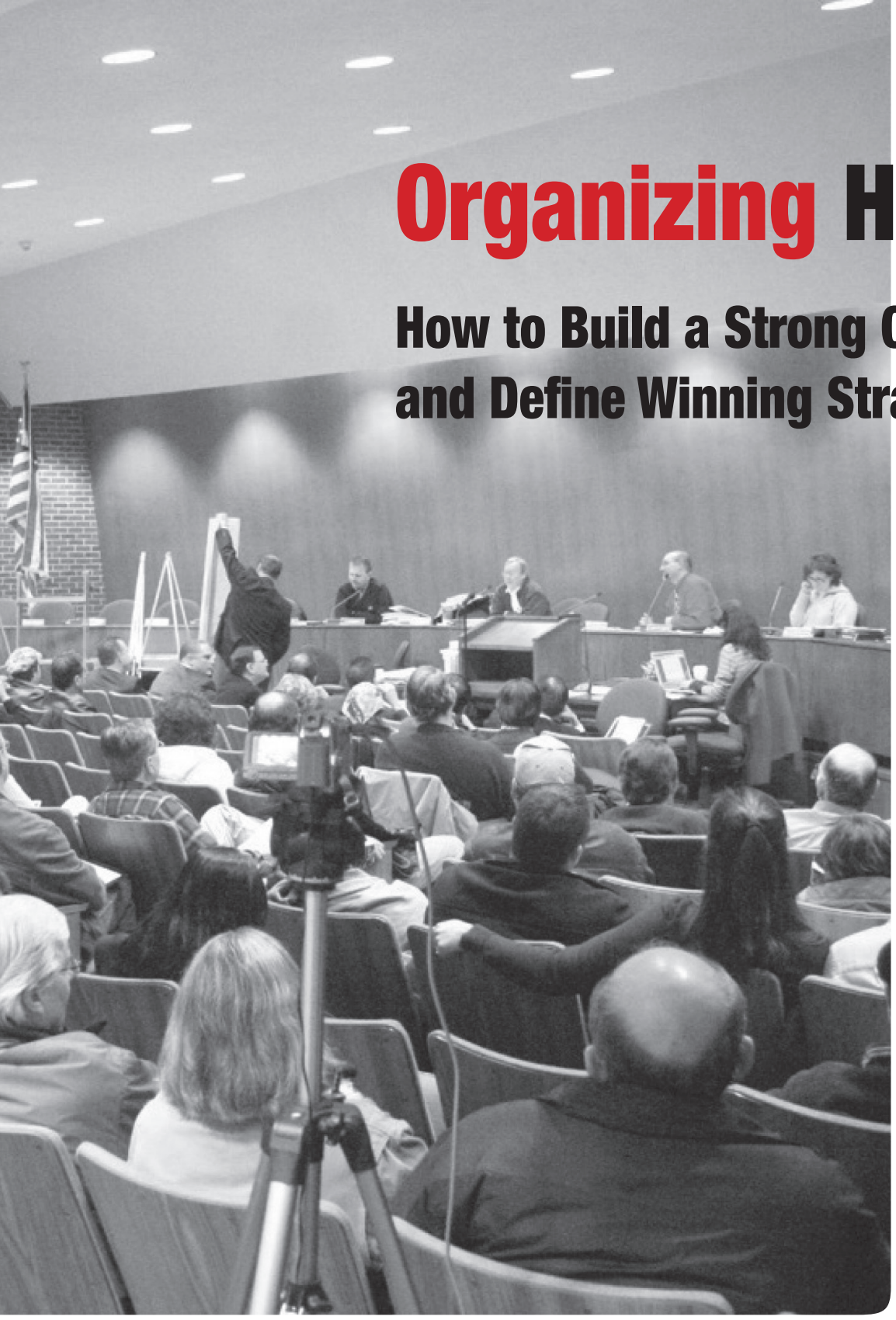

Organizing Handbook

How to Build a Strong Organization and Define Winning Strategies

CHEJ

Center for Health, Environment & Justice
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Center for Health, Environment & Justice

