

CHAPTER 5 – Launching a Campaign

A good campaign isn't just a series of unconnected events and rallies. It must be based on a coherent idea of what is going to be achieved and how to achieve it. For a campaign to succeed there must be set goals, an examination of its impact upon your organization, constituents and allies, knowledge of the opponents, targets, tactics and timelines.

The Midwest Academy's Strategy Chart is an excellent guide to developing a strategy that will ensure a good campaign or project, and this chapter is based on their organizing model. For a major campaign, your group should set aside a weekend afternoon (naturally followed by a weekend party) to flesh out all the details using this approach. The investment of time will prove well worth it in the long run.

Power

Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.

Before you can develop a good campaign, you must understand power. Many of us think power is nasty, especially if we've been brought up in a liberal background. We think it must be bad, since the bad people have it and use it to oppress others. But the real question is who has the power, and over whom? Organizing is about redistributing power, taking it back from those who have too much of it, and giving it to the youth, the community, to the public. *Organizing is about democracy.*

There are many different forms of power. Students have people power, whereas our targets are generally rich and control institutions. Thus students will often want to mobilize people (like in a rally) and work outside of the institutions, which are often so controlled by our targets (and undemocratic) that relying solely upon them would be foolish. Occasionally students can use institutions, like the courts (or the political system) to achieve good (e.g., suing a corporation for its pollution or increasing the minimum wage). Elites might use their institutional power to remove decisions from the public realm by making them behind closed doors, arresting demonstrators, or even having dissenters brutalized (particularly in the developing world). To summarize, in your campaign, you should look at what kind of power your members and allies have, compare it to your opponents', and then pick an area where you can over-power them and win. For instance, instead of trying to outspend corporate political action committees to influence politicians in government, you should mobilize your people power by waging a public pressure campaign.

A brief note here: this chapter will sound antagonistic to those who have been socialized to "work within the system." But if there is an elite that controls most institutions and is using its power to oppress people, while the masses are relatively powerless, then we need to take action to restore a democratic balance. This is not to say that you shouldn't at least try to work within the system initially, but often achieving your goals will require conflict and working outside the system.

Also it is important to remember that you don't always have to compete against others to regain a balance of power; cooperation is often an effective means. For example, if you have allies within the administration, you are empowered by your good relationship with them.

Setting Goals

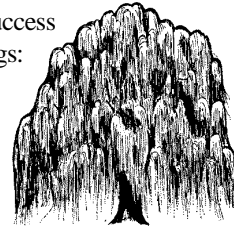
Be realistic, demand the impossible.
(May 1968)

Don't begin a campaign without setting a clear goal. Your goal is your definition of victory. You need to be able to look back over it after a set amount of time and answer the question "Have we won?" This should be defined as concretely as possible, with long-range, medium range and short-range goals. For instance:

- Long range: Reduce our oil dependency.
- Medium range: Shift the school to alternative energy.
- Short range: Start a solar-power co-op house by the end of this year.

Now winning is great, but how you win is important to your success in the long term. Your campaigns need to accomplish three things:

- 1) Achieve concrete improvements.
- 2) Give people a sense of their own power.
- 3) Change the relations of power in society.



In other words, getting your school to start recycling is great. But you should also give campaign participants a sense that they were able to make a difference and increase the level of student input. If this is achieved, you have changed the relations of power between students and the administration. This is what moves the world closer to true democracy.

Ask yourself how your goal will fulfill these three criteria. Then consider how your organization can conduct a campaign in a way that will best achieve its goals and in the process also empower itself.

Your Organization

The campaign should also build your organization. How can this campaign create new leaders and strengthen the ones you have? How can it bring in new members? How can it involve members at a variety of levels of commitment?

You should think about how many people your project could employ. This is especially important when planning for the introductory meeting, since you want new people to get involved. If you don't involve them, they won't stick around long. There should be a range of jobs, from light to heavy, to make it easy for new people to get involved without signing their life away. Work to increase each member's level of commitment over time.

When planning a campaign it's good to list what resources your group has. You want to know the members of your group, its supporters, how much money the group has, what facilities the group can use, the group's allies, the group's connections, and its reputation. Also ask what internal problems, if any, need to be fixed before you can go forward.

Use numbers as much as possible for these things. Specific information is always better than being vague.

Constituency

It is important to know who could help your group with its campaign. Anyone who is affected by the issue that inspired your campaign or could benefit from your proposed solution is a potential ally. Some good questions to ask are:

- 1) Whose problem is it? What groups are potential allies organized in?
- 2) What would they get out of helping you? What do they have to risk in order to help you?
- 3) How could they help? What power do they have? What resources do they have to offer?

The whole point is that the more people and groups that you can involve, the more powerful you'll be. But remember that groups join for their own reasons. You need to understand their motives and needs and respect them.

Targets

A target is always a person. It is never an institution or elected body. Who are you going after anyway? Who are you trying to influence? In other words, who can give you what you want? This person is your primary target.

