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SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

As far as we know, this is the most complete grassroots organizing guide available on the Internet. To be applicable to citizens in all communities, we've removed some of the Vancouver-specific information.

Introduction to Organizing ->

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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Introduction to Community Organizing

Do-It-Yourself Organizing
This section is a do-it-yourself guide to grassroots organizing. It focuses on bringing together people who share a common place such as an apartment building, city block, or neighbourhood. The focus on people acting together does not diminish the importance of citizens acting alone. Nor does the focus on organizing around a place diminish the importance of organizing around an issue.

Learn-it-yourself organizing
Before you can do-it-yourself you will have to learn-it-yourself. Most provinces in Canada do not offer full training programs in community organizing. In Canada, faith in government has placed decisions about our communities in the hands of politicians and professionals.

When you can't do it all yourself
A paid, experienced organizer can help when the task is to pull citizens together quickly, or involve people who normally stay at home. Paid organizers often begin by gathering information on the neighbourhood, then proceed by introducing themselves to residents, bringing people together in discussion groups, building self-help skills, and finally, training new leaders to take over the organizing task. The presence of a professional organizer may lead some volunteers to wonder why they are working for free while someone else is being paid. A few groups have addressed this problem by turning funds for an organizer into honoraria for volunteers.

The Active Ingredients of Organizing
Community organizing is often presented as a step-by-step process. The ingredients of a process often make sense, but the step-by-step sequence usually fails to fit actual circumstances. What we've done is look at community organizing from the point of view of its ingredients. Which of these you turn to at any given time will depend on your circumstances. Except for the first, ingredients are added and readded regularly as part of community organizing. All, as well, are interwoven. For example, planning requires research, which depends on getting and keeping people, which is affected by decision making, which requires evaluating, and so on.

Take Action! ->

Community Organizing

Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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About Citizen Works | Contact Us | Privacy Policy | Jobs/Internships

CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Beginning

Where do you begin if you want to become more involved in your neighbourhood? Here are some options.

Begin with research
Although professionals often start with research, you don't have to start here. On the other hand, you might be wise to begin with research if you intend to tackle an issue you do not fully understand.

Begin by joining an existing group
Most neighbourhoods have many different kinds of active organizations. Linking up with one of these can be an easy way to get involved. Begin by checking out the community groups listed by city hall.

Begin by starting a new group
If working with an existing group looks difficult, you might have to start a new group. New neighbourhood organizations usually form around a core of three to five committed people. Putting together a core of first-rate people is worth the effort. Once you have done so consider these questions:

- What are we trying to do?
- What size of area are we going to organize? (The smaller the area, the easier.)
- Who will support our efforts?
- What is a good idea for our first action? (It should be simple, focus on a local concern, and increase the group's visibility.)
- How are we going to reach out to others?
- Should we organize a general meeting and invite the community?

Make a special effort to remain friendly with other local groups that have similar goals. Friendliness can replace the common tendency toward competition with the potential of cooperation. Inter-group cooperation is the engine of real progress at the grassroots.

Do your research! ->

Community Organizing
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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed | Take Action | Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: [GO]

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Researching

Cities behave in tricky ways. What may seem an obvious problem, or an obvious solution often seems less so after a little research. Acting before researching can waste time and energy. It can also reinforce the stereotype of active citizens as highly vocal, but largely uninformed. The stereotype is the most often-cited excuse for dismissing calls for greater citizen participation in local decision-making.

> Here is a typical story of what can happen for lack of a little research. People living in a quiet neighbourhood receive notice of a proposal to use a nearby residence as a psychiatric half-way house. Fears of "crazy people" running amok prompt them to form an ad hoc citizens group, which moves swiftly into action to combat the proposal. Having skipped research, they don't discover that most special needs residential facilities (or snrfs) do not create problems, or reduce property values. They don't discover that most snrfs are not even known to local residents. Without these facts, the group goes to battle. Over nothing.

Gather existing information on your neighbourhood
Information on your part of town already exists. The municipal planning department has community profiles, traffic studies, zoning and other maps, aerial photos, and possibly an official community plan. Local health authorities or service agencies may have a needs assessment or more focused studies of your area. Back copies of community newsletters and local newspapers will contain the recent history of many local issues. Your branch of the public library will have copies of many local reports, studies and newsletters.