March 2010

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Mentoring a Movement

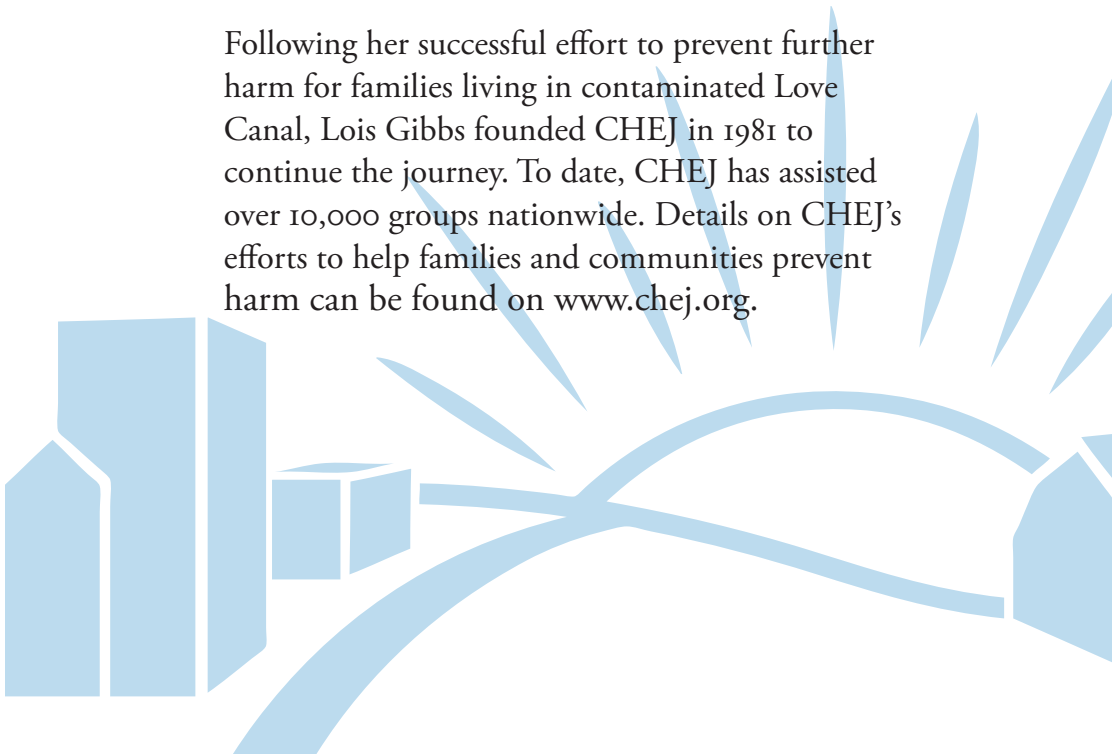
Empowering People

Preventing Harm

About the Center for Health, Environment & Justice

CHEJ mentors a movement building healthier communities by empowering people to prevent harm caused by chemical and toxic threats. We accomplish our work through programs focusing on different types of environmental health threats. CHEJ also works with communities to empower groups by providing the tools, direction, and encouragement they need to advocate for human health, to prevent harm and to work towards environmental integrity.

Following her successful effort to prevent further harm for families living in contaminated Love Canal, Lois Gibbs founded CHEJ in 1981 to continue the journey. To date, CHEJ has assisted over 10,000 groups nationwide. Details on CHEJ's efforts to help families and communities prevent harm can be found on www.chej.org.



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Preface

The articles in this guidebook are organizing "tools" that people can use to address problems or issues that they or their organization confront. It can also serve as a refresher on basic organizing approaches. The articles originally appeared in a column called "Organizing Toolbox" that ran in CHEJ's newsletter, *Everyone's Backyard*. The articles have been edited and updated and arranged to provide an overview of the key elements of community organizing. They were written primarily by CHEJ staff, though a few were written by guest authors. They are identified at the end of their article. A few of the articles relate a personal story. The authors of these articles are also identified at the end of the article. The updates and editing for this handbook were provided by Ron Davis, Stephen Lester, Michael Schade, and Anne Rabe.

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Introduction

"Organizing" is a term people throw around a lot. Its meaning can be both simple and complicated. Put simply, organizing is bringing people together for a common purpose and for mutual support to get the power needed to take control of their lives. In order to influence an outcome in your community, you need power. Power is obtained in two ways, either by engaging and organizing people or by spending money. Most community groups have little money and are often battling huge corporations, who can always outspend citizen groups. That's why we encourage activists to stress the "**people power**" side when organizing.

The first step, however, is deciding to get involved yourself. Maybe it's because of your children, or because of the way the town supervisor treated you and others at a public meeting, or maybe you decided that you're just not going to take it any more. The first section of this handbook describes this phase. The next step is to get more people involved. The best way to do this is with face-to-face contact and communication. Talk to your friends and family and have them talk with their friends and family. Organize a group to go door-to-door in your neighborhood. You can also reach large numbers of neighbors by hosting your own community meeting or speaking at churches, clubs, schools, etc.

As you engage your neighbors, you'll want to work together to define what you, as a community, want to accomplish. This will lead to forming an organization that has its primary focus to address the issue that brought you and your neighbors together. Together you'll want to define your goals, both short term and long term. You should be realistic in setting your goals. Pick goals that you can win. One or two are enough; don't choose more than three or four. Section Two describes many of the factors that go into building a strong democratic organization.

There are four basic steps to achieving your goals:

- Organize a community group
- Decide what you want

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- Find out who can give you what you want
- Develop strategies that target the decision-makers so that they give you what you want

Once you've organized into a group, defined your goals, and identified who can give you what you want, you'll need to develop strategies that target the decision makers so that they have no choice but to do what you want. This does not come about easily. Government and political officials are influenced by many factors and forces and you will quickly realize that to be successful, you have to create more pressure on the politicians and government officials than anyone else. Section Three covers this ground.

You'll realize after a while that most community struggles are not resolved in a matter of weeks or even months. Sometimes, such as with a contaminated site, it may take years to resolve a situation. Staying together as a group and learning how to be effective over the long haul is critical to the long term success of any organization. Section Four will help you to do this.

Every group faces multiple challenges and stresses during its time together. Maybe it's a key leader who faces personal stress in their marriage or who works on the issue 24/7 and burns out. Sometimes it's clashing leaders or infighting among frustrated members who get tired of the fight. Other times it's finding a way to out-organize the government who sets up a meeting designed to control community involvement and create the outcome they want. Don't accept the rules they define for you. Speak up and challenge the way government operates. It's not in your interest to follow along according to their rules. Section 5 provides advice on how to address these and other challenges.

