



**ACLU**

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION  
of TENNESSEE



**Stand Up/Speak Up:  
A Guide for  
Youth Activists**

**Stand up/Speak up: A Guide For Youth Activists** is a tool for young people who want to create change in their schools and communities. For information on specific policies in your school refer to your student handbook. For information on permit requirements and procedures when organizing community events, check with the office of your mayor, county clerk, or police department. This guide is designed to serve as a reference and is not meant to provide legal advice.

**The American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee (ACLU-TN)** is making Tennessee more open and forward-looking. We are a watchdog against government abuse of rights, fighting for fairness in our laws and their enforcement. We work daily in the courts, in the state legislature, in Congress, and in communities across the country to protect and promote the individual freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and the Tennessee Constitution:

- **Your First Amendment rights** - freedom of speech, association and assembly; freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.
- **Your right to equal protection under the law** - equal treatment regardless of race, sex, religion or national origin.
- **Your right to due process** - fair treatment by the government whenever the loss of your liberty or property is at stake.
- **Your right to privacy** - freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into your personal and private affairs.

The ACLU-TN, organized in 1968, is an affiliate of the National ACLU, which has been the country's pre-eminent leader in moving freedom forward since 1920. ACLU-TN partners with the National ACLU and the ACLU affiliates in the fifty states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, translating the guarantees of the Bill of Rights into reality for citizens and non-citizens residing in this country alike.

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*“I wasn’t really raised to break the rules... I was a preacher’s kid and I knew I probably would get in trouble, but I also knew that certain laws and rules had been changed through history by people confronting them... So I had some examples also of people standing up and speaking up to change things and I did believe that we had rights from the Constitution.*

*If you just use the little bit of courage you have, to speak up for something you believe in, you’ll be amazed at what a difference you can make. You don’t have to be some great hero, some really great courageous person. Of course you’re going to be scared; you’re going to be nervous at times but just use the little bit of determination that you have. And that’s what happened with us.”*

*- Mary Beth Tinker,  
the 13-year-old plaintiff who fought for  
students’ right to free speech in the 1969  
Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines**

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# Introduction

As a student, you're a member of a group with a long, rich legacy of creating real, substantial change. In fact, some of the most influential people to make a difference within their communities did so as teenagers and students. Mary Beth Tinker was only thirteen-years-old when she and several peers stood up for their First Amendment rights. After being suspended for wearing black arm bands to school to protest the Vietnam War, Mary Beth and her classmates kept fighting, eventually winning the Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines* in 1969, a landmark victory for student speech rights.

Not all student leaders accomplish their goals by winning a lawsuit at the Supreme Court. You and your friends are already active members of your school and neighborhood, and you both impact and are impacted by the things that go on in your communities. It is within your reach, and it is your right, to stand up and speak up about what happens there.

There are many different ways to be a teen activist, and this manual will explore the experiences of high school students from across Tennessee who used a variety of strategies to mobilize, educate, and empower their communities.

The purpose of this guide is to help you understand how to best use your voice to make change. You will find out, step-by-step, how you and your peers can create and mobilize a student-led movement, and you can also learn from the stories of real students just like you who have already taken the plunge into youth activism. They made their communities better through hard work, creativity and coordination, and you can too.

Every effort to create change will be unique depending on the issue, what aspect of it you want to address, your collaborators, and what else is going on in your community at the time. There is no set formula for how to successfully pursue change. It will be up to you to determine which of the elements described in this handbook works best for what you want to accomplish, and the order in which you want to take these steps.

Most importantly, remember, you don't have to wait for the world to change. You can change it yourself. Starting now.

# Where do you start?

## What bothers you?

Often, student-led campaigns begin the moment that a young person observes something in his or her community or school that is unfair or disturbing and has a strong, visceral reaction to it. They know that they want to do something about it, becoming deeply passionate about challenging the injustice they see or experience.

When **Andrew** watched the film *Prayers for Bobby*, about a young man who commits suicide after being rejected by a homophobic family and community, he had a strong feeling of hopelessness as he realized that for some young people, the only way to deal with being gay is to end their lives. He went on to create an LGBT support group for students at Portland High School and became a voice for anti-bullying initiatives for youth in Tennessee and nationally.



**Madeline** felt overwhelmed by seeing so many of her peers becoming pregnant and giving up future plans in order to care for a child. She became an advocate for comprehensive sexual education and raised awareness of teen STD and pregnancy rates both at her school, University School of Nashville, and in her community.

**Jazmin** was frustrated by the lack of access to higher education for many immigrant students—many of whom were either born in the United States or came here as young children. Many of her friends either couldn't attend Tennessee state universities or had to take time off from college because they were being charged out-of-state tuition fees—which were three times as high as in-state tuition fees—s imply because of their families' immigration status. This Glencliff High School student stood up for immigrants' rights, including advocating access to higher education, challenging racial profiling, and educating community members about their rights when encountering law enforcement.



**Maryam** felt injustice as she heard misleading news reports about an Islamophobic “anti-Sharia” bill proposed by the Tennessee General Assembly. This Hillsboro High School student countered religious intolerance by bringing students together to learn about shared values and diverse cultures through interfaith dialogue.

**Kemario** was unhappy about conditions at his school, ranging from the lack of resources for a school band or a fine arts program to the absence of air conditioning. He led his Carver High School classmates in a non-violent protest to improve school conditions and successfully fought the closure of twenty-three schools in his community.



**Taylor** felt sad that many of his Hume-Fogg High School classmates could not afford to go to prom. He worked on a number of community service projects at his school through the Student Government Association, including successfully organizing a campaign to fight economic discrimination at his school and ensure that all students had access to non-academic school activities.

A group of Davidson County high school students were disturbed by anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in their schools. They formed the **Support Student Safety Coalition (SSSC)**, who, in collaboration with the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee, mobilized the community and convinced the school board to revise its anti-bullying policy to include gender identity and sexual orientation.

All these youth were deeply troubled by certain issues they observed, so they decided to take action. When you take a good, hard look at your school, community, state or country, *what bothers you?*

# Power in Numbers

Once you know what you want to work on, the next step is deciding whether you want to tackle this issue by yourself or with others. There are many ways you can tackle a problem on your own, from blogging, tweeting or posting about it, to writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed, to making appointments and visiting your elected officials.

On the other hand, building a team of people to tackle an issue is often more successful and more fun. If you decide to go this route, the next step is recruiting and organizing the people who will build the campaign. Though not all campaigns will choose to arrange their leadership in the same way, you should definitely begin by establishing a core group of people who are also motivated to work for the same change you want to see.

## Building the inner circle

Your cause may begin with a small number of students recognizing a change is needed. The key is to find leaders who are just as passionate about the cause as you are. For the Support Student Safety Coalition (SSSC), the “group” began as two students but expanded to five with the guidance of a nonprofit. For Kemario, he and three other students with good speaking skills, strong community relationships, and a shared sense of injustice were able to find a common goal. Ideally, the inner circle should remain small to keep things efficient and to better hold your group’s leaders accountable.

What to look for in a leader:

- a) *Passion* - Your leaders must care as much as you do about the problem and be enthusiastic about seeking change.
- b) *Patience and Tenacity* - Your leaders must recognize that change takes time and that patience and persistence are required to succeed.
- c) *Time* - Your leaders must be willing to commit a good deal of time to the campaign, which could mean weekend and night meetings.
- d) *Skills* - Your leaders must be passionate and enthusiastic, but they must also be able to write effectively and communicate well with community members to rally support for the cause.

## Delegating offices and responsibilities

Because your inner circle will likely be small, at least at first, teamwork is key. Delegate tasks so that everyone is contributing and working together. It can also be helpful to assign your leaders specific areas on which they focus. For example, Andrew found as he started a gay-straight student alliance at his school that he quickly got overwhelmed without delegating tasks to other officers. Taylor found in his student government work that while you don’t necessarily have to have a hierarchy within your organization, you should have specified roles. The roles your group needs will be specific to your cause and your strategy, but they could include:

- *Media Coordinator/Publicity Chair*: One person should serve as the media contact to ensure the consistency of your message and allow your group to build stronger relationships with reporters. The media coordinator also could be in charge of managing your social media, which will mostly likely become one of the most important components of your campaign.
- *Recruitment Coordinator*: The recruitment coordinator spearheads efforts to attract new organizational and individual supporters for your campaign, and to find



and coordinate volunteers. Make sure this person likes to engage people and always has a smile on his or her face!