Find out what people want
In the absence of a single over-riding concern, your group will have to identify neighbourhood issues. In many cases you will try to answer the following questions:

> - What do residents like about the neighbourhood, and what do they want to change?
> - What are the opportunities for making the neighbourhood more interesting, identifiable, understandable, helpful, friendly.
> - What is the highest priority problem? Who is

Menu:

- [Introduction to Organizing](#)

- [Beginning](#)

- [Research](#)

- [Planning and Acting](#)

- [Getting Noticed](#)

- [Evaluating](#)

- [Getting People](#)

- [Keeping People](#)

- [Leading](#)

- [Meeting and Deciding](#)

- [Facilitating](#)

- [Fundraising](#)

- [Group Structure](#)

affected?
- Where is it located? What has been done?
What can be done? Who can help?

Give this research some time. A question such as, "What do you like about the neighbourhood, and what do you want to change?", can take a group a couple of evenings to itemize, condense and prioritize.

Consider a survey of residents

Any survey requiring face-to-face interaction not only provides information but helps build community.

Go to those in the know

Interview those who know what is going on in the community, and those who know how to deal with an issue. Often they are people with first-hand experience. A small focus-group discussion with six teens can reveal more about teens in the community than a survey of 500 adults. Other sources of information are community activists, and people listed as contact persons for community organizations.

Discover your human resources

To really understand your neighbourhood, you need to research its capacity to act. Start by answering these questions:

- Who can help?
- What resources does our community have: public institutions, business groups, religious organizations, citizen associations, clubs, ethnic groups, sports and recreational groups, cultural associations, service groups, major property owners, businesses, individuals?
- How, why and where do people get together?
- How do people find out what is going on?
- Who most influences local decisions, local funding, and local investment? Who has a big stake in the neighbourhood?

Research solutions from other places

A problem in your neighbourhood probably exists in other neighbourhoods in Vancouver and other cities. Ask citizens in other cities for help; if you have a computer and Internet access, post requests on the freenets of other cities.

Make a plan, and make it happen! ->

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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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CITIZEN
WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed   Take Action   Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Planning and Acting

Planning is necessary if you want to avoid wasted activity, and make your collective efforts count. It should move from the general to the specific, from the big picture to the small, from the long term to the short, from "what" to "how". Planning entails:

- Setting a goal
- Devising objectives (or strategies) to achieve the goal
- Devising actions to achieve the objectives.

Look beyond the obvious to find good objectives
In trying to deal with a problem like growing juvenile crime your group might decide on the obvious objective of getting more police. If you looked beyond symptoms, at causes, you might decide to try to open local schools during evenings. Research can help you look beyond the obvious.

How do your objectives score?
Generate ideas for objectives that will lead to your goal, and then decide which to pursue. Test alternative objectives by asking:

- Does it have strong group support?
- Is it specific enough? ("Reduce crime" is too general. "Eliminate street prostitution on Angus Drive" is specific.)
- Is it easily attainable?
- Will it have an immediate visible impact?
- How will we know when we've reached our objective? How do we measure progress?

To be effective, your group should pursue no more than one or two objectives at any given time. New groups should begin with small projects having a high probability of success over the short term.

Plan the action
Generate ideas that will lead to your objective, then decide which to carry forward. Once your group agrees on an action, create an action plan. It should include a time-frame; an ordered list of tasks to complete; persons responsible for each task; a list of resources required including materials; facilities and funds. Keep action plans flexible so you can respond to the unexpected. One good way to identify a group's priorities is to ask people to write their views with thick markers on large

Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

post-it notes. Each person sticks their notes to a board or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them. A facilitator then helps the group arrange the notes into clusters with similar characteristics.

Acting

Once you've completed the necessary groundwork, you need to act. Surprisingly, many groups never get around to acting. John Gardiner says, "Many talk about action but are essentially organized for study, discussion or education. Still others keep members busy with organizational housekeeping, committee chores, internal politics and passing of resolutions." While many interest groups get together just for discussion, community groups tend to work best when acting accompanies talking. Otherwise, they tend to shrink to a few diehards for whom meeting attendance has become a way of life.