How do you prepare for a public hearing? How can you use a local ordinance to control the type of company that can build in your community? How can you get your local politicians to support your efforts? What's the best way to involve and use experts to win your fight? These are all issues addressed in Section 6.

So often, community leaders think that if they do enough research and get the right information into the hands of the decision makers, that all their problems will be solved. If only things worked that way. Section Seven defines the role scientists and scientific information play in community struggles and puts into perspective what questions science can answer and what questions it can not answer. In particular, this section addresses how to assess health problems in communities and what can be learned from doing a health study in a community.

This handbook will show you that if you want to protect your family and your home, the best way is to do this is organize the people most impacted by a pollution problem. You can be successful by building a strong, organized community group that effectively works the system, and makes government and corporations answer to you! We have helped over 10,000 community groups. Yours can be the next success story.

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Section I.
Getting Started

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Chapter 1

Why We Organize

Every day, people facing threats to their health and environment call CHEJ for help. They are looking for proof that all landfills leak, health studies linking incinerators to cancer, or the environmental record of a company that wants to build a plant in their community. CHEJ tries to provide those facts. But we also stay on the phone to help people through the terrible realization that simply speaking the truth about landfills, incinerators, or previous violations won't stop the poisoning.

The truth is only a start. In order for things to change, the truth has to be understood by a large group of people who then use this knowledge to fuel their efforts to win justice. The truth won't stop the poisoning, but organizing will.

According to Webster's dictionary, organizing is "uniting in a body or becoming systematically arranged." Organizing to protect our communities from environmental harm means pulling together a large enough, diverse enough, active enough group of people to convince corporations and the government that they have to stop making people sick.

Organizing is how we restore the balance between the rights of the people to safe food and healthy communities, and the rights of corporations to profit and pollute. We will never have as much money as the corporate polluters. We will never be able to afford their Madison Avenue media campaigns or their twenty-four hour access to elected officials. But we can build our own power to overcome their influence. We can do this by organizing to demonstrate the strength of our numbers and the righteousness of our demands.

Successful organizing happens when a group of people finds visible ways to use the truth to wake up the conscience of a larger group. In an era when politics is defined by scandals and sound bytes, organizing can remind the American people that political life is supposed to be about self-government, justice and the common good.

After years of doing it, we've come to the conclusion that organizing is more of an art than a science. It's more important to be in touch with what is happening in your community and to respect and include your friends and neighbors than to follow a set of rules.

But at the same time, there are some basic rules for organizing that usually hold true. These rules aren't always applicable, but they are right often enough that you should consider them as you start to get organized around an environmental issue in your community. Some of those rules are:

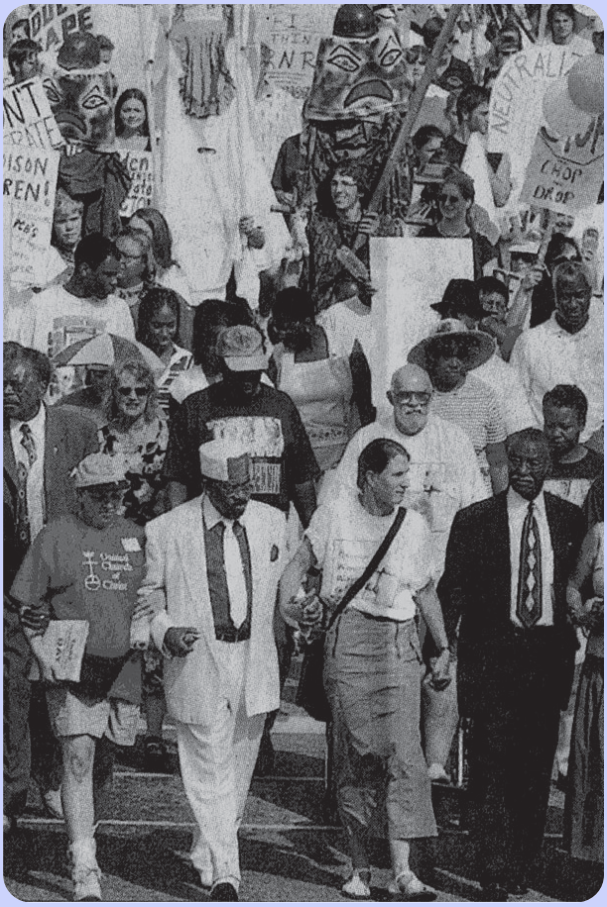
- Power determines the outcome. If two or more groups care about an issue, and one of them has a lot more power, that group will get what it wants, no matter what the facts are or who will be hurt.
- Our power comes from people, while corporations and government's power comes from money. Communities need to use strategies that depend on people's creativity, courage and caring. The corporations and government will use strategies

that depend on things which can be paid for, like experts and lawyers.

- Polluters and government agencies write the rules so they can win using the experts and lawyers which are their strength. You can assume going in that if you play exactly according to the rules of their game, you will lose most of the time, whether you are at the slot machines in Atlantic City or the hearing process of your state environmental agency. Create your own rules instead.
- To win, communities will have to work harder than polluters and government agencies do. Polluters and agencies are doing what they do because they are paid to. They've done it before, and they know most of the facts before the fight even starts. You are opposing them because you believe your health and your community are at risk. This gives you an unmatched motivation for working harder than they do.

