

Grassroots organizing toolkit for Local Civil Rights Restoration campaigns

This toolkit provides guidance, case studies, ideas, and suggestions for building a successful campaign to restore civil rights and civil liberties through grassroots organizing on the local level.

Every coalition and campaign is unique, so feel free to adapt the guidance provided to your community's needs. While this toolkit is designed for local campaigns focused on civil rights and liberties, the methodology can also be applied to campaigns pursuing other goals.

Contents

- Initial planning.....3**
 - First steps..... 3
 - For organizations* 3
 - For individuals* 3
 - Preparing for your first meeting 4
 - First steps* 4
 - First meeting agenda items* 4
 - Building a coalition..... 7
 - Assigning outreach targets* 8
 - Engaging potential allies*..... 8
- Building power10**
 - Choosing tactics and actions..... 10
 - Making the most of your actions 11
 - Debriefing tactics 11
 - Basic tactics..... 11
 - Community forum* 11
 - Film screening* 12
 - Tabling*..... 12
 - Canvassing* 13
 - Petition drive*..... 14
 - Letter writing*..... 15

<i>Call-in day</i>	15
<i>Demonstrations, marches, and rallies</i>	15
<i>Vigil</i>	16
Creative and original tactics	17
<i>Artivism</i>	17
<i>Street Theater</i>	17
<i>Flashmob</i>	18
<i>Lyrical Ambush</i>	18
<i>Direct action</i>	18
<i>Guidelines for creative tactics</i>	18
Internet and social networking	20
Stand-alone website	20
Blog	20
Facebook.....	21
Twitter.....	21
Group email list.....	22
Coalition email address.....	22
Other social networks	22
Dos and don'ts of social media and activism	22
Working with local governments	24
Approaching your local government	24
<i>Tips for meeting with elected officials</i>	25
Accountability sessions	26
Customizing the reforms.....	26
City council hearings	26
Working with law enforcement officials.....	27
Appendix A: Sample outreach letter	28
Appendix B: Event planning guide	29
Appendix C: How to write a press release	32
Appendix D: Sample press release	33

Initial planning

First steps

Your initial steps will vary depending on whether you are an **organization** or an **individual**. Some campaigns start with organizations and others start with individuals.

Campaigns can be successful regardless of how they first launch. Local Civil Rights Restoration (LCRR) campaigns, however, tend to work better when organizations representing the different communities affected by law enforcement abuses (including African Americans, Latinos, Muslims, Arabs, South Asians, Sikhs and others groups perceived to be Muslim, peace and justice activists, environmental activists, and civil libertarians) are involved. Pulling those communities together at the beginning of a campaign can seem intimidating, but securing a broad alliance is the central goal of the first phase of this campaign model.

For organizations

If you are not the decision-maker in your organization, ask for a meeting with whomever has the power to allocate your organization's resources. In the meeting, explain the LCRR campaign and why you think it could be a good opportunity for your organization. Feel free to contact BORDC before your meeting. We can provide tips and talking points to assist you in preparing for your meeting.

If you are a decision-maker in your organization, seek whatever internal consensus or process is necessary to proceed. Once your organization is on board, set up an initial planning meeting to discuss the campaign.

Note that organizations can and should play varying roles in the campaign. Even if your organization cannot offer large amounts of time or resources to the campaign, it may be able to lend its name to the campaign as an endorser, which can still be very helpful.

For individuals

Organize an initial meeting and invite people in your community (e.g., neighbors, friends, colleagues, acquaintances) who you think might be interested. Brainstorm a name for your coalition. To emphasize that you are working locally, it's a good idea to put your town's name in the title. Here are some examples of names other coalitions have chosen:

- Bill of Rights Defense Committee of Tacoma
- Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition
- Coalition for a Safe Berkeley

And here are a few other ideas:

- Anytown Residents for Civil Liberties
- Anytown for Sensible Policing

Don't worry if your initial meeting is small—as few as three or four people can be more than enough to get a campaign off the ground. If you follow these steps, your numbers will grow!

Preparing for your first meeting

First steps

1. Contact BORDC at organizing@bordc.org to let us know that you're starting a local campaign. We can provide information and guidance and help answer questions.
2. Prepare a sign-in sheet that you can pass around to make sure you collect attendees' contact information.
3. Print out a description of the campaign for each attendee. You can also hand out accompanying talking points and other resources as you see fit.
4. Prepare an agenda and choose a facilitator. As the convener of the meeting, it may make sense for you to facilitate, but if there is someone else you think should do it, ask whether s/he would be willing to play that role. You should also designate someone to take notes and circulate them afterwards.

Tools

- [Facilitation 101](#) (International Association of Facilitators)

First meeting agenda items

We suggest including the following items on the agenda of your first meeting:

- Introductions
- Explaining the campaign
- Assessing your community
- Brainstorming allies
- Developing an initial strategy
- Creating subcommittees and roles
- Next steps

You may choose to do some of these items at your second meeting, and instead keep your first meeting focused on the first three or four bullet points. How you structure your meeting depends on the capacity of the people involved. It may be better to keep the meeting short, or it could be better to define your campaign more deeply right away. It's up to you.

The following sections include more detail on each of these agenda items.

Introductions

Go around the group and ask all attendees to introduce themselves. Ask each person to share her or his name, why s/he is interested in this campaign, and what other grassroots campaigns, if any, s/he has supported (to any degree) in the past.

It's best to involve people who don't have campaign experience along with those who do. Doing so can enable the fresh energy of newcomers to organizing and also take advantage of experienced organizers' skills and knowledge.

Explaining the campaign

Hand out a one-page description of the campaign and go over it with the group. You or someone else very familiar with the LCRR strategy should lead this part of the meeting. BORDC can help prepare you and provide resources.

Tools

- [One-page flyer](#) depicting how local policing issues fit together
- [Local Civil Rights Restoration FAQ](#)
- [Talking about law enforcement abuses](#)
- [Local Civil Rights Restoration Act \(LCRRA\) Model Legislation](#)
- [Case Study: Restoring the Fourth Amendment in Hartford, CT](#)

Assessing your community

Discuss the landscape of your city or town. Are residents educated on racial justice issues? Have there been immigrants' rights campaigns? Are strong, organized groups already working on these issues? How can this campaign build on what already exists? What messages will resonate with the people in your community?

Who will vote on your reforms and what is the structure of that body? It is likely the city council, but some municipalities have other processes for voting on legislation, such as a town meeting or board of freeholders. How many votes do you need for your proposal to become law?

What are the names and political affiliations of the members of the local legislative body? Based on what you know about them, who can you expect to support your reforms? Who is likely to oppose them? Who are likely swing votes? If the members represent specific wards or districts, does your coalition include people from each ward?

You may not know the answer to all these questions at this point, but write down what you do know and make a plan together to research any questions that remain.

Brainstorming allies

Before a local government body will consider your reforms, you'll need to build a strong, diverse coalition representing as many different interests as possible—especially those communities directly affected by police abuses, including the following:

- Civil rights groups defending the rights of African Americans
- Immigrant rights organizations
- Organizations representing Arab, Muslim, or South Asian communities
- Libertarian groups concerned with privacy
- Peace and justice networks
- Faith communities (e.g., local congregations, lay leaders, or clergy)

You might also consider reaching out to teachers, professors, students, civic groups, neighborhood associations, religious leaders, union locals, political party chapters, librarians, attorneys, and the your local Human Rights Commission (if one exists).