Get noticed! ->

Community Organizing
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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed   Take Action   Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Getting Noticed

If you want to expand the number of people who know what you are doing, you need to get noticed. This usually means working with the media. Besides informing a larger public, the media can empower residents, nudge politicians, and add momentum to a grassroots initiative. According to David Enwicht in *Reclaiming Our Cities and Towns*, empowerment comes from simple exposure. "Group members say, 'Did you see we were in the news again. Isn't it great? We are really starting to get places now.'" When you understand the media, you can also raise public issues that are being ignored, and reframe issues from a citizen's perspective. Be careful, however, if you are not used to dealing with the media. Many journalists look for stories rooted in conflict, error and injustice. They may impose a confrontational agenda that can actually make it more difficult for you to resolve your issue.

Assemble a list of sympathetic journalists
If you have a positive news story, you may find no one is interested. One way around this is to cultivate a list of journalists who care about community building. Note their deadlines, so you can call after a deadline.

Find the media professionals in your community
Seek help from the people in your community who work for newspapers, radio and television stations. They can provide advice on what is newsworthy, how to get attention, and who to call. Most will not want to appear in the foreground, but in the background they will be invaluable.

Define your objective, then your messages
Don't rush off to the media without a clear idea of what you want to accomplish. Use this to create a set of clear messages you wish to project. If you intend to air a problem, one of your messages should suggest a reasonable solution.

Make actions newsworthy
To get media attention you need to tell a good story with a human focus that is happening now. The more creative, colourful, and humorous, the better coverage will be. Getting noticed is largely a matter of dramatizing issues.

Link actions to other news events
Your actions will stand a better chance of getting covered if they tie into other events in the news: government announcements, holidays, local conferences, world events, hot issues. The media like a good feeding frenzy.

Menu:

- -[Introduction to Organizing](#)
- -[Beginning](#)
- -[Research](#)
- -[Planning and Acting](#)
- -[Getting Noticed](#)
- -[Evaluating](#)
- -[Getting People](#)
- -[Keeping People](#)
- -[Leading](#)
- -[Meeting and Deciding](#)
- -[Facilitating](#)
- -[Fundraising](#)
- -[Group Structure](#)

Issue news releases

Send out a news release if you have fresh information you wish to publicize. Issue the release on your group's letterhead. At the top put "For immediate release" and the date. Next, create a strong newspaper style headline that will interest an editor who has to shuffle through hundreds of news releases every day. The first sentence of the copy should contain the most important fact in your story. The rest of the release should cover the essentials of who, what, where, when and why. At the bottom put "For more information" and contact name and phone number.

Keep the whole thing short, one to two pages double spaced. For big events send out a news release seven days prior, then telephone a reminder one to two days before the event. Faxing a release without any personal contact is usually a waste of time.

Aim at TV

Some of the most effective citizens groups get TV coverage by staging events that provide action and good pictures. Greenpeace, for instance, gets attention by sending little rubber boats buzzing around huge aircraft carriers. Some groups also shoot their own broadcast quality video or create video news releases to help control what is broadcast.

Try to schedule actions on dull news days, allowing enough time to process material for the 6 o'clock news. Choose a spokesperson who comes across well on TV. On television a great deal is communicated non-verbally through tone of voice, facial expression, and body gestures.

Practice your blurb

For regular TV and radio news you will have 15-30 seconds to make a statement. Practice what you want to say before the event. Your statement or a minor variation can be used in response to any question asked. No one will know the difference.

Reframe stories on live radio

If you can get on a live radio show you can actually shape the news, because you won't be edited as you would on TV or in the newspaper. Just make sure you know what you want to say.

Write a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor of a community newspaper is an easy way to get publicity. Small papers will publish any reasonable letter that does not require a lot of fact checking. Common Cause, the largest citizens group in the US, did a study which showed that a letter to the editor was one of the most effective ways of influencing politicians.

Don't rely on the media to educate

The mass media prefer to entertain. If you want to get out detailed information, you will probably have to do it yourself through newsletters, bulletins and other methods listed in the Handbook.

Consider other kinds of announcements

Community bulletin boards run by radio and some cable stations can announce your event. So can ethnic newspapers,

TV and radio stations. Public service announcements on radio and TV offer another opportunity. For radio, send in public service announcements of 30 seconds or about 75 words. Include a start and stop date, plus information on your organization.

Consider alternative media
Consider printed t-shirts; buttons; window signs; posters; bumper stickers; cartop signs; public projections, bridge banners, notices in apartment building laundries, church orders of service, web sites, email networks, and the newsletters of other groups. For more methods see "Getting People" and "Information Sharing".