These rules may seem harsh and they are. And sometimes things turn out to be easier than these rules would lead you to expect. But when our communities are at stake, it's important to start out vigilant, alert and ready to face the challenges ahead of us.

Experience has taught us that organizing isn't easy. Recognizing this should help us to be forgiving of each other and ourselves. We are trying to build a democratic society without adequate blueprints and models, so our trial-and-error method has to leave room for experimentation and mistakes. And recognizing how necessary organizing is should help us to be inclusive and persistent. There are no magic facts. There are no perfect heroes to give perfect speeches that will convince the polluters to stop polluting. There is only the dogged determination of people working together to protect their own health, their families' health and the health of their communities. This is why we organize.



Successful organizing happens when a group of people finds visible ways to use the truth to wake up the conscience of a larger group.

Chapter 2
Getting Started

When I first started my work in environmental health issues at Love Canal, in Niagara Falls, New York, more than 25 years ago, I was like many people who contact CHEJ. I had no idea that my home was located on contaminated land—my house was 3 blocks from a landfill that contained 20,000 tons of chemical wastes. But I did know that my children were constantly sick.

Read Your Local Newspaper

It was a local newspaper article I read that clued me in to what was going on. It reported that chemicals were found to be leaking out of the dump and into the surrounding community—including the elementary school attended by my son and 400 other children. It is often the local newspapers that alert communities to dangers that lurk in their towns or cities.

Don't Count on Government to Come to Your Aid

For me, as for so many others who have contacted CHEJ, it was shocking to find out that when I asked the school board to move my son Michael from the 99th Street school on the perimeter of the dump to a safer public school they refused. I was armed with two doctors' statements encouraging the board to move my son, yet their response was "If we move your child, we would have to move all 407 children, setting a precedent—because of one hysterical mother with a sickly child."

Go Door to Door

After talking and meeting with the city, county, and health officials, as well as the school superintendent, it became clear that no one was going to do anything. They were either not convinced there was a public health problem, had no funds, or were unwilling to risk setting a precedent. Not having a clue about where to go next, I decided to talk with my neighbors. I thought someone smarter or more skilled than I could figure out this puzzle. Going door to-door was frightening. I'd never done anything like that before. I feared that people would slam the door in my face, call me crazy or yell at me to get off their property. Like many of the leaders in our network, I had to summon a great deal of courage to knock on that first door. One leader once told me when she went door-to-door for the first time, she was so distracted by her knees knocking she didn't hear a word of what the person at the door said to her. I quickly

found out the value of knocking on doors when my neighbors began telling me about their health problems. Some were able to talk to me about the history of the site and to show me where chemicals were entering their properties. I found out that my neighbors also didn't know what to do. They too were hoping that someone smarter and more skilled than they were would provide guidance. It didn't take long to realize that I needed to keep very careful notes because after a while sources of critical information became blurred. I began carrying a composition notebook everywhere. Borrowing credibility from the last person I talked with was also a key lesson. When neighbors answered their doors, I began to tell them how I had just spoken with their neighbor Mr._____ who signed the petition about _____ and then did my little speech detailing the problem.

The key elements of my "speech" included:

- Who I was—Hi, I'm Lois Gibbs and I live on 101st Street.
- Who we were—I am with the Concerned Parents of 99th Street School.
- Statement of problem (short!)—This is a petition to close the school because . . .
- Request for support—I was hoping you would sign our petition and come to a meeting with other parents to talk about this.

These one-on-one conversations were the building blocks to a powerful community organization. People are willing to get involved but often need someone to help them think through how they can best contribute.

Ask Neighbors to Sign a Petition

One of the first things our community organization did was ask neighbors to sign a petition demanding that the elementary school be closed. Petitions are a good way to begin conversations. The petition offers another advantage: it will provide you with a list of neighbors and their telephone numbers so that you can remind them of the upcoming meeting. In addition to a petition, develop a simple flyer inviting neighbors to a follow-up meeting with others concerned about the problem.

You Must Build Community Support to Win

The past 25 years of talking with thousands of community leaders through CHEJ's grassroots work has made it very clear that if a group tries to shortcut the door-to-door work, their organization will never become as powerful as it could be. Equally important is that going door to door is not a single event. Groups need to continue door-to-door contact with neighbors to keep them informed and motivated to take action.

Written by Lois Gibbs, Executive Director, CHEJ.

Chapter 3

Making That First Contact

Three young organizers made the long drive through rural California to meet famed farmworkers organizer Cesar Chavez. After their hard dusty journey, they sat with him and asked, "Cesar, how do you organize? "Cesar replied, "Well, first you talk to one person, then you talk to another person, then you talk to another person."But, HOW DO YOU ORGANIZE? they insisted. Cesar repeated. "First you talk to one person, then you talk to another.

To build an organization, there's no substitute for face-to-face contact. You can call people on the phone, send emails, mail flyers, or distribute leaflets, but to build a relationship that holds an organization together you must meet and talk with people, one by one.

So first, you have to go and knock on someone's door. When you knock on a new person's door, there's that awkward first few seconds when she's deciding whether or not to slam the door and go on with the business of life. Your opening has to be clear, open and appealing. She's wondering, Who are you? Where are you from? What do you want? And what's it going to cost me? Think about your own experiences with strangers coming to your door. What makes you decide to talk to them? What makes you decide to close your door?