How can you influence him or her? What kind of power do you have to do it with? If you can't influence the target directly, who can you influence that might be able to influence your target? These people are secondary targets. They act as stepping-stones through which you can extend your power to your main target. The more secondary targets you can arrange to "en-circle" the target with, the better.



For instance, suppose you're trying to get the CEO (chief executive officer) of Splex Inc. to stop selling radioactive baby formula. Even if you can't get at him or her, stockholders can. Consumers can. The government can. If you're trying to influence a merchant, what about advertisers, distributors, suppliers and consumers? Think about all the people your targets are surrounded by through the various social connections and networks they are part of.

Tactics

Now that you have a sensible strategy in mind, you can choose your tactics.

Tactics should:

- ▣ Fit into an overall strategy. For example, if you are trying to democratize a certain process, you shouldn't use any tactics that don't have democratic support from your group. There is no way to democracy, democracy is the way!
- ▣ Make sense to your members and supporters. Don't do something that your members think is crazy.
- ▣ Be flexible and creative. If your methods fit the same old patterns, you'll get the same old responses. If possible, do something that is outside the experience of the target. Befuddle them if you can.
- ▣ Have follow-up built into them. How often have you done something, had fun doing it, and then wondered where it got you? Each step should set you up for the next one, just as a good pool player sets up for the next shot.

Consider the following when determining your tactics:

- ▣ Who are we trying to influence with this tactic? How will it influence them?
- ▣ What kind of power are we bringing into this situation? How are we applying it?
- ▣ How are we following through? How does this tactic build our power for the next step?

You need to be clear on these things if your tactic is to have any long-range impact. Is your rally to influence the public or the administration? Will the media you get from it raise awareness for an upcoming vote? Why should the President care about 100 students on her front lawn anyway?

Follow-up is especially important. Are you demanding a meeting and setting a deadline or just making some noise and walking away? What will you do if they do nothing?

Timelines

Sometimes projects drag on with no real sense of progress. To avoid this, draw up a timeline. This is simply a schedule for when you expect to get things done.

This is especially important when preparing for things with definite dates, like rallies and talks. Think carefully about all things that need to get done and when they need to get done by. Decide on a reasonable amount of time for assignments to get done by at meetings. The items on the timeline should be specific. For instance:

- ⊕ 2/7 - Assign someone to make a poster for the Toxic Buffet and get it printed.
- ⊕ 2/14 - Hand out posters, assign people to buildings and get them posted by the 17th.
- ⊕ 2/19 - Deliver press releases to local papers.
- ⊕ 2/21 - Chow Down!

Look at the student calendar before you set a timeline. Be aware of vacations, holidays, weather, major sports events, and so on. Try to avoid conflict with other people's meetings, events, and exams. Consider the student energy cycle. It peaks at the beginning of semesters and ebbs during exams.

The Strategy Chart

The Midwest Academy Strategy Chart provides a handy step-by-step checklist for planning campaigns. It is located at the end of this chapter. Let's go through the chart in detail with the following example:

The Issue

Energy Conservation in student and low-income housing apartments in Gummi Gucci.

Power

Mr. Pinkerton owns most of the apartments in town, so he basically has a monopoly. Students are the consumers. This means that both Mr. Pinkerton and the students have some economic power. The problem is that Mr. Pinkerton (a.k.a. "Pinko") makes his tenants, the students, pay the utility bills. Therefore he has no incentive to invest in energy-saving measures like insulation.

Pinko is certainly a wealthy and "honored" citizen in Gummi Gucci, so he has a lot of clout on the town council. Then again, about 40% of the population are students, so the students have some electoral power too. Pinko can spend money advertising to get good public relations, but the students can counter that with leafleting, postering, and media events.



Goals

Long-range: reduce the town's energy consumption by 20% by the year 2007.

Short-range: get Pinko to insulate his apartments.

Your Organization

You have about 10 steady members with maybe 20 more who come to meetings occasionally. You have about \$200 to spend this year on copying, mailing, phones, and so on.

Constituency

Low-income people, students, and some students' parents are paying high bills for heating in the winter and air conditioning in the summer. They could sure use a break. Local workers could also use the temporary jobs that would come from insulating all of Pinko's apartments. This means you could appeal to local labor groups. The Black, Latino, and non-traditional (students who are married, have children, or are older) student groups might be interested since these groups often have even less economic entitlement to good housing. Service organizations like Habitat for Humanity might also be interested in this campaign.

Target

Basically, Pinkerton is the one you need to influence. But if he doesn't budge, maybe the town council could pass a local law. Perhaps the renters could use their power as consumers. Encircle your primary target with secondary targets!

Tactics

You decide to begin with a friendly meeting to explain the virtues of energy conservation, its environmental effects, and how it pays off after a year or two. You explain to him how it will make his apartments more attractive to potential renters. Estimate the costs for him, and give him the names of local businesses that could do the job. Ask him to at least give the tenants rental credits for the price of insulating themselves. At the same time you could organize the tenants to request insulation or rent credit. Ask for a response within a week of your meeting.