Try the direct approach
Consider phoning or writing those who have the power to put things right. If you have a city-related problem that you cannot solve, even with the help of city staff, call or email a city councillor.

Evaluate! ->

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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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CITIZEN
WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed   Take Action   Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Evaluating

Your group will need to evaluate both projects and processes if you wish to improve your effectiveness and stay on track. Unfortunately, many grassroots groups rarely evaluate either.

Don't evaluate when trying to create
Avoid evaluating and criticizing when trying to generate ideas. If you are facilitating a meeting, prohibit criticism when the group is brainstorming.

Make honest evaluation part of your group's culture
Make a habit of asking what worked and what could be better for both actions, and projects. Consider a round to evaluate group process at the end of meetings.
If you don't ask for honest feedback, you won't get it. Unhappy people will simply drop out. To get the most honest feedback, make responses anonymous, and obtain responses from people outside your immediate group.

Check on benefits to members
At the end of actions ask participants about benefits. Did you learn anything? Did you have too little or too much to do? Did you have any fun? Did you feel part of the group?

Compare results with objectives
Is there a gap between what is happening and what you want to happen? If there is a persistent gap, you might consider getting help from a professional organizer. Another way of dealing with a persistent gap is to revise your objectives.

Get people involved! ->

Community Organizing
The Citizen's Handbook:
A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed   Take Action   Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Getting People

One of the main on-going activities of any grassroots organization is getting more people involved. This is not easy; most people don't like the idea of being "roped into" doing community work in their spare time. The heavy emphasis on the individual by modern commercial culture has driven participation rates below 5% for most community activities. If that sounds low, remember a few people committed to a single course of action can achieve amazing results.

Ask members to invite others
Eighty per cent of volunteers doing community work said they began because they were asked by a friend, a family member, or a neighbour.

Go to where people are
Instead of trying to get people to come to you, try going to them. Go to the meetings of other groups, and to places and events where people gather. This is particularly important for involving ethnic groups, youth groups, seniors, and others who may not come to you.

Never miss a chance to collect names, addresses, phone numbers
Have sign-in sheets at your meetings and events. At events organized by others, ask people to add their name, address, and phone number to petitions and requests-for-information. In return, hand out a sheet explaining the nature of your group.

Try to include those who are under-represented
Minority language groups, low-income residents, the disabled, the elderly and youth all tend to be under-represented in neighbourhood groups. In some cases not participating is a matter of choice - most transient youth choose not to take part. In other cases, English language competence poses a formidable barrier to participation. In still other cases, people get overlooked. This can happen to the disabled and the elderly, even though they have proven invaluable as active citizens. Here are some ways to include the under-represented:

- Go to people in the group you are trying to reach and ask how they would like to be approached.
- Address their issues.
- Think about who you know who knows someone in the group you are trying to reach. Use your connections.

Menu:

- [Introduction to Organizing](#)

- [Beginning](#)

- [Research](#)

- [Planning and Acting](#)

- [Getting Noticed](#)

- [Evaluating](#)

- [Getting People](#)

- [Keeping People](#)

- [Leading](#)

- [Meeting and Deciding](#)

- [Facilitating](#)

- [Fundraising](#)

- [Group Structure](#)

- Identify a group as people you want to work
with, not as a target group you want to bring "on
side". Treat people as people first.
- Organize projects that focus on kids. Parents of
different ethnic backgrounds, and income levels
will meet one another while accompanying their
children.

Do surveys
Surveys are a good way to stay in touch, increase participation,
and bring in new members. They show your group is willing to
respond to a broad base of others, not just those who tend to
participate in community activities.

Door-knock
Door-knocking is the oldest and best outreach method.

Create detailed membership lists
Create membership lists with places for entering name,
address, day and evening phone and fax numbers, priorities for
local improvement, occupation, personal interests, special skills,
times available, what the person would be willing to do, and
what the person would not be willing to do. Consider using a
computer to update lists and sort people by address, priority,
and interests. With such a computer database you can easily
bring together people who belong together. Membership lists
can also form the basis of a telephone tree, a system for
getting messages out to large numbers of people.

Generate newsletters and leaflets
Newsletters keep group members in touch. Because most
neighbourhood groups deliver to all residents whether
members or not, a newsletter helps attract new people.