- *Secretary/Treasurer*: This person plays a very important role by ensuring that the internal dealings of the group are in order. Their role includes taking minutes at meetings, checking the group's email accounts, and, if there are funds, managing them. Responsibility is key for this role.
- *Chair or Co-chair*: The chair or co-chairs are the leader(s) of the group, facilitating the meetings, holding others accountable, and making sure that the group is on track to accomplish its goals. They also are responsible for ensuring that all members' voices are heard.

Keeping your inner circle active and focused is an ever-challenging task. Every member should have a purpose within the group, and you should make sure every member of your inner circle is on board with the leadership structure and roles that are agreed upon. Encourage your leaders to be accountable to one another. *Team work is the key to successfully moving forward.*

## *Recruiting other members for your group*

Most campaigns will need volunteers and supporters beyond the initial “core” group. How you recruit and secure volunteers could determine the success of your activism efforts. Just because you and your core group are interested in an issue, you can't assume that everyone will be. People take action because of self-interest. Self-interest can be anything from obtaining some material change to ending their own oppression to protecting those they love. People may also have a self-interest in feeling good, and they may get that sense of satisfaction from helping others, doing something useful or important, or being engaged in the community. The key to understanding others' self-interest is to first and foremost listen to what they are saying. Once you understand their self-interest, you can demonstrate how your campaign might be relevant to them.

One good place to start is your friends. Are any of them interested in finding a solution to this problem? Are there any student groups at your school that deal with issues related to the one you're working on? Try recruiting first within your immediate surroundings: your family, friend groups, school, community, neighborhood, or religious institution.

From there, get your friends to reach out to people at other schools or in other sections of the community who could be interested in lending a hand. Jazmin was recruited for Jovenes Unidos Por Un Mejor Presente (JUMP) when she wandered by a meeting at school. She said, “They were like, ‘Oh come on in, we have free food,’—and I mean, who doesn't like free food?—‘Come on in, join us!’...we sat down through the meeting and it was really awesome, and we were like, ‘We're going to continue to do this.’” As you add new supporters, keep a list of who they are, including their contact info.

## *Recruiting adult or organizational help*

A youth- or student-led movement is a powerful force for change and you may decide you want your campaign to be entirely made up of youth. But you may also decide that you want to involve an adult or an organization to draw on their perspective, experience, connections or resources. Parents, relatives, teachers, or adults who are part of other institutions in your life, such as a religious organization or community center, are a good place to start. Jazmin suggests specifying what your group's needs are when you ask for assistance. Maryam asked the leader of a youth group she was a member of, Muslim Youth Navigating Tennessee, to help her get started as she planned a religious forum. In return, she got advice, support, and a list of great venues in the community that would be interested in giving her space for the event—for free!

There also may be public interest, civic or youth organizations that deal with issues that relate to your

campaign and they may be willing to help in some way. Contact them, introduce your campaign and ask for an opportunity to discuss how you might work together. The students who initiated the Support Student Safety Campaign approached the ACLU table at a Pride festival and, after discussing LGBT bullying with staff members, decided to build a campaign in which the ACLU served as a key resource and partner.

## Holding a meeting

Once you've put together your campaign leaders, it's time to hold your first campaign meeting. Whether or not your group has chosen a traditional hierarchical model for your campaign, designating a specific chair or facilitator for meetings is usually the most effective way to run them.

### Fun and Safe Space

At meetings of the LGBT youth support group Andrew founded, he said it was important to "come up with your own quirky things to let people know this is a safe space."

*...there needs to be a comfortability level... especially when you start touching on sensitive topics...you want to be comfortable in your environment...your first few meetings you want to lay down...base rules, ...like this is a safe space, what we talk about here stays in this classroom,... 'be a croissant not a donut'... you know... be open, don't be...closed up... if you have something to share you're more than welcome. Use inclusive language, like whatever you're talking about, use 'I' statements—whenever you're talking about controversial issues definitely... And be open [to a range of opinions], like in your group if somebody has something to share...assume [they have the] best intentions...That way... it prevents hostile environments. You know you want to...talk about something and then somebody says something, and you get really mad. You need to...be open about other people's ideas, let them know that you understand it, that you see where they're coming from. If you don't understand it you can [ask]...can you explain more...[or can we] talk later?*

Andrew also talked about the importance of keeping meetings fun. He had entertaining handouts and PowerPoint presentations to share stats. He also suggested,

*when everyone's walking in have some music playing... something I find really cool is... when you walk into a meeting... [and everyone is just] hang[ing] out with their friends... I would [be] like 'Stand up everybody!' and I'd come up with...some little mixing game... like an interest game, like 'OK, who likes Lady Gaga? Those two people? OK, you're buddies, y'all go sit over in this corner and y'all hang out, y'all get to know each other at this meeting and by the end of the meeting everybody's talking...they've made a new friend, ... they're comfortable with somebody else. And outside of the meetings, [if] you see a member in the hallways you stop, you know, ask...how their day is...if you're going to lead something I feel like you've got to interact with your members ... engage them.*

### Tips for hosting a good meeting\*

- *Have a purpose* - Never meet just for the sake of meeting. Figure out if you need a strategy session, to plan an event, or to educate new recruits. Whatever your reason, you should prepare an agenda in advance, and stick to it as closely as possible.
- *Arrange your logistics* - Figure out your needs for the meeting space (how big it should be to comfortably hold all the attendees, will it need to be wheelchair accessible, is it reachable by public transit, is there space for child care if needed, does it allow food, is there a cost to use the space, does it meet any audio/visual needs you

have, etc.) and make sure you have access to it for plenty of time.

- *Have a facilitator* - A facilitator “conducts” the meeting, making sure everything flows and stays on point. You should choose one of the campaign leaders to act as chair before the meeting begins.
- *Establish ground rules* - Have clear rules that are known by all the attendees before the meeting begins; don’t wait until the middle of a heated dispute to try to set rules. Establish answers for questions like: who will facilitate this meeting? How long will it run? How will you decide how a decision gets made?
- *Send reminders and announcements* - It is essential to send announcements both a few weeks and a few days before the meeting. Include a draft of the agenda, a notice of special speakers or presentations, or a written explanation of the meeting’s ground rules.
- *Be courteous* - No matter which system of rules you use to run the meeting, the facilitator, campaign leaders, and attendees should always be respectful of each other. Courtesy includes starting and ending on time, and actively engaging all attendees in the business of the meeting.
- *Take minutes* - Minutes, or notes on what is said during the meeting, are useful for keeping track of how or why a decision was made and what action was agreed upon. They also help keep those who can’t attend up-to-date. Have one of the campaign leaders take minutes (not the facilitator; he or she will be very busy moving the agenda forward). Don’t forget to share them with relevant people who couldn’t attend the meeting.
- *Follow up* - Effective meetings result in specific resolutions and action plans. End the meeting by summarizing the main points and how next steps will be accomplished, including who is responsible for each step and the deadline. Always announce the next meeting before concluding.

\*Adapted from ACLU-NC’s “Activist Toolkit: Running an Effective Meeting”

# Do Not Skip this Chapter: Researching Your Issue

One of the early tasks your group should undertake is to research the problem you want to fix. The idea of doing research about an issue might sound like an extra homework assignment and you may be tempted to skip this section of the guide, but the value of information cannot be overstated. Research is vital not only for figuring out good solutions, but also for establishing support for your cause. Knowing your issue inside and out and backing up your arguments will help people understand why this issue merits action. Jazmin says she “spent hours researching logistics, statistics, reading...hours....so I’ve been able to be a part of...presenting facts...to the community.” While basic research may seem straightforward in the Internet age, there are some things to keep in mind to ensure your statistics and stories are most effective.