BORDC has established relationships on the national level with many national organizations (including the NAACP, Council on American-Islamic Relations, American Friends Service Committee, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, ACLU, and National Lawyers Guild) whose local chapters may be apt targets for outreach. Please reach out to us so we can help connect you with local contacts from those networks.

To get started, spend time brainstorming potential allies from your community. The following activity can be a great way to start identifying these groups.

Activity

- Provide the group with one large sheet of paper divided in half both vertically and horizontally, so there are four quadrants. Also hand out three colors of sticky notes.
- Ask the group to write on the sticky notes the names of organizations (one color), communities (another color), or institutions (the third color) related to the work. This will help participants brainstorm potential outreach targets.
- Have participants place the sticky notes on the paper according to their degree of solidarity on the horizontal axis and their relative power on the vertical axis. Allies will be on the right side of the paper, opponents on the left, and neutral in the middle. Powerful groups and organizations will be toward the top of the paper and less influential ones should go near the bottom. The notes in the top right quadrant—powerful allies—should be the first ones you contact and you can work your way down toward less likely or less powerful allies.

Developing an initial strategy

You can consider campaign strategy at your first meeting, or you can wait until your coalition includes a few more people. Either way, you should start to do this fairly soon after deciding you want to start a campaign.

The [Midwest Academy Manual for Activists](#) defines a strategy as, “a method of gaining enough power to make a government or corporate official do something in the public’s interest that [they do] not otherwise wish to do.” A strategy is more than just a plan—it’s a means of building collective power in order to entice a specific decision making body to take a particular action.

This definition, along with the [Midwest Academy’s Strategy Chart](#), provides a good starting point for developing a strategy that will be successful in your community. The strategy chart has five columns:

- Long-term, intermediate, and short-term goals
- Organizational considerations
- Constitutions, allies, and opponents
- Decision-makers (targets)

- Tactics

As you fill in your chart, use the information you collected while brainstorming allies and assessing your community to start developing a strategy for your campaign. Filling in the chart will help you go into further detail and think through the steps you will need to take. Refer to the tactics section of this toolkit for ideas about how to build your coalition's influence.

After completing your chart, create a timeline for carrying out your strategy. The timeline can, and probably will, change throughout your campaign, so be sure to build in extra time and be willing to adapt as you move forward.

Tools

- [Strategy Chart](#)

Creating subcommittees and roles

Subcommittees will differ from campaign to campaign, depending on the needs and capacities of each group. However, many groups have found it helpful to set up at least the following subcommittees:

- *Drafting Committee*: This committee will work on developing a version of the Local Civil Rights Restoration Act for your city or town. Contact BORDC for assistance, as we have lots of experience adapting the reforms for different communities and can put you in touch with other campaigns that have gone through this process. It can also be helpful to contact a local lawyer to help you navigate your local government's rules and processes.
- *Outreach Committee*: This committee will take the lead on reaching out to organizations and groups to help build your coalition.
- *Internet Committee*: Every campaign can benefit from some kind of web presence (even as simple as a Facebook page or blog), and this committee is in charge of setting that up and promoting it to enlarge its online audience.

For other ideas on how to set up committees, look at this [example](#) from Northampton, MA. Remember that everyone has a different leadership and work style and encourage people to take on responsibilities that match their skills and capabilities. Wellstone Action's [Leadership Roles for Effective Organizing](#) outlines four different types of leaders and the skills and tasks for which they are best suited.

Next steps

Decide what the next steps for the campaign are, who is responsible for each task, and set a date for the next meeting. After the meeting, email the group thanking them for coming and giving a summary of what happened at the meeting that includes the task assignments.

Building a coalition

Since many different communities are vulnerable to civil rights violations by law enforcement agencies, it is vital to build a coalition that includes groups representing as many of those groups as possible. A coalition that represents the diversity within your community will be more effective and less vulnerable

to opposition than one that reflects the views of only a few community members. Building a coalition to support your campaign should therefore be a central part of your early efforts.

Your coalition may want to consider a discussion about how to structure your coalition's process regarding scheduling meetings and making decisions. Because process concerns can often invite tension and discourage participation, however, we recommend maintaining an informal approach to process at the beginning of your campaign, in order to allow new coalition allies to influence the process as they join.

Coalition partners may also approach the campaign with varying levels of focus and commitment. Many successful campaigns have a few key groups that are very active on the campaign while other groups play a supporting role. That supporting role can include mobilizing supporters for actions, signing coalition letters, or speaking with the press. Documenting your coalition's decisions for those groups that choose not to participate in day-to-day campaign decision-making is important in order to give less involved allies a chance to actively support your work.

Assigning outreach targets

Invite volunteers (or assign coalition members) to serve as point people or ambassadors, responsible for reaching out to specific groups among those you've collectively brainstormed.

Begin by inviting coalition partners to identify any existing relationships that your coalition members have with your outreach targets. For example, if someone in your group has a sister who's a longtime volunteer at a local religious congregation, that person might be a good candidate for outreach to that congregation's service or social action committee. Similarly, if a member of your coalition works for an organization that has conflicted in the past with one of the groups you plan to contact, that member should probably not be assigned to contact that group. It's good to be honest about historical relationships from the beginning to avoid surprises later.

Next, define a period over which each ambassador will develop a relationship with the particular groups to which they've been assigned before reporting back to the group. A month usually allows sufficient time to build those relationships, though you may also want to invite each ambassador to provide an interim update in case there are opportunities for others in your coalition to support their efforts in the meantime.

Engaging potential allies

The most important thing each ambassador can do is to listen. Proactively call your contacts, introduce yourself as an ally, and ask questions about their issues, concerns, and how your coalition can help. Report back to the group to share the information you've learned, and invite your new allies to send representatives to your coalition's next meeting.

Here are some tips for reaching out to potential allies:

- Begin by seeking an individual point of contact and making a one-on-one connection, ideally in person. Introduce yourself as an ally and invite your contact to lunch or coffee to learn about their community's challenges and concerns.
- Ask questions about the organization's activities and explore what issues are most important for the community it serves. If your contact is a community group, explore when they meet and how you or other supporters can get involved in their meetings and activities. While your primary purpose may be to recruit a new ally for your coalition, approach your early interactions as a chance to build a new relationship, rather than focusing on the end goal.
- Ask questions and take notes to share with your coalition allies. If your contact at the new allied group raises law reform objectives that aren't covered in the LCRRA, please inform BORDC so we can consider updating the model.
- Attend a meeting or event hosted by your outreach target. Doing so expresses solidarity with their aims and also builds trust. In addition, attending coalition partners' events can offer insight into their networks and identify the key leaders (who you'll likely want to approach later on).
- Build trust by supporting the activities of your coalition allies and outreach targets. Follow up after participating in their events with an email or call. Thank them for including you and note that you're looking forward to working together going forward. The more they see you at their events and get to know you as a helpful, supportive, and reliable ally, the more they will trust you and be willing to actively support your coalition's efforts. At some point, bring one or two members from your coalition to also attend and institutionalize your relationship.
- Invite your contacts (or other representatives of her or his group) to attend your coalition's future meetings. Appeal to their self-interest: your coalition offers a chance for their organization to team up with natural allies and promote their own interests alongside others'. Emphasize that abuses of constitutional rights affect us all, and by participating in your coalition, their organization can gain allies to support their activities both for work within, and beyond, your coalition.
- Rinse and repeat. If your coalition allies also invite the groups to which they've been reaching out, you can assemble a broad and diverse coalition with far greater reach than any of the participating groups alone in as little as one or two (and certainly within three) months.