Keep them interested! ->

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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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Get Informed | Take Action | Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Keeping People

People join community groups to meet people, to have fun, to learn new skills, to pursue an interest, and to link their lives to some higher purpose. They leave if they don't find what they are looking for. Citizens groups need to ask themselves more often: What benefits do we provide? At what cost to members? How can we increase the benefits and decrease the costs? Here are a some ideas on where to begin.

Stay in touch with one another.
Regular contact is vital. Face to face is best. If you have to meet, getting together in someone's house is better than meeting in a hall.

Welcome newcomers.
Introduce them to members of your group. Consider appointing greeters for large meetings and events. Call new contacts to invite them to events, or to pass on information.
Help people find a place in the organization. The most appealing approach is to say, "Tell us the things you like to do and do well and we will find a way to use those talents." The next most appealing is to say: "Here are the jobs we have, but how you get them done is up to you."
Invite newcomers to assume leadership roles. If the same people run everything, newcomers feel excluded.

Pay attention to group process
Most volunteer groups do not give adequate attention to how they work together. Decision-making methods are not determined explicitly nor are roles, or healthy behaviours. Some groups make process a topic of discussion by appointing a process watcher.

Discuss the group contract
Set aside occasions when members describe what they expect of the group and what the group can expect of them in terms of time and responsibilities. This information should become part of your membership lists.

Act more, meet less
The great majority of people detest meetings; too many are the Black Death of community groups. By comparison, activities like tree-planting draw large numbers of people of all ages.

Keep time demands modest
Most people lead busy lives. Don't ask them to come to meetings if they don't need to be there. Keep expanding the

Menu:

number of active members to ensure everyone does a little, and no one does too much. Work out realistic time commitments for projects.

Do it in twos
Following a practice from Holland, we suggest working in pairs. It improves the quality of communication, makes work less lonely, and ensures tasks get done. Ethnically mixed pairs (such as English and Chinese) can maintain links to different cultures. Gender mixed pairs can take advantage of differences in ways of relating to men and women.

Provide social time and activities
Endless work drives people away. Schedule social time at the beginning and end of meetings. Turn routine tasks into social events; for example, stuff envelopes while sharing pizza. Some groups form a social committee to plan parties, dinners, and trips.

Provide skills training
Provide skill-building workshops and on-the-job training. Simply pairing experienced and inexperienced people will improve the skills of new members. Training in leadership, group facilitating and conflict resolution are important enough to warrant special weekend workshops.

Lead the way! ->

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A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed | Take Action | Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: ___ GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Leading

Good leaders are the key to community organizing. They do not tell other people what to do, but help others to take charge. They do not grab the limelight, but nudge others into the limelight. They are not interested in being The Leader, but are interested in creating more leaders. They recognize that only by creating more leaders can an organizing effort expand.

Model the effective leader:

Set realistic expectations
Nothing buoys a group more than tangible success. The smart leader will steer the group toward things it can easily accomplish.

Divide-up & delegate work
Divide-up tasks into bite-sized chunks, then discuss who will do each chunk. Make sure everyone has the ability to carry out their task, then let them carry it out in their own way. Have someone check on progress. People do not feel good about doing a job, if nobody cares whether it gets done.

Show appreciation for work well done
Recognize people's efforts in conversations, at meetings, in newsletters. Give thank you notes and other tokens of appreciation. Give certificates and awards for special efforts. Respect all contributions no matter how small.

Welcome criticism
Accepting criticism may be difficult for some leaders, but members need to feel they can be critical without being attacked.

Help people to believe in themselves
A leader builds people's confidence that they can accomplish what they have never accomplished before. The unflagging optimism of a good leader energizes everyone.

Inspire trust
People will not follow those they do not trust. Always maintain the highest standards of honesty. Good leaders air doubts about their own potential conflicts of interest, and about their own personal limitations.

Herald a higher purpose
People often volunteer to serve some higher purpose. A leader should be able to articulate this purpose, to hold it up as a

Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

glowing beacon whenever the occasion demands. A good leader will celebrate every grassroots victory as an example of what can happen when people work together for a common good.

Convince others they can lead
Make the practice of leading transparent. Invite others to lead. Don't try to run the whole show, or do most of the work. Others will become less involved. And you will burn out.

Meet and decide! ->

Community Organizing
The Citizen's Handbook:
A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver
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CITIZEN WORKS
Tools for Democracy

Get Informed | Take Action | Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Meeting and Deciding

Meetings are necessary for planning, and decision making. How well they work influences whether people remain in a group. All meetings should be as lively and as much fun as possible.