Who sent you? With whom are you connected that I know? These are credibility questions a good organizer will work out in advance. If you can say, "I was just talking to your neighbor, Mrs. Jones, and she said you'd be a good person to talk to, or "Reverend Smith is working with us-he's letting us use the church basement for our meeting next week, "you have "borrowed credibility" and have a few more seconds to get in the door.

The person you're talking to knows that you haven't decided to knock on the door for a lark. You want SOMETHING, so what is it? Are you passing around a petition? Petitions are an excellent door opener. Many organizations use petitions for just this reason to have a conversation opener with new contacts. Carrying around a petition is better than walking around with your group's flyer. People know it generally doesn't cost them anything to sign a petition; they'll be more at ease if you open with: I'd like to talk to you about our organization.

Once you are inside the door, your job is to talk less and to get the other person talking. Listen to her

story, her reaction to your group's issue, how she ties that in to her own past experiences and future aspirations. You are also taking the measure of her leadership possibilities. The more people talk to you and the more they perceive you as LISTENING, the stronger will be the bond between you.

Whether you are selling brushes, vacuum cleaners, or toxic waste cleanup, the time comes when you have to close in for the sale. In organizing the sale is the commitment to DO SOMETHING. To make the sale, you will have to show how it is in the person's interests to get involved in your organization. People act out of self-interest. You want them to see how their needs and desires fit in with what you are doing. Usually, their self-interest is less direct: If I work with this organization, I can count on them for help when I need it. Or self-interest could be the desire to help, to do the right thing, to socialize, to be connected to something exciting. The strength of such commitments will vary: a strong moral or religious commitment often outweighs the need to socialize (though not always!)

Use your judgment to gauge what the person might be willing to do. Everyone can do something. Commitment should be expressed as action. "I believe" should flow directly into "I will do. "Signing the petition is the easy way out. So is making a half-hearted promise to maybe come to the meeting. Explore ways that the person can become actively involved. Ask for other contacts. Ask her to come door-knocking with you, or to make two to five contacts herself. Make sure that she knows you'll be back in touch to see how things went. Close out the meeting by being sure you and the new person have a clear and concrete understanding about the deal; how many people she'll contact, how many she'll commit to getting to the meeting, etc.

Now you're up off the couch and heading for the door. You've had a good meeting with a brand-new person who looks like a real good prospect. Before you leave, that person deserves to know how happy you are with this meeting and, more important, how essential she is to building this organization. Remember how you felt the first time someone asked you to get involved.

Then you're out the door, armed with more insight into the community, new names, more issues, and, hopefully, feeling stronger. Now you've talked to one person and it's time to talk to another.

To build a relationship that holds an organization together you must meet and talk with people, one by one.

Section II.
Organizing Your Group

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Chapter 4

Group Structure

Over thirty years ago, I was elected president of the Love Canal Homeowners Association. That night, after the election, a terrible sense of fear ran through me. I had never been in charge of anything in my life, but now, because people knew me from my door-to-door petitioning, I was somehow in charge of their lives. Dear God, I thought, what could my neighbors be thinking? The only "chair" I was interested in was at my kitchen table with my family.

Most people in this network never knew me as the shy, nervous, and totally insecure person I was in 1978. I knew nothing about organizing a group, let alone about what structure to use. Yet, it was this terrible fear that drove me to take the right path at Love Canal. In retrospect, I became a good leader because I built and shared power and gave people a voice and a real sense of ownership over the direction of the organization. Here's what I did.

Out of fear that I would make bad or wrong decisions that could cost lives, I decided not to make any decisions. That's right; I decided to find a way to get everyone else to make decisions. If *they* were wrong, then I wasn't going to feel guilty about people getting sick or left trapped in the neighborhood.

So I went about setting up work groups and committees. Decisions were actually made at the group meetings where hundreds of people came and debated issues, plans, and strategies. I served more as a facilitator, spokesperson and cheerleader for the various committee efforts and the group as a whole. The action committee took the decisions and ideas from the meeting and carried them out. The fundraising committee raised about $10,000 through the two years of our efforts. Street representatives took care of keeping the neighborhood up-to-date on activities and news, and so on.

When people asked me to make a decision about something, I told them to go to the appropriate committee and ask it to take the matter under consideration and bring it before the whole group at the next big meeting. Deflecting was easy.

The result was a model that encouraged participation and shared decision-making. What emerged was a truly democratic organization. I now think of the model as being like a "bicycle" wheel with each spoke representing a work group or committee. At the hub of the wheel is the coordinating committee (see Figure 1).

The coordinating committee consisted of two members from each of the work groups. These members were elected by their work group. (Although these elections can turn into popularity contests, they generally work out well.) The coordinating committee did exactly what its name says – it coordinated activities and didn't make decisions on behalf of the larger organization. It is the coordinating committee that put together the agenda for the large group meetings and in coordination with street representatives and the communications working group developed our notices and flyers.

Figure 1. Model of a democratic organization

It was the responsibility of each working group or committee to come up with a report to the large group at the next meeting. Because people who attended the meeting wanted to have a say or at least wanted to know that we cared about how they felt on issues or approaches, we found that it was usually good to have several work groups present a question to the larger group for discussion and decision.