## What’s going on?

The first step in your research is looking beyond the symptoms of the problem at hand to its potential causes. Trying to get a sense of where the root cause lies will guide you in determining the best way for you to tackle the issue. Begin by brainstorming: what do you already know about the issue and what would you like to find out?

Once you’ve identified what you know and what you need to know, it’s time to start digging. To start your research, hop online and, using your favorite search engine, type in some key words that pertain to the broader issue you’re addressing. When you get started, focus on some major questions about the problem:

- *How widespread is it? Are there cases of this elsewhere? Is it more than an isolated incident in your area?*
- *What’s the effect of this problem on the community? Who suffers? Who benefits?*
- *What are the costs of the issue (financial or otherwise) to your school or community?*
- *Are there any laws or policies on the books that relate to the problem? If so, what are they?*

Next, delve deeper by researching how you might want to approach solutions to the problem:

- *Are there any models out there for how the problem could be fixed?*
- *Are there any other current events or issues that relate to your cause?*
- *Has anyone in the past tried to do this same thing in your community? If so, what happened?*
- *Is anyone else currently discussing the problem?*
- *Who has a stake in what’s happening? Who has a stake in the outcome?*
- *Who will be supporting you in this endeavor? Who will be against you?*

When Taylor realized that some of the students at his school couldn't afford to go to prom, he thought about why that problem existed. He learned that a significant portion of his school population received free or reduced lunch, but these students had no assistance in paying for prom because it was not an academic activity. Students who could barely afford to pay for their lunches certainly could not afford prom tickets.

After Andrew asked himself why LGBT youth resorted to suicide, he "just started Googling," landing on websites like the American Civil Liberties Union ([www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)), where he read about issues faced by gay teens in schools, such as being able to take a same-sex date to prom. He also read about the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network ([www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)), which works to keep school environments safe from anti-gay bullying. Andrew had come out before transferring to Portland High, but after observing other gay kids at his new school, he realized that "it wasn't an environment that would be preferable to come out in." Andrew began to understand that not only was there an acceptance problem for students within their families, there often wasn't any support within their school environments.

After realizing how few of her classmates had access to contraception and a healthy understanding of how to practice safe sex, Madeline made the connection between high teen pregnancy rates and ignorance about safe-sex, and concluded that Tennessee's abstinence-only sex education program for public schools had to be the culprit. "When it comes to sex education, that's just a right everybody should have," she thought. By offering abstinence-only classes to her peers, "it was like withholding information from them." Madeline decided that her state's sex education program was not properly preparing her peers to make smart and informed decisions about safe sex.

The student leaders of the Support Student Safety Coalition (SSSC) knew that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) students were being bullied because of their sexual orientation and gender identity in Nashville schools. But they needed more information. They asked: "Are teachers and administrators doing enough to address the problem of anti-gay bullying? Do they actually know it's a problem? What new tools would administrators need to adequately address the problem? Do students need more education about the effects of anti-gay bullying?" The SSSC members concluded that school administrators were not addressing anti-LGBT bullying because they were not aware of the extent and prevalence of the problem in Nashville schools. Their analysis helped identify how best to proceed—if a lack of awareness was part of the problem, then a public education campaign would be needed before a push for any policy changes could begin.

It will be important to go through an intense research phase in the beginning of your campaign, but learning about your issue is an ongoing process. Be on the lookout for new information that you can use to strengthen your campaign.

## Sources

The source of your information is important. In fact, it's so important we're going to say that again and we're going to put it in italics: *the source of your information is important*. To best make your case, you need to identify credible sources of information. While sites like *Wikipedia* may provide useful background information, they may not be considered as credible as sources of information that have content written or vetted by experts. In addition, be aware that different segments of the public may perceive some media sources or interest-driven organizations as more or less credible than others. Your source of information can make or break whether someone sees your argument as legitimate. For example, if Madeline had met with her school administration

Try to use research from sources like government agencies, academic institutions, non-partisan think tanks and research groups.

Include relevant statistics and findings that have been published in academic journals if possible.

Additionally, news stories can be beneficial to include in your evidence. However, be aware that different segments of the public may perceive different news outlets as more trustworthy than others.

to convince them to improve the quality of sex education in her school, a survey from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that indicates comprehensive sex education reduces teen pregnancy would be more effective than a quote from someone's personal blog. While both might be right, the former seems to be more evidence-based and impartial, while the latter may appear to some as coming from a biased source. Try to choose credible, impartial sources whenever possible.

## Researching Your Community: Surveys and Stories

Statistics from studies and news stories from across the country can be powerful tools to support your campaign, but they may not directly address how the issue affects *your* community. You can also collect, analyze and apply your own original research to your campaign. Two good ways to bring the issues of your campaign home for the people you're trying to convince are to create a survey and to collect impact statements.

### Making a survey

Too often it's easy for people to say: "Well, that issue isn't a problem here." A survey conducted in their own community can change their minds—and fast. For example, Andrew convinced decision-makers that LGBT equality was a real and important issue at Portland High School by drafting a survey, collecting answers to it at club meetings and sharing the results with his principal. When writing the questions for your survey, keep some of the following in mind:

- *Be upfront about why you're doing this.* Always inform the person taking your survey why you're conducting the survey, what the data will be used for, and that you may share the survey results publicly. Make sure you protect people's privacy—allow surveys to be completed anonymously.
- *Start off with demographic questions* (age, gender, school attended, ethnicity, etc.). Keep these questions narrowed to things you think might be relevant or show some interesting statistic or trend.
- *Make sure questions are clear and to the point.* Don't make them wordy, confusing or redundant. In addition, don't ask too much in one question. Separate multiple issues out into multiple questions.
- *If you want to include a multiple choice question, give clear possible answers to questions* and provide a place where they can comment with their own answer. At the same time, avoid having too many answers to choose from
- *Use a variety of distribution methods.* Hand out surveys at school, post a printable copy on Facebook, and/or create an online survey using websites like survey-monkey.com or poll daddy.com.

When Taylor was president of the Student Government Association (SGA), the group conducted numerous surveys, using them not only as a tool for collecting data, but as a means to engage people and demonstrate that the SGA took their opinions seriously.

*"The first survey we did at the start of the year...every student in the school took it and we asked them to... tell us about their favorite student government events, their least favorite student government events, things that they'd like to see, things that they'd like to see done differently...we...took the biggest, reoccurring themes from that survey and used that to [build*

*a plan for action]... a lot of times surveys on their own don't sound like fun, so [when we do surveys online sometimes we have a fun question, like, 'which teacher do you think could make the best evil genius?' or something like that. And people would go on there and answer that and...in a week we'd announce the result from that question, and it's just like a fun thing. So people go and answer for that, and we also get to ask them serious questions in the process]... with student government...we wanted to have an on-going conversation beyond just [the] election...and really let [people] see that we wanted to do things based off of what they wanted. After we took the survey we made [a report] and we published that on our Facebook page for everyone to see. They could go through there and see what our agenda was, things that we wanted to do, what some common things were from the survey...that really was a legitimizing factor for us, because people saw that we cared, that it wasn't just a piece of paper that we gave out...so later when we gave surveys they knew that we would actually listen..."*

## Telling the Story: Impact Statements

While numbers are powerful and survey results can be eye-opening, one of the greatest ways to sway public opinion is by sharing a person's story. Personal accounts might be your best way to change hearts and minds, especially when the amount of relevant, available research is small and the cost of conducting your own study might be large. You can easily relate the issue at hand to community members by using impact statements.

The Support Student Safety Coalition (SSSC), for example, was not able to find a tremendous amount of research about how the code of conduct was affecting students in Nashville, and conducting a scientific survey across the school district would have been difficult. However, statements from students who were affected by anti-gay bullying were perhaps more powerful than numbers.

To increase public participation and to provide a safe space for those who wished to share their stories, the SSSC created an online forum where students could post their impact statements anonymously. The words of students who had experienced bullying because they were LGBT were then incorporated into the SSSC's website and other campaign materials, giving their campaign a human voice. These voices allowed students and other concerned community members to relate to each other's experiences and provided the campaign with new and unique content that reiterated the SSSC's message.