The basics of meeting
Fix a convenient time, date and place to meet. You can find free meeting places in libraries, community centres, some churches, neighbourhood houses, and schools. Some groups meet in a favourite restaurant or cafe. To keep a group together, decide on a regular monthly meeting time, or think of another way of staying in touch. Agree on an agenda beforehand. A good agenda states meeting place; starting time, time for each item, ending time; objectives of the meeting; and items to be discussed. Start the meeting by choosing a facilitator, a recorder, and a timekeeper. Begin with a round of introductions if necessary. Next, review the agreements of the previous meeting. Ask for amendments or additions to the agenda, then begin working through the agenda. If you have trouble reaching agreement, refer to "Decision Making" below. Record actions required, who will carry them out, and how much will be accomplished before the next meeting. Finally, set a time, place and an agenda for the next meeting.

Display everyone's contribution
Consider using a flip chart, overhead projector or a blackboard.

Follow a set of discussion guidelines
Regular meetings work better if everyone agrees on a set of discussion guidelines. Some groups post their guidelines as a large sign:

- Listen to others
- Do not interrupt
- Ask clarifying questions
- Welcome new ideas
- Do not allow personal attacks
- Treat every contribution as valuable

Develop a friendly culture
Encourage humour. Provide food and drink, or meet in a restaurant. Allow for social time.

Decision Making

Your group should discuss, agree on, then post guidelines for

Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

reaching decisions.

Straw polling
Straw polling entails asking for a show of hands to see how the group feels about a particular issue. It is a quick check that can save a great deal of time. To make straw polling continuous, agree on a set of hand signals everyone will use throughout the meeting. These silent signals enable people to gauge how others are reacting moment by moment. They can also provide invaluable feedback for a speaker who is trying to work with a large group.

Voting
Voting is a decision making method that seems best suited to large groups. To avoid alienating large minorities, you might decide a motion will only succeed with a two-thirds majority. Alternatively, you might decide to combine voting with consensus. Small groups usually follow informal consensus procedures. Large groups, on the other hand, often try to follow Robert's Rules of Order without anyone really understanding how to Amend a Motion, or the number of people needed to Move the Question. If rules are used, they should be simple and understood by everyone.
Some community groups limit the privilege of voting to people who have come to three or more consecutive meetings to prevent stacked meetings, and to encourage familiarity with the issues being decided. Voting usually means deciding between X or Y. But not always. Some issues will admit a proportional solution, part X and part Y. In such a cases the ratio of X to Y in the solution usually reflects the ratio of people voting for each alternative.

Consensus
A consensus process aims at bringing the group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. It does not require unanimity. Consensus can take longer than other processes, but fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions. Here is a sample outline:

> 1. A presenter states the proposal. Ideally, a written draft has been distributed prior to the meeting.

> 2. The group discusses and clarifies the proposal. No one presents concerns until clarification is complete.

> 3. The facilitator asks for legitimate concerns. If there are none the facilitator asks the group if it has reached consensus. If there are concerns:

> 4. The recorder lists concerns where everyone can see them. The group then tries to resolve the concerns. The presenter has first option to:
> ~ Clarify the proposal.
> ~ Change the proposal.
> ~ Explain why it is not in conflict with the group's values.
> ~ Ask those with concerns to stand aside. By "standing aside" a person indicates a willingness

to live with a proposal. By "crossing off a concern" a person indicates satisfaction with clarifications or changes.

5. If concerns remain unresolved and concerned members are unwilling to stand aside, the facilitator asks everyone to examine these concerns in relation to the group's purpose and values. The group may need to go through a special session to examine its purpose or resolve value conflicts.

6. The facilitator checks again to see if those with concerns are willing to stand aside or cross off their concerns. If not, the facilitator keeps asking for suggestions to resolve the concerns, until everyone finds the proposal acceptable or stands aside. Often the solution is a "third way", something between either/or, black and white.

7. If time runs out and concerns persist the facilitator may:
~ Conduct a straw poll.
~ Ask those with concerns if they will stand aside.

~ Ask the presenter to withdraw the proposal.
~ Contract with the group for more time.
~ Send the proposal to a sub-group.
~ Conduct a vote, requiring a 75% to 90% majority.