How did emergency decisions get made? Not by me. If an emergency decision needed to be made, the coordinating committee would communicate with people. They had two choices: 1) ask the street representatives to take a poll of the people, contacting as many of the households as possible or 2) call an emergency meeting.

How much structure do you need?

Answer: Enough. Enough to make decisions and enough to effectively involve your members so that (a) they feel needed and (b) you and the other core group members don't do it all.

The constant contact with neighbors encouraged participation. People felt like they really were part of the group, included and *needed* – not merely bodies to warm a seat at a meeting or hearing. People felt engaged and came to meetings and participated in all the different ways that made sense to them.

This is the model – although at the time we didn't know anything about "models" – we successfully used at Love Canal. If you are a leader of an organization and make all the decisions, do all of the work, and can only get a small number of people to turn out at your meetings, you might want to think about trying out some of the lessons learned at Love Canal.

Most groups make decisions by setting up a pyramid structure that looks like Figure 2.

This structure is very efficient for decision-making, since decisions are mainly made by the leaders at the very top. Exception: occasionally, leaders of a pyramid will take a decision to the general membership. The general membership, unaccustomed to being asked, sit there like mushrooms, confirming the top leadership's impression that, for most of the members, "the lights are on but nobody's home."

CHEJ talks to leaders who tell us that, after six months of a fight, "only a handful of us are left to do the work, nobody's coming to meetings and everyone's apathetic." How long would you stay active in a group if your only function was to warm a seat? These problems are the price to be paid for a top-down decision-making structure.

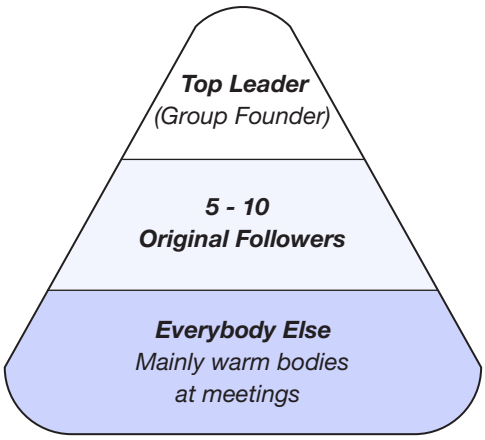

Figure 2. Common decision making structure

The opposite extreme is a freeform, leaderless structure (often called a "collective") where decisions are made only by consensus. Everybody's at the same level. While this approach may be very democratic, decision-making becomes agony. Even though everyone feels like an important part of the group, such paralysis may occur that the group is destroyed as a functioning organization. How often is it that everyone in any group will agree on critical issues? In a true collective, all big decisions have to have everybody's approval. Some of the anti-nuke groups of the 70's used this model.

The "bicycle" model bridges these two approaches and has been advocated by CHEJ ever since.

When new people join your group, you need to ask them to join one of the committees. There, they get a specific task that matches what they know how to do and like to do. This is a great way to spread around the work and prevent burn-out. Each committee has a general "mission" and can set up sub-committees if it needs to (e.g., Public Relations has a squad of folks who do the newsletter, the Speakers' Bureau, the flyers, etc.). Coordination comes from the Executive Committee who the committees report to. As the committees report in, decisions get made. Holding regular membership meetings help give everybody a share in "owning" the organization.

The bicycle model also attracts people because they work on what they think will win, rather than hoping everyone will agree on one specific approach. The 'spokes' give people diverse groups to join. If someone only wants to protest, then they can join the action committee. But if someone thinks protesting is a terrible and frightening thing, then they can help with the education or fund raising activities.

Think about ways you can set up your organization in a way that encourages people to join, get active and stay active. People quit when they feel useless. They also quit sometimes if they've asked to do things that are either too much for them to handle or too vague or undirected (leaving them feeling that "I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing.")

Written by Lois Gibbs, Executive Director, CHEJ.

Chapter 5

Should Your Group Incorporate?

Whether your group should incorporate is a very important question and one that should be handled with a lot of thought and care. Before you decide to go forward and incorporate, ask yourself, "Why?" As with any other major step, you should not proceed unless you know why you are doing it and what you are getting yourselves into.

Generally, incorporation and the process of seeking tax-exempt status can be a costly, time-consuming process. It obligates you to set up a structure that needs to be carefully thought through and to meet a number of local, state and federal legal requirements, including filing more reports than most people have ever imagined.

Unless your group has some very good reasons to do it, such as planning to be in existence for several years along with the need to raise money through grants and donations that require you to be tax-exempt, then our advice is either forget it, or wait until you do have some compelling reasons for doing it.

Why Groups Think They Should Incorporate

1) To Gain Legitimacy.

BELIEF: Many people feel that the best way to prove themselves and to the world that they are "for real" is to take the legal step of incorporating. All groups, when they first start out, can be considered to be an "unincorporated association." Though this has a nice ring to it, many people feel this isn't enough and that they have to prove that they are somehow more than just an informal group of people.

REALITY: First off, this is a political, not a legal question. Generally, community organizations gain legitimacy by their actions, not by the amount or type of papers they file with the government. Nobody really cares whether you are a corporation or an unincorporated association. You can have an unincorporated group that doesn't do anything, as well as a corporation that is very active. You can have a very active "unincorporated association," or an incorporated, do-nothing group. What wins you respect and POWER is what you do, not what format you've selected.