Tools

- **Appendix A:** Sample outreach letter
- [Building Bridges with Arab and Muslim Community Members](#)

Building power

Once you've built a coalition, you'll need to build its cohesion and collective influence. To reach your end goals, your coalition must demonstrate that it has the support of diverse communities. Based on your community, your coalition, and your goals, choose organizing tactics that will be effective in building public awareness of your work.

Choosing tactics and actions

The next section includes a number of suggested tactics and actions for your campaign to consider. As you review them and others you brainstorm, ask these questions to help you choose which to pursue:

1. Will this tactic build our group?
2. Will this tactic publicly demonstrate our coalition's reach?
3. Will the end result be worth the amount of work put into it?

If the answer to every question is yes, you have a great tactic!

Will this tactic build our group?

Tactics should attract more allies to support your coalition. For individuals and organizations to be invested in your coalition and its work, they need to feel involved.

Build your coalition from within by continuously engaging your members and building your tactics around the talents and interests of your group members. For example, if your coalition includes a lot of artists and musicians, you might want to consider events that incorporate art and music. If your group members aren't excited by creating art, on the other hand, hosting a community art show or concert could be very challenging.

It's also important to provide opportunities for people within your coalition to get to know each other and build community. Often this can feel like an afterthought: Why have a potluck if we could be canvassing or meeting with city councilors? But a strong coalition of people who know each other personally and care about each other's talents and interests can run a more effective and successful campaign. By building a coalition based on personal trust and mutual interest, your coalition can be successful even if your reforms do not pass—your coalition can endure, or build a new campaign beyond your initial goals. Community building can be among the most powerful impacts of a campaign.

Will this tactic publicly demonstrate our coalition's reach?

Your tactics should show your targets (your local government) that you are a force to be reckoned with. What will be effective in demonstrating power is different in every situation. For example, if your group only has five people and you don't have extensive networks, it probably isn't best to start out with a huge rally in front of city hall. Instead, your group could focus on circulating a community petition. When you have several hundred signatures (it only takes a few people collecting signatures at a busy supermarket or street corner), bring a reporter along when you deliver the petition to the city council. Whatever tactics you choose should demonstrate that the community at large, not just your group, cares about your goals.

Will the end result be worth the amount of work put into it?

Before settling on a tactic, realistically consider how much work it will take to execute. Also consider honestly what the end result will be and what it will accomplish. If your coalition works hard on for weeks but sees few results, your members may become discouraged or burnt out. Careful planning can help avoid this.

But remember, even if an action flops, it's not the end of the world.

Making the most of your actions

Invite each of your coalition allies to cosponsor each of your actions. You can also engage new allies by inviting outreach targets you've identified but who have not yet joined your coalition.

Building public awareness of your campaign requires making your tactics and actions visible, whether by holding them in a public location or earning media attention.

At any event, use a sign-up sheet to collect event attendees' contact information and follow up with them shortly after the event to invite them to your next meeting. If they each take on outreach assignments, you can accelerate your coalition's growth as you engage new supporters.

Debriefing tactics

After every tactic, it's crucial to debrief with your coalition.

Whether your action went off without a hitch or flopped, talk as a coalition about what happened. Discuss what went well, what you could have done better, and what you learned. Then use that shared experience, and the knowledge you gained from it, to plan future actions even better.

One easy way to structure a debriefing is to put a large sheet of paper on the wall with a line down the middle. On one side, list what went well and should be replicated in your next tactic. On the other side, list what you could have done better. It's important to keep this conversation constructive and focused on moving things forward before your next action. Every tactic or action can be a learning opportunity if you make space for a focused reflection and discussion.

Basic tactics

Community forum

Hosting a forum to discuss your concerns and proposed reforms can be a great way to educate the community and recruit more members for your coalition. It's also a great way to publicly launch a campaign and start building support in your community.

A forum usually involves a panel discussion where each panelist speaks for five to ten minutes, followed by a discussion or question-and-answer period of at least 30 minutes.

When choosing speakers for your forum, ensure diversity on your panel in terms of perspective, areas of expertise, race, religion, age, and gender. Don't overlook students as potential speakers, as they can offer great insight into the youth mindset and campus organizing.

Before the panel, schedule a meeting or conference call with the speakers to review what each person will talk about. This will help the speakers get comfortable with each other before the event, making the public discussion more streamlined and effective.

Send invitations to all your outreach targets, as well as any local email lists serving the communities you're trying to reach. Posting flyers at neighborhood cafes and on community bulletin boards can also help expand your audience.

It can also be helpful to invite businesses and nonprofits in your community to cosponsor the forum and make a donation to cover expenses such as copying, postage, childcare for participants, and facility rental. Sponsorships will help not only recruit new members for your coalition, but also expand your network for promoting the event and rally support for future efforts.

Film screening

You can show a film at a local movie theatre, college or high school auditorium, business, religious institution, or even a community member's home. There are many films, both documentaries and fictional pieces, that highlight civil rights issues. Choose one that will highlight the issues your campaign seeks to address, and ideally one that can prompt a discussion among attendees after viewing it.

For example, BORDC sponsored a showing of [*The Most Dangerous Man in American: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*](#) in Washington, DC. *The Most Dangerous Man in America* tells the story of Daniel Ellsberg, a high-level Pentagon official and Vietnam War strategist, who in 1971 leaked 7,000 pages of top secret documents to *The New York Times*, exposing decades of government lies and making headlines around the world. The screening was followed by a question-and-answer session with Daniel Ellsberg and the filmmakers.

A film screening can be a great time to circulate flyers for other upcoming actions or coalition meetings. Finally, seeking food donations from local businesses, or asking members of your campaign to bring snacks, can also drive attendance and ensure an energetic discussion following the screening.

Copyright laws

Be aware of copyright laws that prohibit certain public showings of films. You can avoid copyright violations by requesting permission from the filmmaker or producer to show their work. While some may require you to pay to show the film, many others will allow grassroots groups and organizations to show their films for free.

Tools

- Refer to BORDC's [list of recommended resources](#) for ideas about films.

Tabling

Tabling at events organized by other groups is a good way to spread the word about your campaign, meet and talk to community members, get signatures for a petition (if you have one), and add names to your contact list.

Table in a location where many people from the community will be, such as a farmer's market, fair, or busy shopping area. It can also be good to table in neighborhoods you haven't reached out to yet or at events hosted by groups you'd like to join your coalition.

Make sure to bring or have access to a table and chairs. Distribute educational materials about the campaign and ask attendees to fill out a sign-up sheet and sign any petitions or letters to local government officials, if you have them.

Be active! Don't wait for people to approach you or ask you questions. Proactively greet people as they walk by and try to engage them. For instance, you might ask passersby if they've ever felt victimized by police officers, or considered supporting reforms to stop those abuses.

For example, the American Friends Service Committee of Western Massachusetts regularly sets up a table at the Northampton recycling center on Saturdays. Since the only people who go to the recycling center are city residents, this is an easy way to reach a lot of people who actually live in the city. They bring information about their campaigns and talk to residents about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities.