### A sample of impact statements from the SSSC website

*"My boyfriend came out as bisexual [and] everyone thought it was fascinating, disgusting, horrible, an abomination, hilarious.... If there's an unflattering way to mess with this 17-year-old boy, they probably already thought of it and carried it out. People still joke around about his orientation, and it makes me sick. I'll never forget those few weeks. After 17 years he thought he could be himself, but the ignorance of kids just couldn't accept it. I hated going to school during that time, and it killed me to see him treated that way. If there's absolutely any way to put an end to all this, I truly hope Metro will take it."*

*"As a straight male... I was constantly called 'the gay kid'. Nothing seemed to change the fact that simply because I [participated in arts], I was gay... [Because of] the constant nagging of teammates, and sometimes even coaches... I gave up on the soccer team altogether, despite the fact that I had only one season left [and] how much I truly loved the sport. I sacrificed my final season of competitive soccer of my life... in order to avoid the problem..."*

*The harassment, however, continued to persist... If anything it became even worse."*

*“I have had to lie many times about my sexual orientation when students asked if I was a ‘fag’. They made these assumptions because of the way I speak.”*

*“Someone very close to me faced these specific issues... She was a lesbian, and classmates often called her an ‘ugly dyke’ and other slurs... Rumors were started about her, and one student... sent out a mass email talking about her and her orientation. It made it very difficult for her to accept herself, and for years she refused to acknowledge that she was gay because she associated it with such negativity.”*

*“When I attended X school for a couple of years, I was harassed by some students... I always felt uncomfortable after the fact. It was hard to function there, so I transferred...”*

*“My assistant principle would not help me when being bullied... multiple times.”*

## Incorporate your research into your campaign

You’ll want to incorporate the research you’ve done—numbers, statistics, facts, policies, stories, and surveys—into your campaign. This might mean creating info packets that you hand out to new or potential supporters, or creating easy-to-read memes that you upload to your group’s Facebook page (for tips on how to do this, see the “Memes, Images and Video” section). It might even mean that you turn the research into talking points when you speak in front of a group of decision-makers in your community.

Whichever ways you choose to work in your well-researched information, always remember to include citations! Even if you are talking with a small group face-to-face about your campaign, make sure to mention where you found your facts. It can help convince uncertain people that your information and your campaign are legitimate and should be taken seriously.



# Developing Your Campaign\*

Now that you've done your research and developed your core group, it's time to identify your goals and the steps you need to take to get there. Whether you want to change a policy, create an awareness campaign or start a new club, the first thing you must do is set goals to keep your campaign on the right track and to allow you to measure success.

## Developing your plan

### Setting Your Goal

A campaign must have specific, measurable, achievable results. Your goals should be clear enough to allow you to set a benchmark for what success will look like. *Short-term goals* are the intermediary steps you want to accomplish in the near future that lead to something bigger. *Long-term goals* are the ultimate, big picture objectives that you want your campaign to achieve. For Maryam's interfaith dialogues, a short-term goal was finding and booking an event space for her forum. A long-term goal was to improve the understanding and communication amongst teens of different faiths in Tennessee.

### Making an Action Plan

Once you have agreed upon your specific goals, create your "to-do" list. These tasks constitute the strategic implementation of your plan—your action plan. Think about the pros and cons of various strategies as you develop your plan, and keep your plan complete, clear and current. Your action plan should list:

- What actions will occur;
- Who will carry them out;
- When will they take place; and
- What resources will be needed to carry them out.

Building this action plan will require some creative brainstorming. One way to approach this task is to start at the end. If you know you want to organize a rally at a school board meeting in May, what needs to happen the week before to ensure turnout? What should you accomplish the month before to spread the word? How do you plan to build community support for your efforts three months ahead of the school board meeting? The Support Student Safety Campaign began planning for a rally at a school board meeting an entire year ahead of time, slowly and carefully building community support for their efforts both in the community and on the board, in order to have the most impact when they finally attended the school board meeting itself. Their action plan allowed them to slowly and strategically build community support among students, parents, educators, counselors and advocacy groups for the policy change they sought. In turn, this allowed them to pack the school board meeting with supporters.

### Thinking strategically

Your campaign will only be as successful as your plan. Of all the potential tactics you could use, which will move you closest to your goal? Maryam's interest in fighting Islamophobia began when the Tennessee Gen-

\*Adapted from ACLU-NC's "Activist Toolkit: Planning a Campaign"

eral Assembly was considering an “anti-Sharia” bill. However, Maryam’s long-term goal was to improve relations across different religious groups. So she strategically decided that rather than just lobbying against that bill alone, the best tactic for her would be to hold an interfaith youth dialogue.

To actually work, your plan also must be realistic. Look at the limitations of your campaign. How much time, person-power, and funding do you have available? Make sure your plans reflect what your group is capable of. For example, if your supporters are only available after school, it wouldn’t make sense to plan a large rally on Sunday morning.

Start thinking about whether there will be organized opposition to your campaign. If so, can you anticipate what their arguments or actions will be? If you know the other side will start urging local residents to support their view instead of yours, can you arrange to get your message out in supportive venues, or for an editorial or op-ed in the local paper supporting your point of view (see “Leveraging the Media”)?

## Assess Your Strengths & Weaknesses

One way to ensure an achievable plan is through a SWOT analysis—a look at your campaign’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

- *Strengths* are already-existing attributes of your campaign organization that will help you achieve your campaign goals, such as members who have already run successful campaigns, available resources like free meeting space or supplies, and established allies.
- *Weaknesses* are attributes of your campaign organization that are harmful to the achievement of your campaign goals, such as severe limitations on funding or an absence of fundraising expertise in your core group.
- *Opportunities* are external conditions that are helpful to the achievement of your campaign goals, such as an upcoming regional conference of activists focused on your issue or a sympathetic reporter who has covered your cause in the past and may want to again.
- *Threats* are external conditions that are harmful to the achievement of your campaign goals, such as a strong coalition of organizations who oppose your work and have made your campaign the centerpiece of their activities and membership recruitment.

Whatever the scenario, careful evaluation of all four SWOT factors is the best way of creating a successful campaign plan that will allow you to anticipate needs, prioritize your action steps based on realistic goals, and make the most effective use of people, time, money and resources. This way, your campaign can achieve the greatest possible impact.

## Identifying allies, opponents and decision makers

When you’re putting together your action plan and thoughtfully critiquing your SWOT analysis, you should begin noting the different groups, organizations and people who can help you, as well as those who may oppose your cause.

## Allies

Successful campaigns often bring together a variety of interested parties who coordinate their actions, tactics, and messages to meet campaign goals. Potential allies will be different for each campaign, but they may include: elected officials and community leaders in favor of your position; actual or potential beneficiaries of the legislation, policy or public awareness effort being considered; service or advocacy organizations serving the targeted population; local celebrities; experts in the field; businesses; clergy; or social organizations. Identify and contact all potential allies early in your campaign, and, if possible, establish a coordinated campaign structure so that the center of your effort is a small group with strong two-way communications with all allies involved. For example, you could set up a private Facebook group or a Google group through which allies can communicate and share information.

## Opponents

Equally important to coordinating potential allies is understanding those who disagree with you. When possible, get to know those on the other side personally. They are more likely to fight “fair” if the other side is not a nameless, faceless “enemy.” Furthermore, they may be an ally on another issue in the future. Assessing where the opposition is coming from will aid you in determining the best strategy for moving forward with them, whether you negotiate a compromise or battle the issue out in a public forum. If you are going to confront the opposition, spend time considering their strategy. What messages will they use? What research will they point to? What are their available resources? These questions can inform your strategy and action plan.

## Decision-makers

Once you’ve identified the problem and are thinking through your action plan and contacting your allies, you need to start thinking about where you’re trying to take your campaign. If your goal is to increase public awareness, your target may be the student body, or members of a neighborhood, or the public at large. But if your goal is to change a policy or law, it’s time to start identifying who makes decisions about that policy so that you can build your case for them. Who are the decision-makers for a proposal such as yours? Your principal? The school board? Local government? State lawmakers? Congress?

