational speech from the campaign manager or a public official; to update activists (and media) on new developments or campaign milestones; or to allow activists to share success stories with each other. Readily available conference call technology can allow you to have several speakers in different locations who can also talk with each other before speaking to the wider group of participants. You can "moderate" the call in order to control audience participation, create an orderly Q&A process and more. For a simple conference call you may be able to use in-house technology for your organization or a coalition partner. Also available are services like freeconferencecall.com and a number of companies who provide the service for a fee.

Webinars

Webinars are conference calls with the added ability to share visual information on participants' computers. People phone into a shared conference call number and use the Internet to join the webinar. You could use a webinar to discuss polling results, share first drafts of materials for discussion, or show recruiting videos or advertisements. Webinars can be highly interactive, allowing participants to raise questions by phone or email, or to edit materials live while other participants watch. Participating in webinars generally requires people to

have a decent computer and Internet connection, and download some software. A number of companies provide webinar services, such as anymeeting.com.

Organizing Online

Social media sites like Facebook (www.facebook.com) provide opportunities to create and build communities of support for your campaign and promote specific events. See the "Using Social Media" section of this toolkit for more in-depth information.

Resources:

Activation Point, a report by Spitfire Strategies on what moves people to action, is available at www.activation-point.org.

For a simple conference call you may be able to use in-house technology for your organization or a coalition partner. Check out available services like www.freeconferencecall.com. Or, if you have more complicated needs, try a company such as www.copperconferencing.com.

For more information on webinars see www.idealware.org/articles/fgt_online_conferencing.php.

For tips on planning a successful webinar, check out www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/training/page11252.cfm.

For other technical questions, see www.techsoup.com.