At the end, the facilitator states the outcome clearly. For consensus to work properly everyone must understand the meaning of "legitimate concerns". They are possible consequences of the proposal that might adversely affect the organization or the common good, or that are in conflict with the purpose or values of the group. Consensus will not work properly if concerns come from ego or vested interests, or derive from unstated tensions around authority, rights, personality conflicts, competition or lack of trust. Trust is a prerequisite for consensus. If your group adopts consensus as a decision making method you do not have to use consensus of the whole group to decide everything. You can (and should) empower individuals, committees, or task forces to make certain decisions.

Live with disagreements
Get agreement on the big picture, then turn to action. Don't exhaust yourself trying to achieve consensus on details. On a contentious issue, embracing a variety of positions will make you more difficult to attack.

Facilitate! ->

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Facilitating

The facilitator's role is to help a group make progress. Good facilitating keeps a meeting on track and moving forward. The more people who learn to facilitate the better. If you accept the role of facilitator you must be neutral. You should also try to:

Watch group vibes
If people seem bored or inattentive, you may have to speed up the pace of the meeting. If people seem tense because of unvoiced disagreements, you may have to bring concerns out into the open.

Ask open ended questions
For instance, "We seem to be having trouble resolving the matter. What do you think we should do?"

Summarize what others say
For instance, you might begin, "It seems we agree that . . . "

Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak
One way of ensuring quiet people get a chance to speak is to initiate a round. In a round you move around the table with everyone getting a few minutes to present their views.

Inject humour
There a few better ways of overcoming cranky, niggling or petty behaviour.

Learn to deal with difficult behaviour

- Flare-ups - When two members get into a heated discussion summarize the points made by each, then turn the discussion back to the group.

- Grand standing - Interrupt the one-man show with a statement that gives him credit for his contribution, but ask him to reserve his other points for later. Alternatively, interrupt with, "You have brought up a great many points. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?"

- Broken recording - When someone keeps repeating the same point, assure them their point has been heard. If necessary ask the group if they want to allow the person to finish making their point.

Menu:

- [Introduction to Organizing](#)

- [Beginning](#)

- [Research](#)

- [Planning and Acting](#)

- [Getting Noticed](#)

- [Evaluating](#)

- [Getting People](#)

- [Keeping People](#)

- [Leading](#)

- [Meeting and Deciding](#)

- [Facilitating](#)

- [Fundraising](#)

- [Group Structure](#)

- Interrupting - Step in immediately with, "Hold on, let X finish what they have to say." If necessary, ask the person who tends to interrupt to act as the recorder for the meeting.

- Continual criticizing - Legitimize negative feelings on difficult issues. You might say, "Yes, it will be tough to reduce traffic congestion on Marguerite, but there are successful models we can look at." If necessary, ask the critical person to take on an achievable task.

Suggest options when time runs out
Identify areas of partial consensus, suggest tabling the question, or create a small subcommittee to deal with the matter at a time of their choosing. Consider a round at the end of the meeting Going quickly around the whole group gives people a chance to bring up matters not on the agenda. You can also use a round to evaluate the meeting.

You'll need money! ->

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SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Fundraising

You do not need to fundraise to begin organizing your neighbourhood. However, you will need money to organize large numbers of people, or launch a large action program. If you decide to fundraise, be careful. You can lose money, and divert time and resources away from your objectives. If you must raise money, here are some suggestions.

Individual contributions
Asking for contributions from local people turns fundraising into community building. People become more attached to groups, projects, and places they feel they own. Money can come from memberships, voluntary subscriptions to newsletters, collections at meetings, door-to-door canvassing, planned giving, memorial giving and direct mail. Lots of books cover these approaches. Some groups make donations tax deductible by registering as a charity with the federal government. In Canada call 1-800-267-2384.

In-kind donations
Seek in-kind or non-monetary contributions. This includes donations of printing, equipment, furniture, space, services, food, and time. Local businesses respond well to requests for in-kind donations.

Auctions
Consider a dream auction. Elizabeth Amer writes in Taking Action, "Neighbours can donate overnight babysitting for two children, a local landmark embroidered on your jacket, cheese cake for eight, four hours of house repairs. At a big community party your auctioneer sells every treasure to the highest bidder."