If you’re not exactly sure, it’s not so hard to find out. Don’t hesitate to e-mail or otherwise contact a school board member, administrator, or anyone else who might be able to help you. If you’re still in the process of developing your campaign strategy, you may want to keep exactly what you’re proposing quiet and find a general way to ask about where to take your problem.

Once you’ve identified the decision-makers, you’ll want to identify the best time to contact them in order to achieve your goals. Do you think you are more likely to move that person by talking to them about your proposal early and quietly? Once you have gathered community support? Or both? Who are the best people to bring your message to the decision-maker?

## Research the individual

If you want to make a case to someone, it’s good to know a little bit about them so you can appeal to what they care about. Here are some questions to think about when researching:

- If the person is an elected official, when is the next election coming up? What issues are part of their platforms? What other issues have been brought to these officials recently? What did they say about them?
- What is their voting record like? You can find elected official’s voting records and biographies online. If their voting records are not on their websites, so you might have to go into the minutes of meetings to see how they voted on different issues.

- Do they have a vested interest in your issue? For example, if you are trying to improve school conditions like Kemario was, it could be helpful to know if the decision-maker has or had children in the local school system.
- Do they have a separate occupation related to your cause?
- Do they have a presence on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn where you can learn more about them and what they care about?

SSSC identified one particular board member who would likely be interested in their case because he had been one of the largest supporters of students in a previous debate over school uniforms. SSSC wasn't sure whether he would be supportive of changing the anti-bullying policy or not, but his history indicated it was worth a try to approach him. If you're appealing to a group of decision-makers, like a school board, research all the members, but try to focus on one or two who look like they may be supportive of (at least sympathetic to) your campaign.

## Fundraising

Many, if not most, campaigns will require some sort of fundraising. You might not need very much money but you'll most likely have to pay for some things, such as flyers, photocopies, buttons, etc. However, unless you're planning on paying for things out of your own pocket, you will need to raise money for specific items or projects. Know beforehand. Plan out a budget and set your fundraising goals accordingly. If you don't have the funds within your group to purchase what you need, you can ask people who might support you for donations.

Fundraising can be difficult and you might be turned down a number of times. No matter what, it's important to always be professional and respectful when asking for gifts, even when potential donors are unable or unwilling to give money to your cause.

### TIPS for Fundraising

*Piggyback on existing group meetings.* Try to find places or groups that would be willing to let you give a brief presentation on who you are, what you're trying to accomplish, and how donations would help you reach your goals. Bring your pamphlets and examples of the work you're doing.

*Put the donation into context.* It helps if you can give potential donors a specific idea of what their financial gift would support, giving them a sense that their funds are being used responsibly.

*Gain legitimacy through partnering with established organizations.* Many people may be wary of giving their money to an organization or campaign they are not familiar with. If a potential donor sees the name of an established, reputable organization on your campaign materials, they may feel more comfortable about giving.

*Offer tax exemption, if possible.* If you are working with an established non-profit, donors may also be able to receive a tax benefit for their donation. Keep in mind that donations for your group will not be tax-deductible unless you have filed the necessary paperwork in your state to become a registered 501(c)3 non-profit. Donations that support

lobbying are not tax-deductible.

Say thank you. Saying thank you is an essential component of fundraising. Always tell potential donors that every dollar helps and is valued. After every donation you receive, immediately send a thank you letter to the donor.

Once you complete the project, get in touch with the donors to show them

## Know your rights and consider the consequences

As you develop your campaign, you'll need to consider your rights and whether there are any limitations to them that affect your campaign plan. For example, the First Amendment guarantees the right to speech and assembly. The Bill of Rights protects individual rights like freedom of speech from intrusion by all government entities, including public schools and the Constitution doesn't place age requirements on these freedoms. But the government does retain the power to regulate our rights to a limited extent to preserve safety and order in our society. The Supreme Court has determined that student expression is allowed unless it "materially or substantially interferes" with the educational process. This means that you have the right to free speech at school, but you have to exercise this right in a manner that does not disrupt the school day. While the government cannot regulate the content of speech, the government can regulate the time, place, and manner of the speech.

Suppose you are upset about a new grading policy the school board has proposed. You can't stand on your desk during class and scream about the policy at the top of your lungs, because that would disturb other students' ability to learn. But you could, for example, organize a rally of like-minded students. Just be sure to hold your rally in a safe place at a safe time. If you block entrances, clog the hallways, or leave class, your actions could be judged to be "materially or substantially interfering," and school administrators would likely both end the rally and discipline you. Luckily, there are lots of ways to protest—including many that have been determined to be non-disruptive to the school day.

For Kemario, one of the keys to the success of his protest was the knowledge that he and his fellow campaign leaders had about school policies and legal regulations, which he'd found through the ACLU. "We did not enter the school at all," he said. "Once you enter the school, and you leave the school without permission, you can be suspended. And we made sure that the students did not face that...We made sure that we understood the rules before we allowed the students to engage in this process."

For information on specific policies in your school refer to your student handbook. For information on permit requirements and procedures when organizing community events, check with the office of your mayor, county clerk, or police department. Always make sure you are working within what is legally permissible. Know your rights and exercise them in a responsible way, and if you have to interact with law enforcement, school officials, or other authority figures, remember to be polite, calm, and clearly explain how your actions are within your constitutional rights.

ACLU-TN's *Know Your Rights: A Guide for Public School Students in Tennessee* and "Your Right to Protest in Tennessee" are also good resources for your group and can be found at [www.aclu-tn.org](http://www.aclu-tn.org).

# Brand your campaign

Your group's "brand" refers to public perception of your group and what it stands for. The way your group uses its name, logo, tagline, catchphrases, symbol or design—or any combination of them—differentiates it from other groups or campaigns and influences how your group is perceived. A consistent, strategic, recognizable and attractive brand is an important way to get someone's attention and to show that your efforts are professional, well-organized and prepared.

## It's all in the name

The first step is to give your campaign a name, and to begin to build a recognizable brand around that name. The name of your organization will be attached to your efforts for the remainder of your campaign. Choosing the right name can be difficult, but here are some guidelines to remember:

- Consider building your name around the goal you wish to achieve, and the wider values it reflects.
- Be conscious of how your name will come across to wide segments of society, even your opponents.
- Make the name have as much broad appeal as possible.

The SSSC could have chosen something like "Students Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Bullying" that got straight to the point of their cause. However, this name would have immediately made it seem like the group was only fighting for LGBT students, and people in the "moveable middle"—those people who are not already on board but have potential to be—might have lost interest before they could hear the group's message. By opting for "Support Student Safety," the group allowed themselves to make the case that stopping anti-LGBT bullying was something that would keep all students safer. This name not only reflected the group's mission and values, it gave the cause a broad appeal. Plus, who could publicly say they did not "Support Student Safety?" This strategic branding decision gave the group the upper hand in the court of public opinion.

## Catching Eyes: Logos and Slogans

Now it's time to get your group's name out there! Recruit a graphic designer or art student, or create your own logo. Come up with some catchy slogans, and slap them on buttons and bumper stickers and upload the image as a JPEG to your Facebook page. There are many free graphic design software programs, such as Pixlr, available if you do a quick Google search. Before you know it, your group will be on backpacks and lockers around the school district. If you are working on a project that is for the benefit of students, make sure your materials are appealing to students (without breaking school codes of conduct or copyright laws, of course)!

The SSSC made buttons and stickers that simply read "Support Student Safety." These were to the point, and were given to students, parents and teachers. However, they also made a series of bumper stickers that read "Discrimination? That's so gay!" By choosing to make a satirical play on a common misuse of the word "gay," the group demonstrated an edgy sense of humor that drew students in and got them interested. Even if you can't come up with a catchy or funny slogan, if your campaign materials look appealing, they can still be effective.