2) To Protect Members and Leaders.

BELIEF: Some groups incorporate because they feel this will protect their members and leaders from being sued by their opponents for the work on the issue. A few groups incorporate to protect their leadership

from any financial liability, to protect leaders from being personally liable for the group's debts.

REALITY: It is true that in a corporation, the individual liability of leaders and members is limited. Generally, a leader can't be held personally liable for debts incurred by a corporation. However, there are some important exceptions. A leader who serves on a corporation's board has a "fiduciary responsibility," which means that s/he is held responsible for acting reasonably and responsibly in that role. If you and your fellow leaders don't pay attention to the corporation's finances or act irresponsibly (for example, by authorizing expenditures far in excess of the group's resources), you could be found to have violated your "fiduciary responsibility" and be held liable. IRS says that it must get its tax money and if a group fails to do so, the board members can be held personally liable. If your group hires someone and federal withholding, Social Security or unemployment taxes aren't paid, the IRS can come after both the corporation and the individual board members, even if you didn't know that the taxes weren't being paid.

The other "protection" issue is lawsuits field by your "enemies." Leaders want to incorporate to avoid being sued personally for offenses like libel and slander. This is a natural concern (though one that is usually exaggerated) for many groups engaged in tough fights with Big Business or government. The sober reality is that your enemy can sue you anyway — they will probably sue both the group and the individual board members, plus any other individual they think was involved. You will still have to hire a lawyer and defend yourselves. Being incorporated means that your lawyer can argue (and probably win) the point that you are exempt from prosecution because you acted as an official of the group, but you will not be protected from being sued. Incorporation simply gives your lawyer another "defense" s/he can raise on your behalf. Besides, these lawsuits against you by your "enemy" are often just harassment suits filed to get you off their backs. Unless the group or the individuals in it willingly and maliciously told lies, the odds of winning are heavily in your favor. But you still have to deal with the anxiety and initial expense, even if you are vindicated, or counter sue and win.

3) To Collect Donations.
BELIEF: Many leaders feel that the only way they can raise money is by being incorporated as a "non-profit corporation."

REALITY: You don't have to be incorporated to collect donations. Anyone can give money to anyone else; it's a free country. It's just that there's no tax advantage to the donor unless the group s/he is supporting is not only incorporated, but also recognized by the IRS as a particular kind of "tax-exempt" corporation (generally one that falls into the definition laid out in section 501c(3) of the IRS Tax Code).

If your fundraising plans are generally small-scale and informal, you don't generally need to go through the extended processes of incorporation and seeking tax-exempt status. However, if you do plan to be around for a while and need to raise lots of money, you will have to solve the tax/fundraising question.

One additional, but less common, reason why leaders feel they should incorporate is so that they can participate in a lawsuit in a formal way. The reality is that you don't need to be incorporated to participate in a lawsuit. The courts recognize "unincorporated associations" and will permit them to become parties to a lawsuit. There is, of course, the added question you should consider of whether any group, incorporated or not, should become formally involved in a lawsuit. In most cases, it's better for the organization to do what it does best: ORGANIZE. Let the individuals who have the legal grievance file the suit. Leaders of an organization should weigh what the organization gains by filing a suit, as opposed to what the individuals gain, and how the lawsuit will effect their organizing.

The Processes of Incorporation and Tax Exemption

Being incorporated and being tax-exempt are two different procedures. You incorporate by filling out forms, and filing Articles of Incorporation and

By-laws with the appropriate state agency, usually your Secretary of State's Office. Later, you file with the IRS for recognition as a "tax-exempt" corporation, usually under section 501c(3) of the IRS Tax code.

- Incorporation. You will need to draw up clear and detailed By-laws and Articles of Incorporation. This will require your group to carefully examine its purpose and structure. Please, resist the temptation to simply "borrow" another group's By-laws. By-laws are your legal rules of operation and define how decisions are made. As such, they are not interchangeable from group to group and you're asking for serious trouble down the road if you adopt rules of behavior that don't fit your group and the people in it. The mechanics of incorporating with the state are otherwise pretty simple. It's the concept behind your By-laws and Articles of Incorporation that should take up most of your time and energy.
- Tax-exempt Status Recognition. First, you must be incorporated as a "not-for-profit" corporation with your state. Then, you file for recognition as a tax-exempt organization with the IRS. There are specific forms for this, along with instructions that should be read very carefully. Again, resist the temptation to copy some other group's paperwork, especially if they filed their papers some time ago. Include all attachments that are required in the instructions and keep your fingers crossed. Getting recognition from the IRS as a 501c(3) corporation has never been easy. IRS agents carefully screen applications from citizens' action groups, and often give them a lot harder time and appear to be denying applications more and more.

Problems in Getting Non-Profit Tax-Exempt Status

The main problem in getting non-profit, tax-exempt status for most community organizations is that they described what they plan to do (political action) in terms that IRS interprets as forbidden activities for 501c(3) corporations. That is, what some groups do is describe their organizing work in terms that IRS reads as "lobbying" or "partisan political activity." Lobbying by 501c(3) corporations is severely limited and "partisan political activity" (e.g. endorsing candidates, electioneering, etc.) is prohibited. So when you say, "Our purpose is to hold our elected officials accountable….", the IRS literally sees "Red," holds up your application, or rejects it outright.