Canvassing

Canvassing is a way to engage with your community and tell them about your campaign face to face. Many groups go door to door in their town or city, telling residents about the campaign and asking them to sign a petition, come to an event, or write a letter.

Always go in pairs or groups and make sure the larger group knows which neighborhoods and streets each pair or group will visit. Also, be sensitive to the fact that you are coming to someone's home—treat people respectfully and be gracious if they prefer not to speak with you.

Since you will be interacting with people don't know, exercise good common sense. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, politely say goodbye and leave immediately.

Choose a time when people are likely to be home but your visit won't be disruptive (Saturday afternoon might be a good time, but during dinnertime on Wednesday probably isn't). Bring educational materials and be prepared to answer common questions.

Recruit volunteers from the campaign to canvass. For people who haven't canvassed before, it can be helpful to give them some training on what to say, what to bring, and how to respond to questions. It might even be helpful to provide a script they can practice beforehand.

Keep records about your canvasses. Ask volunteers to record how many houses or apartments they went to and how many people they spoke to.

For example, the Preserving Our Civil Rights Campaign in Northampton, MA, gets groups of volunteers together on Saturday mornings to canvass around the city. They meet at one of the coalition member organization's headquarters, have breakfast together, and provide basic training on canvassing. Then

they split up and canvass for a few hours. They use canvassing as a way to provide the community with campaign updates and to recruit new members.

Tools

- [Running a doorknock operation](#)

Petition drive

A petition signed by community members is an excellent way to demonstrate support for your reforms and build a contact list of local supporters. It can also fit well with any events you might host, by offering a way to engage attendees beyond merely attending.

After writing a petition, circulate it at a forum, while tabling or canvassing, and at other community events. Also consider writing a separate, perhaps more detailed, petition for allied organizations to sign.

Keep in mind that petitions are only effective if you have a significant number of signatures, there is a strategic purpose to the petition (e.g. delivering it before an important vote), and you follow up with elected officials about the petition. As a result, anticipate running any petition drive for at least several weeks in order to recruit a critical mass of supporters.

Once you have enough signatures, you'll need to deliver the petition. Delivering the petition in some public fashion can provide an opportunity for visibility that can independently advance your goals. For instance, you can gather all the completed petitions and deliver them at a city council meeting to which you invite supporters and members of the local press.

Tips on community petitions

- Make sure you address the petition to the people who actually have the power to make decisions about your campaign's goals. For example, address the petition to the city council or mayor rather than the "town of X" or the "people of X."
- Make sure signatures are large enough that they will be legible.
- Ask people who sign the petitions if they want to volunteer or be on your campaign's contact list. If so, get their contact information (email address, phone number, and mailing address) and follow up with them within a week.
- Always make copies of petitions or signature cards before delivering them so that you can follow up with people who signed them and use them in the future.

For example, BORDC circulated two petitions to engage local groups and allied organizations on a fall 2011 campaign to stop the extension of the FBI director's term. One petition was for individuals; another was for organizations. We delivered a copy of the organizational petition to lawmakers at their offices and asked constituents to email their representatives with the link to the petition signed by individuals. All of this took place before key votes on extending the FBI director's term.

- [Mueller petition for individuals](#)
- [Mueller petition for organizations](#)

Letter writing

Asking supporters to write letters to their elected representatives in the city council can be a more personal way than a petition to demonstrate broad community support. It's easiest to entice people to write a letter at an event where they are already sitting down.

For example, you could take a few minutes during a forum and ask attendees write letters. Offer a sample text if they are writing their letters themselves, or provide pre-printed postcards on which they can add a personal message.

You can either mail the letters or cards to city councilors or deliver them at a meeting. Similar to petitions, wait until you have a lot of letters or postcards before you send or deliver them to elected officials, do so at an opportune moment (e.g., before an important vote), and make copies of them for your records before delivery.

Tools

- [Write a letter to an elected official](#)

Call-in day

Similar to a petition or letter writing drive, organizing a call-in day can demonstrate your campaign's reach and apply pressure to elected officials or decision makers. The purpose of a call-in is to prompt constituents to call their elected officials and request that they take a specific action, such as vote in favor of an ordinance or hold a hearing on a given issue.

It's best for supporters to call the particular elected officials who represent them, so avoid asking people to call an official unless they live in that official's district. In order for this tactic to be effective, it's important to recruit many people from various different areas to make calls.

The smaller the constituency, the more effective this tactic can be. For a senator with 10 million constituents, 50 calls means very little. On the other hand, for a city official who represents only 1,000 constituents, 50 calls will likely get the official's attention.

Calling elected officials can be intimidating, so prepare a script for people making calls. It can also be helpful to ask supporters to make calls when they are already gathered at an event.

Tools

- Sample script for a call-in day: [Congressional call-in day to restore habeas corpus, September 19, 2007](#)

Demonstrations, marches, and rallies

Holding a demonstration or a march can show decision-makers, the media, and the community the support you have for your campaign.

For a demonstration or march to be effective, however, it has to be strategic. Demonstrations and marches are only effective if a significant number of people attend, so consider these tactics only when

you're sure you have enough people to make an impact. A demonstration attended by relatively few people can actually undermine your campaign by revealing its limited reach.

Pick a time and location that will further your campaign. For example, a demonstration outside of city hall on the night of an important vote or hearing can influence the decision makers or journalists covering their votes. Signs and posters that creatively promote your campaign's goals can also help amplify your message. As with any event, it is critical to promote the action to your coalition allies and impacted communities. Earned media attention in advance of your action can also help increase participation.

To get your message into the press, consider designating a half-hour of your rally as a press conference. Invite a few representatives of your coalition's supporting organizations to each make a statement, and distribute an advisory about the event to the local press. BORDC can support your press outreach, so please share any such plans with us.

Permits

Check your local laws about large public gatherings. If a permit is necessary to avoid arrest, discuss with your group whether it makes sense to seek a permit. Denials of permit applications can provide useful opportunities to earn press coverage or engage local attorneys to challenge the denial.

Tools

- [Full-page flier](#) for publicizing a local rally (**Note:** This flier is an editable PDF form. If you find you are unable to use the form to add your local event information to the flier, please [download](#) the latest version of Adobe Reader.)

Vigil

A vigil is a solemn (and often silent) gathering of people to honor, remember, or call attention to an injustice. Often, faith groups hold candlelight vigils outdoors at night and invite concerned community members to join them.

If you want to hold a vigil, first decide on the issue that your vigil will focus on. It's best to pick a concrete issue or group of people to honor, such as victims of a hate crime or someone wrongfully imprisoned. You can choose to have a speaker address the attendees or have a member of your campaign read a statement about the injustice you're commemorating.

Distribute information about the campaign and the issue that the vigil addresses, but do so respectfully. A vigil is a solemn event, not a time to be pushy or forceful about sign-up sheets.

If you're hosting a candlelight vigil, providing candles can help. A small paper cup with a hole cut in it can also shield the candle from the wind and catch dripping wax. Have your vigil in a public place where the community will see you and can easily join you. Also bring a banner or posters so people walking by know what you're doing.