# Rolling Up Your Sleeves

It's time to move forward with your action plan, take your campaign public, and make some change! Campaigns may have a range of goals, from changing laws or policies to changing hearts and minds, to providing a good or service. Whichever direction you choose, your campaign will likely include some sort of direct action, event or effort that takes place outside of your regular meetings and promotes your cause. This section is filled with ideas for action—choose the tactics that best fit your objectives. It's not an exhaustive list of tactics or goals and you may also find that a particular tactic can be used to meet goals beyond what is listed below. Be creative!

Type of Action	Description	This tactic can help you:		
		Change a policy	Educate the public	Bridge diverse groups
Meet with your principal	Arrange for your group to meet with your school's leadership to present your argument and show student support. If your school's administration does not approve of your efforts, hold a meeting off school property and invite students who are interested in what you have to say. Write a summary of the meeting or create a video to show the principal that your issue is relevant and important to students	X		
Reach out to teachers	Finding allies among the school faculty can be a helpful way to get your info to other students and educators. See if your teacher allies might speak on your group's behalf or allow you to present at a faculty meeting.	X	X	X
Reach out to parents	Identify parent allies and find out how to best utilize their connections and learn how to tailor your argument to appeal to their perspective. If you know you're going to talk to the PTA, practice your speech with parent allies and listen to their feedback,	X	X	X
Create a student coalition	Partner up with student clubs at your school or create an inter-school alliance of youth groups.	X	X	X
Address the school	Sign up to speak at a school assembly or ask club sponsors if you can give a presentation at a meeting	X	X	X
Hold a day of awareness	See if a nationwide awareness day for your cause already exists, or designate your own day. Identify a series of ways to educate people (ex. an informational table, a lunch time talk, asking people to wear a particular color or button to show support for your cause, etc.). Promote the day on flyers, social media, the school paper, etc.		X	X
Write an article in the school newspaper	This one's pretty self-explanatory. Find out if your group can submit something to the paper yourself, or whether you should pitch your idea to an editor or reporter from the paper so that they can write something.	X	X	X

Speak to or write your elected officials	See "Meet or Contact Elected Officials"	X		
Place an op-ed	Write a letter letting the paper and the public know about your efforts and how to get involved. In addition, try getting someone outside your group to write a letter sharing their support—parents, teachers, clergy, business owners, etc. all have unique perspectives to share.	X	X	X
Organize a non-violent protest	This is a good way to make a strong impression and can attract attention from the media, the community, and decision-makers. Make sure you obtain the necessary permits and don't disrupt school operations (see "Know your rights and consider the consequences").	X	X	
Attend rallies or marches	Bring your group to a community rally or march for a cause that is in line with your campaign. Take this opportunity to connect with organizations that might support you. Make sure your group branding is visible. Create buttons and t-shirts for your members to wear; make posters or banners with your organization's name to carry.		X	X
Host a forum, workshop or training	This could be anything from an informal Q&A session to a traditional speech, a film viewing or an interactive workshop. Your group could lead it, or invite a speaker. If your group's ultimate goal is to change a policy or law, you might also consider whether there is a way to invite people who attend the event to take action.	X	X	X
Create a social media campaign	See "Social media: Or, using Twitter to start a #revolution"	X	X	X
Create a petition	Petitions are a great way to advocate for changes in policies or laws. Identify the decision-maker who can influence the change you want to see and address the petition text to that person or people. You can create an online petition on a free platform such as change.org, create a paper petition, or do both and compile your signatures before turning it in.	X		

When identifying the tactics that will work best for you, remember to be respectful of your audience and the rules of your school and community. You're trying to get and hold people's attention, but offending them or getting in trouble for breaking codes of conduct would be counterproductive to your goals. Madeline considered leaving condoms around the school, but decided that she might risk turning off people who might otherwise have listened to what she had to say. Instead, she posted notecards in bathrooms with facts about birth control on them, and was able to stay within school rules and increase public awareness about her issue.

## Creating a Coalition

Often decision-makers tend to respond more when they hear from a lot of people about a particular issue. Ensuring that a large cross-section of the community they're living in (and getting elected in!) is on your side can benefit your cause.

### Identifying Potential Coalition Members

The first thing you will want to do is find others who care about the issue. You might want to start



with other student groups—in your school, in other local high schools, or through extra-curricular youth organizations. For example, Taylor’s organization, the Student Government Association, partnered with a variety of groups on different projects. They worked with his school’s Gay-Straight Alliance on an anti-bullying project and with a different high school in town on a fundraiser for a local nonprofit. Many college and university groups are excited to help out in community efforts, and they might have access to more resources than high school groups. Look online or drop by the university’s student union to find out how to contact the leaders of student groups. Depending on your issue, parents, teachers, and school counselors may also be good to bring on board.

Look for other local groups outside academia who may support your efforts as well. Civil liberties and civil rights groups, youth groups and advocacy groups that relate to your issue are great places to start. Madeline reached out to both the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee and Planned Parenthood to enlist their support with a petition to combat legislation that did away with comprehensive sex ed. Jazmin identified other student groups and community organizations with similar interests, like Latino Achievers and Latinas Unidas, to support her group’s efforts to promote opportunities for Latino students. Present your case to relevant organizations and show them how your cause fits into their mission.

Also consider who has influence over the decision-makers you are targeting to see if you can gain their support. For example, local governments are often interested in what the business community has to say about an issue because they bring jobs and other economic resources to the area. If you can demonstrate how supporting your campaign might benefit local businesses, they could be a good group to approach for support.

Each person you speak to will likely have ideas about other people or organizations you can reach out to. You may want to ask if you can mention their name when reaching out to the people they suggest. Remember to strengthen the relationships you are building with the community by being on time, responding promptly to communications, and sending thank-you notes to people who take time to speak with you.

### *What if no one wants to join the coalition?*

In some cases, a person, group, or other organization may be unwilling to join your coalition. While it’s good to present the best case you can to convince them to join you, it’s important to respect their position and not push them too hard. Before reaching out to people, you may want to have a list of other ways people can support your group even if they don’t want to formally join. For example, would they be willing to sign your petition, if you have one? Contribute some resources to your cause? Make a few phone calls or send a few emails for you? Attend an event you organize? Sign up for your mailing list or follow you on social media? Point you in the direction of another person/group that could help? Regardless of how much help a potential coalition member actually was, thank them for their time. You never know when you may want to collaborate with that group or person in the future.

## Meet or Contact Elected Officials

Your elected officials are there to work for you. If your activism goals include any sort of policy change, you should reach out to your elected officials—they have the power to promote your interests within the government. If you want to see a policy adopted or a law passed, go to the people who have the power to make those changes, from members of the school board to city council, from state legislators to members of Congress. Even if particular public officials are not directly involved with the decision-making for your specific issue, they could still be helpful to your campaign as visible and respected community leaders who support your goals.

Kemario and a colleague attended school board meetings to express their concerns about the scheduled closure of twenty-three schools in his district. He felt it was important for decision-makers to see that students themselves “cared about the education they’re receiving and the conditions of the place

where they receive that education.” The school superintendent ultimately decided not to close the schools, demonstrating, Kemario says, “how much impact a student has, really has, on the decisions these people make.” The SSSC also witnessed the power students had to persuade the school board after five of them spoke at a school board meeting on the importance of adding gender identity and sexual orientation to the district’s anti-bullying policy. In addition, SSSC also recruited a local crisis intervention center counselor, two parents and two juvenile court referees to testify. The school board ultimately voted to adopt the policy change the Support Student Safety Campaign sought.

## Leveraging the Media

Once your group gets enough support and recognition, it is time to reach out to the media. Students involved in politics and social change can be an exciting topic and the media may be interested in finding out what your group is all about. However, do not be complacent and expect the media to come to you. Garnering media attention does not happen automatically. You will have to work hard to show the media you are relevant in the community through press releases and a social media presence. Luckily, as a new group or a group starting a new campaign, you have the opportunity to control how to present your group to the public.

## Types of Media

### School media

You’ve already likely been involved with the media in some way through your school—editing the yearbook or reading the school newspaper or blog. No matter how small its circulation is, the moment that you write anything about your group in your school newspaper, you’re involving the media.