If he refuses, start publicizing that fact and tell him you intend to do so. Mention him by name, and lament the fact that he's not willing to do this little bit to save his tenants money. Conduct a survey of the cost of utilities for various apartments, especially energy efficient ones. Compare his apartments to those of the other apartments and publicize it.

If he still refuses, you might try to get the Town Council to pass a local law saying that either: A) all utility bills should be paid by the landlord or B) tenants should get rent credit for any energy-saving investments they make in the apartment. This would actually change the economic relationships between the tenant, the property owner, and the environment!

If that fails and you have to play hardball, leaflet and poster during renting season and tell people not to rent from him.

Timeline

- Sep. 20-26: Contact potential coalition partners. Attend their meetings, try to feel out interest, and invite them to the planning meeting.
- Sep. 30: Meeting with Pinko. Representatives from each group in the coalition are invited.
- Oct. 7: Deadline for Pinko. If he does it, celebrate. If not continue with your plans.
- Oct. 10: Send out press statements from the coalition expressing dismay at Pinko's policies. Each group in the coalition should send out their own statement, but it should refer to or be signed by all of the others. Announce the beginning of a new study on neighborhood utility costs.
- Oct. 14-21: While others are working on the study, go door-to-door to all of Pinko's apartments and explain the issue to the tenants. Ask them to request insulation from him.
- Oct. 24: Announce the results of the study. Mention Pinkerton by name as the worst renter in town.
- Oct. 31: Halloween! Have someone dress as Pinko and walk through the streets burning Monopoly money.
- Nov. 3: Town Council meeting. Raise the issue and talk to sympathetic members afterward. Get on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Nov. 4: Draft a bill with coalition partners.
- Nov. 10: Bring the bill to the meeting and present it. Ask for a vote within two weeks.
- Nov. 14: Have the coalition write letters and call town council members. Get endorsements from school officials, friendly legislators and small businesses. Publicize the endorsements you receive.
- Nov. 24: The Vote. Hopefully you've won and can hold a big party.

Regrouping

What if you didn't win? You have several options. You might want to escalate your tactics so as to put enough pressure on your target for them to give in. By broadening the issue, you can build a stronger coalition on your side. You might want to try changing your main and / or secondary targets. Alternatively, you could choose an easier goal that would be a step towards getting your original one. Don't be discouraged if you lose (it happens). At least you've learned about the issue and about how to organize, and will be better prepared for the next campaign. Maybe you can use the voting power of the students to elect your own candidates to the town council. Sometimes it is worth it to fight a campaign, even if you are likely to lose because in the process you will get many people involved and transform their lives by showing them their power and turning them into activists. For instance, in the case of a war, you might not be able to stop it but by educating hundreds of people about US foreign policy you will build opposition and decrease the likelihood of future wars.



Midwest Academy Strategy Chart

After choosing your issue, fill in this chart as a guide to developing strategy. Be specific. List all the possibilities.

Goals	Organizational Considerations	Constituents, Allies, and Opponents	Targets	Tactics
<p>1. List the long-term objectives of your campaign.</p> <p>2. State the intermediate goals for this issue campaign. What constitutes victory?</p> <p><i>How will the campaign:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Win concrete improvements in people's lives? • Give people a sense of their own power? • Alter the relations of power? <p>3. What short-term or partial victories can you win as steps toward your long-term goal?</p>	<p>1. List the resources that your organization brings to the campaign. Include: money, number of staff, facilities, reputation, canvass, etc.</p> <p>What is the budget, including in-kind contributions, for this campaign?</p> <p>2. List the specific ways in which you want your organization to be strengthened by this campaign. Fill in numbers for each.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand leadership group. • Increase experience of existing leadership. • Build membership base. • Expand into new constituencies. • Raise more money. <p>3. List internal problems that have to be considered if the campaign is to succeed.</p>	<p>1. Who cares about this issue enough to join in or help the organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose problem is it? • What do they gain if they win? • What risks are they taking? • What power do they have over the target? • Into what groups are they organized? <p>2. Who are your opponents?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will your victory cost them? • What will they do/spend to oppose you? • How strong are they? 	<p>1. Primary Targets</p> <p>A target is always a person. It is never an institution or elected body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has the power to give you what you want? • What power do you have over them? <p>2. Secondary Targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has power over the people with the power to give you what you want? • What power do you have over them? 	<p>1. For each target, list the tactics that each constituent group can best use to make its power felt.</p> <p>Tactics must be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In context • Flexible and creative • Directed at a specific target • Make sense to the membership • Be backed up by a specific form of power. <p>Tactics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media events • Actions for information and demands • Public hearings • Strikes • Voter registration and voter education • Law suits • Accountability sessions • Elections • Negotiations

Midwest Academy
225 West Ohio, Suite 250
Chicago, Illinois 60610