For example, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) held a vigil in Berkeley, CA, to honor of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay detention center. They gave out 200 packets that included a candle with the names of four prisoners at Guantánamo, information about NRCAT, their “Statement of Conscience,” and a statement about the vigil. By giving the packets away to people on the street and recruited passersby, they were able to hold a successful vigil with less than two weeks of planning.

Creative and original tactics

The basic tactics described above are not the only tactics that can be effective in furthering your campaign. They should be a starting point for developing your own tactics that will communicate your message, build support, and demonstrate your coalition’s power.

Artivism

Artivism is the combination of art and activism. Art and activism can be combined as a force to publicly display and creatively express ideas about civil rights. In addition, for people who only identify as only one of the two, artist or activist, bringing together both communities can greatly benefit a campaign.

Keep in mind that art can be made out of ANYTHING. Also keep in mind that traditional art materials are very expensive (i.e. oil paints, acrylic paints, canvas, paint brushes, colored pencils ect.). When making either one large collaborative piece or a number of individual pieces, time and resources need to be taken into account. Think about materials that can be acquired for cheap, free (think recycling centers and thrift stores), or have the potential to be re-used so money does not become a crucial component.

- *Example:* The Youth Action Coalition in Amherst, MA, worked with a local bookstore that agreed to allow them to paint a mural on the outside wall of the store. A group of high school students from Youth Action Coalition designed a mural that illustrated the problems that they saw both in the world and in their county including environmental degradation and the media’s failure to cover important issues. The group proposed the mural to the town’s Design Review Board after the bookstore agreed to have it on their wall and went through the necessary process for the town to approve it. You can learn more about Youth Action Coalition and their process of making the mural at their [website](#).

Street Theater

Street theater is a free performance in a public space, often with a political message. Your campaign can use street theater to get attention from the community, share your message with people you might not reach otherwise, and do it in a fun, creative way. YAHA Net (Youth, the Arts, HIV & AIDS Network) provides a [great guide to planning and pulling off street theater](#). They suggest performing in a public place with plenty of people, keeping the performance short and to the point, having a memorable and distinctive message, and engaging the audience afterwards through a discussion. Consider incorporating props, puppets, music, costumes, and audience participation. Anything that will grab attention and communicate you message!

- *Example:* A group of anti-war activists in Madison, WI staged this giant street theater puppet show called [“Flushed Away!”](#) They puppets of George W. Bush and showed him flushing various signs like “Civil Liberties” down the toilet. Two people wearing sashes that read “Citizen” save

the day by plunging the giant toilet. They used signs with their slogan to make it clear what they were doing and what their message was.

Flashmob

Similar to street theater, a flashmob usually happens in a public space and can have a political and educational message. In a flashmob, a group suddenly appears and often performs a skit, song, dance, or action together. A flashmob requires careful planning and timing but can create an amazing visual statement and can be easily recorded and circulated on the internet to promote your campaign.

- *Example:* A group protesting Target had a flashmob at a store by coming out of nowhere and performing a song called [Target Ain't People](#). They recorded it, put it on YouTube, and gained an immense viral following.

Lyrical Ambush

The DC Guerilla Poetry Insurgency defines lyrical ambush as, “An amplified poetry/spoken word/hip hop open mic held in a public space featuring voices, drums/musical instruments, sidewalk chalk, bubbles, and noisemakers—all available for public use.” They have a variety of examples and suggestions at their [website](#).

Direct action

Direct action can include anything from feeding the homeless to blocking the entrance to a government or corporate facility. It has a rich history, and numerous sources have developed guidelines for how to organize effective direct action.

Tools

- David Solnit “[Globalize Liberation](#)” (2004)
- The Ruckus Society [blog](#)
- James Ostrowski, “[Direct Citizen Action: How We Can Win the Second American Revolution Without Firing a Shot](#)” (2010)

Guidelines for creative tactics

When coming up with an original, creative tactic for your campaign, keep in mind the following:

Format

Think about creative and different ways to bring people together, educate your community, or make a public statement. Consider ways to make a tactic new, interesting, and exciting but also feasible given the amount of time, energy, and resources you have available.

For example, the Preserving Our Civil Rights Campaign in Northampton, MA, held a “Civil Rights Trivia Night” at a local coffee shop. Members of the campaign came up with civil rights themed trivia questions and the attendees divided up onto teams to try to answer them. The winners got to choose from a list of services that members of the campaign could offer them as their prizes. For example, they could pick one hour of gardening, a Spanish lesson, or resume help. This event educated participants

about the campaign and its key issues in a fun environment. The prizes used the strengths of the group members, kept the event inexpensive, and helped to build relationships within the community.

Location

Choose a location that will make your event accessible to the public. Think about the goals of your tactic and how a given location will enhance the tactic. For example, if you're doing street theater, think of a place where lots of people will see you but where you won't immediately be asked to leave.

Creating a visual statement

Often, the effectiveness of a creative tactic requires making a visual statement, whether it's a giant banner with your campaign's message on it, a march or rally, or a community art project. A strong visual impact not only attracts passersby, but also creates great photo opportunities. Photographs from the event can be sent to local press, put on the campaign's website, sent to email lists, or given to elected officials to show them the support for the campaign.

Internet and social networking

As you start to build your local coalition and plan tactics, use online resources to maximize your impact. In today's electronic world, if you don't have a web presence, you're at a disadvantage—and your coalition needs every advantage it can get.

You don't need a web designer to have a web presence. If you have someone with web savvy in your core coalition group, enlist them to take charge of your web presence. But if not, there are many easy-to-use tools at your disposal. Think about which ones will work best for your coalition. You can choose a single one, just a few, or all of them—and you may want to start small and add on as you grow.

However, as important as the Internet and social networking are in today's world, it's important not to rely on them too much. Internet activism doesn't replace on-the-ground actions and in-person tactics—it just helps you take better advantage of your opportunities and reach more people. Think of online resources as a way to strengthen your coalition and expand the tactics you're already utilizing.

No matter what online resources you use, be sure to select an easy-to-remember, easy-to-spell name for your coalition and use it consistently across all of your profiles and platforms.

Stand-alone website

Creating a stand-alone website requires registering your domain name (e.g., bordc.org, preservercivilrights.org), finding a web hosting provider, and building a website.

Because stand-alone websites require content administration, graphic design, and periodic maintenance, they can be time-intensive to build and maintain. They also require active promotion to gain an active audience and user base.

For these reasons, a stand-alone site will be best for coalitions that include someone with the time and website management skills to set up, manage, and maintain the website. While organizational allies in your coalition may be able to provide some or all of the assistance you need, a simple blog or Facebook page can be a simpler alternative.

Blog

A blog is a great solution for coalitions without access to a web designer. There are many great free blogging tools available; we recommend [Blogger](#) and [WordPress](#). Both are free and easy to set up, and both have lots of online documentation and easy-to-learn user interfaces accessible to anyone familiar with email.

Once you've set up your blog, use it to post information on upcoming events, commentary on recent news, and basic information about your coalition. You can even post photos and video.

Take a look at any of the following WordPress blogs for ideas:

- BORDC's blog, the [People's Blog for the Constitution](#)
- [Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition](#)

- Western Massachusetts' [Preserving Our Civil Rights Campaign](#)

Facebook

Facebook is great for drawing attention to your cause and pulling in new supporters. Use it to present general information about your coalition and its activities and update supporters about important events and action opportunities.