Reaching out to the school press can be a great place to start. You’ve already got a great “in”—you’re a student there, after all—and you can easily access the editor or faculty advisor of your school paper about writing an article on your cause. Additionally, this is a great forum for you to reach a group of people—your fellow students—who are likely to be affected by the problem you’re trying to solve, and who will be invested in the outcome. In addition, starting your media outreach with your school community is a great opportunity to practice honing your messaging skills before you go submitting an op-ed for a city or

### Being strategic about decision-making bodies\*

You want to focus your actions where they will make a difference.

For example, consider a school board with seven members. Two may already be committed to voting in favor of your cause—adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the schools non-discrimination policy—and two may be staunchly opposed. These four members are not the target of your campaign. There is nothing you need to do to buttress the support of those voting with you (except to thank them), and nothing you can do to change the minds of the two voting against.

Target the three undecided votes in the middle

How and when do they decide their votes? Who are the influential community members, supporters or donors they listen to? Could the other supportive school board members help you reach them? What information do they need about their districts to understand that their constituents favor your position? These are the questions that will guide your actions. If your campaign includes community members contacting decision-makers, you would want them to go to the board members who have not yet decided their position on the issue at hand, particularly if those community members are constituents of those undecided school board members.

*\*Adapted from ACLU-NC’s “Activist Toolkit”*

county-wide newspaper or sitting down for an interview with a reporter from your local TV station.

Other school media outlets can include closed-circuit TV, morning announcements, bulletin boards in halls and classrooms, club meetings or announcements, the school's website or Facebook page, newsletters, school display cases and more. Think about the ways your school administration spreads ideas and information, and start trying to present your case there.

## The Mainstream Media

Mainstream media refers to the major entities that circulate news to large audiences. It includes news programs on your local TV or radio station and newspapers like *the Tennessean*, *the Commercial Appeal*, the *Knoxville News Sentinel* and the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. These outlets cover local as well as state and national issues, and reach an audience all over the state.

In addition to the larger local media outlets, other smaller publications may be important to your group. Often, these publications are issue-based, and may therefore have a positive (or negative) spin on coverage of your group. For example, Nashville's LGBT publication *Out and About* published a positive story about the Support Student Safety Coalition. If you are contacted by a media outlet you are not familiar with, try to learn a little about it before responding to them.

Start local. Eventually it may be worth reaching out to larger, national outlets too. For example, Madeline was able to share her message with a national audience by telling the story of two young girls she knew who had gotten pregnant for a documentary on teen pregnancy.

## Getting the Media Involved

### Should I contact the media?

Whether or not to contact the media is something your group is going to want to discuss together. You may decide to use social media at first, and wait until later in the campaign to reach out to the mainstream media. Try weighing the pros and cons of doing so. These will be different for every group, but in general:

#### Pros:

- The media can foster public support for your cause.
- If the media is paying close attention to your cause, it will make it harder for the decision-maker(s) to ignore it.
- Media exposure broadcasts your cause to a whole demographic of people who might not have known about the problem beforehand.

#### Cons:

- Your cause could get some attack from the public if it is controversial.
- You might not feel comfortable presenting yourself to the media.
- If your campaign does not attain the goal you want, you may not want the media to amplify that fact.

## When should I contact the media?

If your campaign does decide to engage the media, your next step is to determine when to do so. Typically reporters are more interested in covering newsworthy, time-sensitive stories or events than general information. As you unfold your campaign, try to identify those “news hook” moments. What are the key points in your campaign when you might want to get coverage? When it launches? When there’s a major event or a new development? Or maybe at the end, when you’re launching the biggest, most attention-getting part of your action plan?

If your cause is controversial, you may want to consider whether media coverage would increase public opposition to what you’re trying to accomplish.

Before you reach out to anyone in the press, it is important to designate who from your group will be speaking to the media. Your “media coordinator” should be the only person who speaks to the media, except for the founder of the group and only when this is appropriate to the story. The media coordinator will ensure that your group’s message is consistent, and give the campaign one coherent voice. You don’t want your group to have multiple members making conflicting public comments.

## How should I go about contacting the media?

The best way to contact the media depends on the media outlet. For school newspapers, it shouldn’t be hard to figure out who runs the paper and either request an interview or see if you can submit your own article about your group.

For local newspapers and news stations, start to check out their coverage and visit their websites regularly. Find out what local reporters are paying attention to, and if any have written any articles related to your cause. Start developing a list of issue-friendly reporters and their contact information. Most news outlets will have a page on their website about how to best contact their news team. Additionally, reporters and journalists often include their contact information in their bios or in the byline of their articles. When the time is right to share your group’s story, send a press release to your list (see “Press releases”).

In addition to your cause, simply being part of a group of students initiating positive change through direct action can be a great story in and of itself. After emailing with journalists, Taylor seized the moment to discuss his club’s efforts with a reporter who was doing an unrelated story at his school. The reporter asked to interview him, and Taylor took advantage of the chance meeting and started talking about his club’s purpose. The idea caught the reporter’s attention “When you’re a kid,” Taylor says, the media is extra-interested. “The media is always looking for fun things that kids are doing just as filler, especially on a slow news week...So sometimes they’ll find us, sometimes we’ll try to piggy back off of something larger...using whatever opening [we] had.”

Don’t overlook specialized media outlets and bloggers. The Support Student Safety Campaign got in touch with local LGBT news media for much of their initial outreach.

Your initial media outreach should include what you’re doing, why you’re doing it, and how people can get involved.

## Press Releases

The best way to reach out to a large group of mainstream media contacts for serious coverage is to prepare and send out your own press release. A press release is basically a brief story sent to the press on something you think would make a good article—something you’re doing or are about to do, a report your group is releasing, etc. You’ll want to make sure the first paragraph indicates why your story

is important, in order to entice the reporter receiving your release to keep reading. You want to be sure to get all the information out right away: who, what, when, where, why and how. Make the release like a newspaper article in itself: factual and succinct. Include quotations from student campaign leaders and coalition members.

Make sure to include contact information, a place to find more information (your website or social media pages), and a date of release for the article. Most often your story will be for immediate release, but you can also send a press release in advance for a story to be published later. For example, if you are releasing a report and want to allow reporters time to read it and prepare their story in advance, you may specify that they embargo, or hold, their story until the day you actually release the report publicly.

If there's an event you want to invite media to attend, press releases will need to be submitted a day or two in advance to allow time for reporters to add it to their schedules.

## Op=Eds and Letters to the Editor

The local opinion section of your community's newspaper is an important resource to use in your media outreach strategy, because believe it or not, more people read it than you think. Composing an op-ed or sending a letter to the editors of your local papers is a great way to insert your message into community dialogue.

Op-eds should include the following elements:

- a diagnosis of the problem;
- why your group is working to change it;
- why the community should care; and
- how you're moving forward.

Try to focus your op-ed on the problem itself and explaining why it's an issue. You can also mention



### TIPS ON WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR\*

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools because they:

- Reach a large audience;
- Are often monitored by elected officials;

*Tips on Writing Letters to the Editor, continued from p. 29*

- Can bring up information not addressed in a news article; and
- Create an impression of widespread support for, or opposition to, an issue.

Find out the newspaper's rules for submitting letters the editor. Some news outlets require that the letter writer live in a certain city, that letters be submitted in specific manner such as an online form, or that certain information be submitted with the letter. Enhance your chances of getting your letter printed by following the newspaper's guidelines.

Keep it short and on one subject. Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief will help ensure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper.

Make it legible. Your letter doesn't have to be fancy, but you should type it.

Send letters to weekly community newspapers too. The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.

Be sure to include your contact information. Many newspapers will print a letter to the editor only after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually print only your name and city should your letter be published.

Make references to the newspaper. While some papers print general commentary, many will only print letters that refer to a specific article. Here are some examples of easy ways to refer to articles in your opening sentence:

- I was disappointed to see that *The Post's* May 18 editorial "School Vouchers Are Right On" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
- I strongly disagree with (author's name) narrow view on women's reproductive rights. ("Name of Op-Ed," date)
- I am deeply saddened to read that Congressman Doe is working to roll back affirmative action. ("Title of Article," date)

*\*Adapted from the ACLU of Washington*

your group or an upcoming event or action the public can participate in at the end if that would be useful to your campaign.