Grants from governments & foundations
With so many potential sources of assistance, half the battle is figuring out who supports what. After identifying a possibility, find out about application procedures. Getting a grant usually requires writing up a good proposal. Look for matching grants. In many cases governments will contribute a dollar for every dollar raised by citizens.

Charging fees
Consider the possibility of charging fees for services, or products.

Time tithing
Ivan Sheier, an expert on volunteerism, dislikes the time and

Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

energy spent on grant writing and big fundraising events. Instead, he recommends time tithing as a way of producing a steady flow of cash. It is a system that relies on supporters contributing high quality services. A group might advertise such services as conducting a workshop, painting signs, or providing professional assistance. When a supporter performs a service, they do not keep the money they are paid; but have the amount, minus expenses, sent directly to their group.

Organize! ->

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Get Informed   Take Action   Use the Toolbox

SEARCH: GO

Tools for Organizing:

Neighborhood/Community/Town Organizing:

Group Structure

Citizens groups should have as little structure as possible. The right amount is just enough to address their goals. In an attempt to become legitimate, many small groups decide they need more structure. Unfortunately, this can lead to spending more time on the needs of the organization than on the reason for getting together.

Networks, Cooperatives, Collectives
Grassroots organizations seem to work better with a flat structure as free as possible of boards, directors, and chairs. Flatness, or the absence of an organizational hierarchy, does not mean the elimination of individual roles or responsibilities. It does mean the end of people with over-riding authority over other people's work. Citizen's groups must avoid the common mistake of involving small numbers of people heavily. They should strive to involve large numbers of people lightly. Flat organizations, which emphasize horizontal connections, seem to be the best bet for involving large numbers of people lightly.

Traditional structure
Traditional organizational structure seems to dry out the grassroots. Nevertheless it continues to be recommended by many citizens umbrella groups in North America. The most successful traditional organizations have:

> - An elected leadership Some groups elect a set of officers - a president, one or two vice presidents, a secretary and a treasurer. In order to include people doing important work, some expand the leadership group into a steering committee that includes the chairperson of each committee. Leaders should be elected on a regular basis at well-publicized membership meetings. One or two people should not try to run the organization. When that happens others become less involved.
> - Regular meetings
> - A newsletter
> - A means of delegating tasks and responsibilities
>
> - Training for new members
> - Social time together
> - A planning process
> - Working relationships with power players and resource organizations. Power players are people with the ability to make things happen: politicians,

Menu:

- Introduction to Organizing

- Beginning

- Research

- Planning and Acting

- Getting Noticed

- Evaluating

- Getting People

- Keeping People

- Leading

- Meeting and Deciding

- Facilitating

- Fundraising

- Group Structure

owners of key businesses, media people, heads of key government departments, heads of agencies, major landlords.

(!) Provincial non-profit societies

Traditional organizations frequently wind up as provincially registered non-profit societies. The advantages of non-profit status are few, beyond less circuitous access to certain sources of funds. On the other hand, non-profit status means having to follow the rules and organizational structure required by the Societies Act. If you wish to become a non-profit regardless, get a copy of Flora MacLeod's Forming and Managing a Non-profit Organization in Canada, published by Self-Council Press.

(!) Committees & Task Forces

Committees and task forces are the main way jobs are shared. They make it possible to get a lot done without anyone getting worn out. Standing committees look after a continuing group function; task forces carry out a specific task, then disband. Both provide members with a way of getting involved in projects that interest them. A large, action-oriented group might have the following standing committees: coordinating, publicity, membership, outreach, newsletter, fundraising, and research. Many people prefer the short-term projects of task forces, to the work of committees. Ideally, members of committees and task forces are made up of people selected by the whole group rather than by people who are self-selected. If the whole group is confident in a task force or committee it should empower the subgroup to make most decisions on its own. To keep everyone working together, committees and task forces should regularly report back to the whole group. For more on the effective distribution of work see Ivan Sheier's book When Everyone's a Volunteer, reviewed in the "Citizen's Library", and available from the Vancouver Public Library.

Coalitions

If you intend to tackle a large issue you will need allies. Approach other organizations by asking to speak on a matter of community importance at their next executive or general meeting. After you have presented, distribute material outlining your objectives, program and budget. A good way of getting agreement is to ask someone from the group you are approaching to help prepare your presentation. A coalition requires that all participants have a clear set of expectations and get together regularly to develop a friendly working relationship. A coalition works best when established for a specific project, and then allowed to lapse when the project ends.

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