On Facebook, there are two tools available for coalitions: groups and pages. While groups used to be very useful for coalitions, these are now best used for small-group collaboration. For example, you might set up a Facebook group for your core team of organizers or for each of your coalition's subcommittees. However, you should not set up a group for your entire coalition.

Instead, set up a coalition page instead. Anyone with a Facebook account can create a page, and you can add key members as admins, who have permission to manage the information on your page. Then supporters can "like" your page, and your updates and events will show up in their news feeds.

Your campaign's Facebook page should include your mission statement, broad goals, information on how to get involved, and contact information. Ask coalition groups to link to the campaign on their pages.

Note: *Do not set up a Facebook profile for your coalition.* Facebook profiles are accessed by logging in with a unique email address and password, whereas pages are than managed by admins, each of whom have their own Facebook profiles. Further, you connect with a profile by adding it as a friend, but you "like" a page. Facebook profiles are reserved for individuals. Creating a Facebook profile for a group is a violation of Facebook's Terms of Service. Facebook can delete a profile that violates those terms without warning, leaving you without any access to the data you stored on the profile or any way to reach the people who had added the profile as a friend.

Twitter

Twitter is another valuable social networking tool and can be an especially great way to reach young people. Each update is limited to 140 characters, so be concise! Tweeting remains a fine art.

Here are some tips for successful tweets:

- **Use hashtags.** You can create hashtags for a particular event, but it's often best to make good use of existing hashtags, such as #FBI, #PatriotAct, #civilrights, or #privacy. If enough people tweet with a particular hashtag in a short time period, it can become a trending tweet, bringing it even more visibility. You can identify good hashtags by looking at what allied organizations and coalitions are using, but be careful—if you use hashtags randomly or too much, your tweets can be marked as spam.
- **Use short URLs.** Include relevant links in your tweets, but since every character counts, use a link shortening service such as bit.ly or TinyURL to shorten them.

- **Retweet good tweets.** If someone else has tweeted something great, retweet it. Doing so will expose you to the audience of the user who originally submitted the tweet and also build your relationship with that user.
- **Mention your allies.** When tweeting about something related or of interest to another group, include that group's Twitter handle in your tweet (including @ before the name to make it a link) so that the group will see it. BORDC tweets at @bordc.

Group email list

Set up a group email list using one of the many free services available, such as [Riseup.net](#), [Google Groups](#), or [Yahoo! Groups](#). Add your coalition members' email addresses and use the group email list to communicate about your work, plan upcoming events, and discuss current events. Invite people who attend your events to sign up for the group.

Be careful not to overuse email lists, or allow them to be co-opted for non-coalition purposes. Mismanaged email lists can easily devolve into long email strings that prompt readers to unsubscribe.

Coalition email address

Using a shared coalition email address is the most basic online option, but can still be a useful tool for press and supporters. You can easily set one up using any free email service ([Riseup.net](#), Gmail, Yahoo!, and Hotmail are common and easy to use), allowing coalition members to distribute press releases and event announcements.

Beware that this option is notoriously insecure. Not only do online email providers routinely provide data to the government, but shared accounts always create the risk of someone outside the coalition obtaining the password or even someone within the coalition misusing the account. If that happens, you could lose not only the trust of your coalition members, but also access to your own information and history.

Other social networks

There are many more social networks in addition to Facebook and Twitter. You can create a channel for your coalition on YouTube or Vimeo if you have a lot of videos you want to share. You can create a Flickr account to share photos from your events. You can create a Google+ page or a Tumblr account, or join newly launched networks like Jumo and Diaspora.

Just realize that each network you join means more time and effort required to keep it current. Only join networks you're sure that you and your coalition will actively engage. You can always join more later, so consider starting with just one or two at the beginning.

Dos and don'ts of social media and activism

Do...

- **...be concise.** Include the necessary information, but keep it short. Too much text will turn readers away.

- **...have a range of social networking sites available.** Two to three is ideal, depending on the organization's strengths. A good combination is Facebook, Twitter, and a blog.
- **...act immediately.** If something relevant to the organization's interests has occurred, update all sites as soon as possible. Supporters are much more likely to rally around something still raging than around a stale cause.
- **...try to reach a diverse audience.** Though social networking is stereotypically linked to the younger generation, there are many older people on the Internet as well. Reach out to them and work to draw them in. Try to appeal to people of various political perspectives, ethnicities, religions, etc.
- **...use multimedia content.** Pictures, videos, and audio clips are all essential to attracting a wide audience and keeping them engaged. Large blocks of text simply won't cut it on the Internet. Come armed with at least one additional piece of media for every post or expect interest to decline. Flickr and Wikimedia Commons are great sources of pictures for easy sharing on a blog, and YouTube and Vimeo offer video content for use across platforms.

Don't...

- **...become an irritation.** A follower of your blog, Facebook page, or Twitter feed can easily unfollow you. If you post too often or if your posts aren't interesting, you'll lose followers left and right. It's important to keep supporters updated, but not irritated.
- **...take on too many social networks.** While it might seem tempting to start a Facebook page, Twitter account, blog, Tumblr account, and Google+ page, it is unlikely that supporters are going to be interested in monitoring an organization's every move on many different websites. So many accounts to update will also strain the time, resources, and capabilities of your coalition. Try to figure out what accounts will be most effective for your audience and stick to those. Quality is more important than quantity.
- **...overuse links.** Where links cut down text or reference a relevant previous post, they are incredibly useful. However, every link means more reading for an audience that may not have the time or interest to track down every bit of information you offer. If you overload them with links, they'll unsubscribe.

Working with local governments

Early in your campaign, you need to identify the decision makers in your community, such as the members of the city council. Consider the following questions:

- What is your city or town’s government structure? Is there a city council or another elected body?
- Who are the members of the city council (or other legislative body)? What are their political affiliations? What kind of legislation have they supported in the past? (BORDC can help do this research.)
- What is the legislative process? How many votes do you need for your proposal to pass? Can it be vetoed?
- Are the city councilors at-large, or do they represent wards? If the council uses a ward structure, does your coalition have representation in each of the wards?
- Is there a Human Rights Commission, Police Review Commission, or other official sub-council body that might be interested in your proposal? Many towns have such bodies, and because their members are often familiar with the members of the local legislative body, they can be very helpful in moving your coalition forward. Getting a commission to endorse your campaign can also be a great step towards enacting your proposed reforms, as many city councils take commission recommendations into serious consideration when voting on legislation.

Before approaching your city council...

- Have a clear sense of what your coalition wants. You do not need to have a reform proposal finalized—it may even be better to finalize the language of your legislation with the offices of those who’ll vote on it—but you should have a draft or list of provisions that illustrate what you want to see in the final version. The [Local Civil Rights Restoration Act](#) can be a good starting point.
- Demonstrate the power of your coalition. You might present a list of organizations involved in the coalition, a petition signed by members of the community, photos from an event, or news coverage of a well-attended event held by the coalition—anything that illustrates the diversity and strength of your community support.
- Think about who you want to represent your coalition. You’ll want to have someone central to the organizing and planning of the coalition’s efforts approach the city council, but you may also want to include someone who’s been less involved in planning but is more connected within, or experienced with, city government.

Approaching your local government

It may make sense to approach your local government at the beginning of your campaign, or it may be better to spend time building your coalition first. We’ve generally found that in large cities, elected officeholders are responsive only to established coalitions, whereas in smaller cities and towns they’re often approachable early in a campaign.