## Social media: Or, using Twitter to start a #revolution

While mainstream and other local media publications ultimately decide how your group will be presented in their outlets, you have complete control over how you present your group on social media. Utilizing social networking tools is an absolutely essential component of your group's media strategy,

especially as a campaign that involves young people.

## Facebook

Make a Facebook page as soon as your core group is established. It allows you to stay in constant contact with all members, even as your group expands, giving those involved a sense that your group is always active. Send out reminders for events and any updates on the group's progress. The page should also give general information about the group and how those who are not members (or aren't yet) can get involved. Include links to any of your other social media sites or websites where people can learn more, donate or buy merchandise.

Kemario invited his entire school to his group's Facebook page and used it to mobilize other students, sharing details about the time and place of the protest he was organizing. He also sent friend requests to community leaders and journalists on Facebook, then invited them to like his group's Facebook page.

Taylor used Facebook to identify and reach out to potential supporters and volunteers. He also used it to keep them informed about campaign developments, such as survey results or the launch of a new donation page.

## Twitter

Twitter's ever-growing presence provides a great opportunity to quickly update supporters and share relevant news. Twitter can also be a way to have some fun with your supporters and show them a lighter side of your serious efforts. Make your group's Twitter feed active by following some of these hints:

- Tweet frequently.
- If you receive any news coverage, immediately tweet it out to supporters.
- If you run across any news that you believe supports your cause, tweet this as well.
- Recognize the supporter who retweets your group the most each month.
- Follow everyone who follows you.
- Finally, start a hashtag for your group so that you can be alerted whenever your group is being talked about.

## Blogs, Tumblr

Facebook and Twitter may be the most popular social media platforms, but they are not the only way to reach supporters. Starting a blog for your group is a great way to share information. You can use a blog to write longer posts than you can on social media, offering greater insight into the efforts of your group. Your media coordinator should try to post frequently to the blog. Posts can include simple progress reports, media coverage, video updates, or even more drawn-out features detailing your efforts. You can also include testimonials from students who are affected by your issue or invite students to submit guest posts to your group's blog.

Wordpress, Blogger, and Tumblr are some of the most popular and user-friendly blogging services. They are also free. Taylor found that using multiple social media platforms allowed

Remember to always keep your social media outlets synchronized.

Any time a new post is published to your blog or Facebook, push it out to all your other pages as well.

Keep every site updated with the most recent progress and news from your group.

his group to reach different groups of people. Any time a new post is published on your blog, push it out on your Twitter and Facebook pages as well.

If you open your social media or blog pages to public comments, you will have to decide whether you want to allow posts and comments that oppose your position. It is absolutely acceptable to not accept comments, or to delete posts that seek to derail your efforts, but you will have to make this decision, review every comment carefully and remain consistent in what you delete. Also, you may want to make it clear on your social media pages that hateful or offensive language will not be tolerated.

## Memes, Images and Videos

The possibilities for activists to communicate in the digital age are nearly endless, so don't restrict yourself to the written word alone. Images are a powerful way to communicate your message through social media, and to keep your pages fresh, engaging and professional. Pixlr is one free, user-friendly online photo editor you can use to create memes or edit images. Instagram is another popular platform. Create an account and brainstorm with your campaign leaders about hashtags your campaign could use. Cross-promote your Instagrams on other social media platforms and start a conversation among your followers.

Video is also a powerful way to share stories. Recruit friends or students who can shoot video and start a YouTube channel. You don't have to have professional video equipment—all you need is a smartphone or web cam. Create a human face for your campaign by interviewing students affected by your issue, or feature video updates showing your group at work. This will allow supporters to “meet” the inner circle of change agents. Vine is another free tool you can use to create short, looping videos. Jazmin's group created its own videos describing who they are and what they do. They then upload them to YouTube and use them for outreach.

Social sharing platforms are constantly evolving—there are many more than those listed here and the list will continue to grow. The most important thing is to figure out which platforms people in your community are using and focus on those. It's better to have one or two social media platforms that you can manage well than to have a page on every platform.

## Websites

Websites are also excellent tools for engaging the public and spreading your message, and they may be the first way many people find information about you. Start by seeing if any of your members has experience with websites, or if any members of your coalition would be willing to help out. There are also plenty of resources online to help you create and manage basics on your website. Though it was started as a platform for blogging, Wordpress is one great way to create a free or low-cost website. If you want an actual domain name, this will cost money, but it may not be as expensive as you would think.

Keep your website's news/events section updated! You should add something new at least once a month. Even if the bit of news or event doesn't seem like a huge deal, post it. That way, people who look at it know your group is active and involved.

Make sure your website is professional, colorful, and easy to navigate! Also, if you include any statistics, always cite your sources.

Things you may want to include on your website:

- *who you are*
- *a case statement*
- *FAQ*
- *information about the problem you want to solve*
- *news/events*
- *how to get involved*
- *stories, surveys, and other research that supports your case*
- *purchasing information for any merchandise, etc.*
- *brochures, posters, flyers and other campaign materials*
- *links to good articles, etc.*
- *contact information for the group*



# Dealing with the Results

You've done it. You've taken an idea for change and turned it into a campaign. You've raised awareness, you've been in the news, and you've raised funds. Now it's time to ask yourself: Did I succeed?

## Well? Did you succeed?

When all of your hard work has come to a close, you must step back and evaluate whether you have succeeded. Doing this requires revisiting the goals you set in the beginning. If your original goal was to see a policy change and a new policy is in place, you have succeeded. If you were trying to create a new club and that club has been created, you have succeeded. If your goal was to raise awareness, you can measure that by anything from how many events you hosted to how many signed a petition, to how many fans you now have on Facebook—whatever makes sense for your campaign. Perhaps your goals evolved during the course of your campaign- that's okay too. Did you meet your new goals?

Maryam knew she had succeeded because “all of the people came out [from the interfaith dialogue] afterwards [saying] ‘Even though we have different backgrounds, we're still the same and we share the same values.’” Jazmin knew her group's efforts to educate the community about the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was successful because they had over 1,000 attend a forum they organized and over 400 students completed applications at legal clinics they held. Andrew knew he was successful because the student group he wanted to launch was established. The Support Student Safety Campaign knew they were successful because the school board adopted the comprehensive anti-bullying policy they had proposed.

You may need to do a little research to gauge your impact. For example, if you started a public awareness campaign to reduce the prevalence of bullying, you may want to conduct surveys to test awareness, or consult with teachers and administrators to see if the rates of bullying have declined. Assessing your success is vital to determining how to move forward. More action may be needed to address your issue, even if you have achieved your initial goals.

## Share your successes

You've built a wide support base of people who believe in your cause and the work that you've done. Remember to make this base feel included in your efforts, updating them on your successes through email, your website, social media, etc.—no matter how small the achievement. Even small accomplishments along the way to a larger goal keep your campaign's momentum up and keep people engaged.

## If you feel you have not succeeded, regroup and return

Even if you come to the conclusion that you have not achieved your goals, do not be disheartened. Engaging in a campaign as students is not easy, and it may take more time than you originally anticipated. If you didn't achieve the results you wanted, you and your inner circle should assess the reactions of your targets and change tactics if necessary. Did people seem offended or put off by your efforts? It may be better to tone your messaging down, or try to include more mainstream groups as allies or coalition part-

ners. Did nobody seem to notice your group's efforts? You may need to try a bigger, bolder publicity strategy next time. Assess where you think things could have gone better and modify your plan for next time.

## Wrapping Things Up

Student activism is tough. Along the way you'll run into many challenges. The workload may get you down. Nevertheless, if you are committed to your cause, and you tackle your issue with a passion for change, success is likely. If nothing else, your efforts have begun a conversation in your school and your community. If the history of social progress teaches us anything, it is that even a single individual can make a difference. Do not give up the fight. As the student activists in this guide demonstrate, young people can create great change in their schools and communities. Time to get to work!

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