In smaller cities and towns, local elected officials often like to be approached as you're developing the campaign, and sometimes feel ignored or offended if you approach them later. Often, local activists will already know an official who can champion a piece of legislation and lead it through the council. If that is the case in your town, it is a good idea to approach that councilor right away, while waiting to approach other councilors until you've built community support. The community assessment described above can be helpful at this stage of your planning.

Tips for meeting with elected officials

- **Figure out who on the council is likely to be the most supportive, and meet with them first.** It's easier to approach the councilors who are less likely to be supportive when you can tell them that other councilors are already onboard. If you expect certain local officials to be "easy yeses," get them to support your work first and approach the rest of the council later.
- **Decide on your request.** You may ask city councilors to vote "yes" on your proposal when it comes up for a vote. But you may first need to ask someone to sponsor your proposal to get it on the agenda. Decide what you want to ask each elected officeholder, and **make sure you ask it.** Don't just give information, say you'd love the councilor's support, and leave. Ask directly if s/he will be able to perform a specific request (e.g., vote for your proposal, co-sponsor it, approach their colleagues to seek their support).
- **Bring constituents.** If you are not able to get a constituent from the officeholder's district to attend a meeting, bring a petition signed by her or his constituents. Make it clear that constituents care about this issue.
- **Bring more than one coalition representative.** Elected officials are more likely to respond positively to a meeting at which they can see that they're accountable to a group of people, not just one person. Also, attending a meeting with elected officials can be an extremely empowering experience. If an elected official says yes to a request, everyone involved in that meeting feels ownership of that success. If an elected official says no, group members feel that "no" much more personally than if they heard about it second-hand, and will be more active in organizing to turn the "no" into a "yes."
- **Decide on roles.** Before you go into your meeting, be clear on who is starting the meeting, who is speaking first, and who will discuss which parts of your reforms.
- **Present the legislation as a leadership opportunity.** Many elected officials have higher political aspirations and are looking to help make a name for themselves. Your campaign could help give them a public platform as well as a support base.
- **Get a firm commitment.** Ask the official directly if s/he will vote "yes" when your proposals come up for a vote. If you hear a non-committal answer, set up another meeting at which you can expect a "yes" or "no" answer. Bring more people to that next meeting.
- **Leave them with something.** Don't throw pages and pages of information at the councilor, but do provide a short (two- or three-page), clear written explanation of the campaign and something in writing that demonstrates your influence (e.g., recent news coverage, petitions, letter signed by prominent community leaders).

Tools

- [How to Meet Elected Officials Face-to-Face](#)

Accountability sessions

While meeting with your local government, continue to build power through a variety of tactics. At some point, if an elected representative continues to refuse to give you a firm commitment, you may want to hold an accountability session. Accountability sessions only work when you've built significant community power, but they can be crucial in your campaign's success.

Tools

- [How to hold an accountability session](#)

Customizing the reforms

A drafting committee should work on customizing the Local Civil Rights Restoration Act model for your community. The process may involve supportive elected officials as well as members of your coalition. Start with the Bill of Rights Defense Committee's [Local Civil Rights Restoration Act](#) model and adapt it for your city or town.

You may want to copy the model precisely, or you may want to change it substantially. No matter how you change the model, **review your changes with all members of your coalition and get their approval.** The point of the LCRR campaign is to give *all* communities impacted by government violations of civil liberties a vehicle to collaborate.

Language can and should be adapted for each community, but everyone in your coalition should have a chance to decide what their bottom line is (i.e., which pieces are essential and where they might be willing to allow the coalition to compromise) as a policy process proceeds.

Tool

- [Local Civil Rights Restoration Act model](#)

City council hearings

City council hearings can be a great opportunity to demonstrate power and get more members of your community involved in the campaign. Here are a few tips:

- **Leverage public support.** Pack the room. Prepare as many people as possible to speak in support of your reforms. Develop talking points beforehand and include them in emails inviting supporters to attend the hearing and speak in favor of the legislation.
- **Use visual aids to demonstrate your power.** Create signs or stickers for supporters to wear. Make sure everyone knows the room is packed by people supporting *your* campaign.
- **Have a few speakers lined up in advance.** When the hearing is opened for public comment, several supporters should be ready to move to the microphone immediately. Others will likely join them, but be sure that even if no one else decides to come forward, you have speakers ready to make the case for your reforms. Also, make sure that there's good representation of

the communities affected by your reforms. If possible, include a representative from each of the targeted communities among your prepared speakers, so that the decision-makers know how broadly your proposals are supported.

Working with law enforcement officials

Some elected representatives may suggest that you meet with your city's chief of police or the county sheriff's office, before seeking formal support in the legislative body.

Meeting with law enforcement officials can accomplish a number of things:

- It can give you more information about the inner workings of the police or sheriff's department and how best to adapt the ordinance for your community.
- It can show your elected representatives that your coalition is engaging in "good faith" and are willing to hear others' concerns and adjust your proposals based on what you learn.
- It can give you a sense of where your city's police department stands on these issues and suggest potential avenues for collaboration, as well as likely areas of conflict.
- Depending on your jurisdiction, you may be able to enlist his or her support in securing some of your goals. For instance, some law enforcement agencies will welcome data collection as an opportunity to prove that they do not engage in racial profiling. Others may share your concerns about federal policies and appreciate statutory limits to prevent their agencies from being co-opted by them.

However, there can also be pitfalls to working with law enforcement officials:

- They are *not* the decision maker on your reforms. The chief of police, for instance, is not elected and you have no power over him or her. At the end of the day, you do not need the chief of police to vote on your legislation, so you should be more concerned with the support of elected representatives.
- Police chiefs can change police policy, but not the policy of their local government. As a result, even a change in police policy does little to impact other jurisdictions, send a message to the federal government, or engage community members in taking back democracy, which is what LCRR campaigns aim to do.
- Meetings with officials who are not decision-makers can take up a lot of time and energy. Be conscious about how much energy you invest in these meetings in order to keep your "eyes on the prize."

Appendix A: Sample outreach letter

Dear Friend,

I'm writing to you because I've been impressed with your work in the [town/city] with regard to [their issues]. In collaboration with [list existing allies], we're starting a campaign to restore our civil rights and liberties at the a local level and are eager to invite your ideas and participation.

The Bill of Rights Defense Committee is supporting similar campaigns in almost 20 cities and towns across the country, and we think [town/city] would be a great next place to start.

We invite you and your organization to participate in this campaign. You can be involved at any level, from joining our organizing team to cosponsoring events to simply lending your name in support of our efforts.

Do you have time in the next week or two to meet and discuss the campaign and how it might fit within your goals? I'd be happy to lay out our plans and answer any questions you may have. I understand that you're busy with other projects, so our meeting wouldn't take more than a half-hour of your time.

Please let me know when might be a good time to talk. Feel free to either email me at [email address] or call me at [phone number].

Thanks,

[your name]

Appendix B: Event planning guide

Many (but not all) tactics are events, so it's important to know how to plan a good event to execute your tactics well. This is a basic guide for planning any campaign event. Feel free to change any of these suggestions to fit your community and your specific campaign goals. As you plan more events, you may develop your coalition's own standard system for planning and promoting events.

Before the event

Initial planning

When planning an event, consider how it fits into your overall strategy and how it furthers your campaign. Also consider the resources available to you (money, time, energy, people, skills, etc.) and how you're going to get media coverage. Events that attract media often include:

- A big group of people coming together to do something for the campaign
- New information being presented as a part of an ongoing story
- Unexpected news
- Links between local news and national news

With these factors in mind, have a brainstorming session and decide on an event that will further your campaign, utilize your resources, and attract media attention.

Logistics

Once you've decided on an event, put together an event planning subcommittee. Depending on your group, this may be a standing committee that plans all events or a rotating committee that changes for each event.

The event planning committee should then, taking into account the input of the rest of the group, decide on the event details. Consider the following:

- **Time and date:** Is a weekday or weekend better? What's the best time of day for the event? Morning, afternoon, or evening? Before or after dinner? Keep in mind work schedules, secular and religious holidays, etc.
- **Location:** Where will the event be? Does the venue cost money? If so, how will you pay for it? Is the venue accessible for people with disabilities? Is there a space that can be used as a prayer room for practicing Muslims if the event coincides with daily prayers?
- **Schedule:** What's the schedule for the event? If you have a speaker and are serving a meal, should the speaker talk before, during, or after dinner? Who's in charge of keeping the event on schedule so it doesn't run late?
- **Roles:** Who will be the point person for the event? Who will set up before the event? Who will clean up after the event? Who will staff the table with information? Who will greet people at the door? Who will provide childcare if there are children?
- **Food:** Will you serve food? If so, how much will it cost and how will you pay for it? How can we accommodate different dietary needs? Is it ok to have food in the space we've chosen?

Rehearsing

Have you ever been to a disorganized event that took far more time than advertised? If so, you probably didn't enjoy the event or feel interested in attending future events. This is why it is so important to make sure everyone is clear on the schedule and timing of the event!

A great way to prepare for your event is to rehearse everything beforehand. Build in time during one of your meetings to run through the event, taking note of how long everything takes and making any necessary changes to keep the event timely and engaging.

Promotion

Once you've decided on the logistics of the event, you can start promoting it. To promote the event, send a press release to media, put up posters, hold a news conference, and use your local activist and social networks to spread the word. Send the release and a poster to coalition members and people or businesses that have endorsed the campaign.

Also contact people in surrounding towns about your effort and invite them to the event. They might be inspired to organize in their towns. BORDC is happy to help promote your efforts and can send out an email to our subscribers in your town upon request.

Be sure to leverage social networking when promoting the event. Set up a Facebook event and ask everyone in your group to invite their friends. Spread the work by encouraging members to post about it in a Facebook status update or on Twitter and to invite their friends. Ask other partner organizations to post it on their website, Facebook pages, or in their weekly emails to members.

Above all else, be persistent in your promotion. Talk about the event to everyone you know, post it on your Facebook wall, announce it at events you attend, and encourage other members of your campaign to do the same. Word of mouth, although difficult to measure in the same way as sending out emails and hanging posters, is crucial to getting a good turnout at events.

Tools

- [Quarter-page flier in English](#) and [en español](#) for publicizing local events
- Appendix C: How to write a press release
- Appendix D: Sample press release
- [How to hold a news conference](#)
- [Promotion checklist](#)

At the event

Information tables

During the event, place fact sheets, informational materials, petitions, buttons for sale (see BORDC's [store](#)), and collection cans (if you're collecting money) at tables. Have a sign-up sheet for new people. Designate volunteers to be at the table throughout the event.

Photography and videography

Have someone from your coalition photograph and/or take video of the event. That way, you'll have photos to send to newspapers who couldn't send a reporter or didn't bring a photographer. You'll also have the photos and video to use in future publicity and outreach materials.

If you plan to videotape your event, ask your community access station to air it, and post it (or clips from it) on YouTube. In fact, if your community access TV station is interested in airing the event, they may record it for you and provide you with a copy afterward. If you decide to videotape the event, be sure to inform participants in advance and note in the program that the event is being recorded.

See this [taped public rally in Lincoln, NE \(MW\) as an example](#).

After the event

Debriefing

At your next group or subcommittee meeting, debrief the event by brainstorming what went well and what you could have done better. Take notes and refer to them when planning future events. This step is absolutely crucial!

See [Debriefing tactics](#) above.

Press outreach

Send a post-event press release to local media, along with several of the best photographs from the event. A post-event press release is basically the same as your press release, except everything should be in the past tense and you should include how many people attended and talk about how successful the event was.

Appendix C: How to write a press release

A press release is a description of your event that you send to the media prior to an event so that they can send someone to cover it or mention it in their reporting. Distribute your press release by email at least a day before the event or news hook if possible—two days if the event is near a weekend or holiday. If your press release is about news that has already happened, such as the passage of your legislation, send out the press release as soon as possible afterward, within 24 hours if at all possible. Then make follow-up phone calls to a few especially important contacts—ones you think are most likely to attend the event or are most influential.

Your release should have three brief parts:

1. A paragraph or two explaining the who, what, when, where, and why of your event.
2. A paragraph or two that includes quotes from one of your organizers, members, or spokespeople.
3. A final paragraph describes the coalition; you may also want to consider including paragraphs describing or listing the coalition member organizations.

Tips for writing press releases:

- Provide contact information for the campaign including a contact person, phone number, and email address, and website if applicable.
- Keep your release clear and concise—one page or less, if at all possible. Do not send a press release that is more than two pages.
- Include links and/or URLs to supporting materials (e.g. a Facebook event, an online version of your petition, or video from your event).

Appendix D: Sample press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JUNE 28, 2011

A Civil Write-In in Northampton, hosted by the Preserving Our Civil Rights Campaign

Contact:

- **Emma Roderick, Bill of Rights Defense Committee**
(917) 412-4224, emma@bordc.org
- **Marianna Ballou, American Friends Service Committee**
(781) 439-2804, marianna@afscwm.org

NORTHAMPTON, MA—On Wednesday, June 29, at 7 p.m., several dozen Northampton residents from the [Preserving Our Civil Rights campaign](#) will deliver signed postcards and artwork to City Hall, urging city councilors to vote in favor of civil rights legislation set to reach the Council floor this August.

Prior to delivering postcards to City Hall, residents will meet in the basement of the Unitarian Universalist Society at 6 p.m. and will eat together, discuss the campaign, hear speakers, sign postcards, and make artwork.

The campaign, which was launched this year on Martin Luther King Day, seeks to pass local legislation to defend Northampton from federal erosion of civil rights and liberties. Specifically, the legislation addresses protection against unwarranted searches and seizures, implements transparency measures surrounding racial profiling, and affirms the Northampton Police Department's commitment to remain separated from federal immigration enforcement.

“This is an opportunity for the residents of Northampton to show that this is an issue they care about,” said Evelyn Crunden, a Ward 4 resident of Northampton and member of the campaign. “We urge the city councilors to listen to their constituents.”

The [Preserving Our Civil Rights campaign](#) is organized by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Bill of Rights Defense Committee (BORDC), and the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts (ACLUM). It is also unanimously endorsed by the Human Rights Commission. For several months, the campaign has been canvassing, educating residents, and meeting with Councilors, the Chief of Police, and other community leaders. In addition, the campaign has also put on a community wide art project called “Civil Writes.” The campaign hopes to have final language introduced to the City Council meeting on August 18.

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