Tax-exempt, 501c(3) corporations are generally expected to engage in "social, educational or charitable work". Though tax-exempt groups are permitted to engage in some lobbying (provided it does not consume a "substantial" part of the corporation's resources, generally defined as 20% or less), the IRS may give applicants trouble if they feature this activity prominently on their initial application. Non-profit, tax-exempt groups are not allowed to spend any of their resources in endorsing or promoting candidates or getting involved in partisan political activities. If you say anything on your application that even hints at such activities, the IRS will probably reject your application.

Understand the rules and follow them. You must tell the truth. If you really do intend to spend a substantial amount of your group's resources doing things that the IRS restricts or forbids, then maybe 501c(3) is not for you and you should look at other forms, such as staying an unincorporated association, forming a 501c(4) corporation or a "political action committee (PAC)." As discussed earlier, these forms change the way you raise funds. If on the other hand, your purpose is education and other permissible activities for 501c(3) groups, SAY SO. Just don't use your application for 501c(3) recognition as a soapbox — the IRS examiner may not agree with your political principles.

Other Issues to Consider

When you incorporate, you are taking on obligations that must be attended to. You will have to file papers with the state to protect you incorporation status every year. You will probably have to file a number of financial papers as well, as your new corporation starts collecting and spending money. If you file for IRS tax-exempt status, there are more papers to file

as well. There will be deadlines to meet or else you'll find yourself subject to paying penalty fees. At every step along the way, from your first application, through all of your reports, there are fees to be paid.

Further, by incorporating, you will have to formally adopt rules of operation (by-laws or a constitution) and will have to obey them. This is not a bad thing, but it means a change from the days when you could operate as an informal group of friends and neighbors, accountable to no one but each other. You will also have to start keeping good records, even if you have very little money to spend. All of this could be a very positive change, especially if your group plans to be around for a while. But ask yourselves, "Do we need to be incorporated to do what we need to do?"

For additional guidance including help filling out IRS forms, see CHEJ's guidebook Should Your Group Incorporate?

Chapter 6

Holding Effective Meetings

Meetings are a cornerstone to community organizations. They serve as the mechanism to exchange information, provide support, expand membership, build spirit and solidarity, define goals and plan actions. As organizers, we've spent a lot of time in meetings. As you can imagine, we've seen a lot — from really outstanding, heart-pounding gatherings, to flat, heart-breaking ones.

Because meetings are so common, we sometimes take them for granted and think we can just "wing it." Holding good meetings takes careful thought, planning and a lot of work. This chapter should help you plan out a good meeting. In the first section, we explore how to organize an effective meeting. In the second, we explore the different types of meetings you can hold.

Part I: How to Hold an Effective Meeting

Why do people come to meetings? People come to meetings only if they have a reason to come, and not everyone comes for the same reason. According to Tim Sampson, a long-time teacher of community organizing, people are likeliest to turn out if:

- They have made a commitment to someone to come.
- They have a role or responsibility in the meeting.
- They have an immediate and specific self-interest in what will happen; or
- They have past, positive experiences with similar meetings.

Pre-Planning: For every minute of a meeting there should be equal time given to pre-planning. Hold a planning session that includes everyone who'll take a leading part in the meeting. If your organization doesn't have a system designating who attends such planning sessions, think about who needs to come in order to make the meeting a success.

Why Have A Meeting? The first questions to ask in preplanning are, "Why are we holding the meeting?" "How does it fit into our battle plan?" While holding regular meetings is a good idea, holding a series of regularly boring meetings is not. Your members have a limited amount of time and energy to devote, so you need to make the most of the time they are willing to give.

Set A Goal: Think through what you want to accomplish. Is this the meeting where you come up with ideas for the next step in your battle? Is it a forum to educate the general public on your issue? Is it to put your "target" on the spot publicly? If you don't know what you want out of the meeting, you probably won't get it.

Statement of Purpose: Once you know your goal, write it in a short sentence on a chalkboard or newsprint. This "purpose statement" helps you stay on track and gives you an easy, polite way to get members back on the subject when they start to wander: "You're right Joe, global warming is a big problem, (maybe next meeting's agenda?) BUT, the purpose of tonight's meeting is..." Joe is happy because you've addressed his issue, and the crowd is happy because Joe's extraneous droning didn't make them late for dinner.

Meeting Checklist

All pilots have a checklist they're required to go over before flying a plane. It doesn't matter if it's their 1st or 10,000th flight. Forgetting to check the basics (are the wing flaps down?) have caused disasters. So it is with meetings.

- Why are we having this meeting, what are our goals?
- What will be this meeting's Purpose Statement?
- How should we arrange the Agenda to help us meet our Goals/Purpose?
- What message do we want people to leave the meeting with?
- Do we want the media to attend? Why? Do we have a press package ready?
- What will we suggest people do after the meeting?
- Do we have an action planned to bring our message across?
- Who do we want to come to the meeting?
- How will we get them to come?
- Have we invited people of different color and economic status?
- What's our plan if industry or government officials show up?
- Do we need an outside speaker at this meeting? Why?
- What's our plan if the speaker doesn't show?
- Who will Chair this meeting?
- Who will write on the easel pad?
- Who will have a welcome committee ready?
- Do we have childcare arrangements?
- Do we have munchies and drinks?
- What equipment do we need? (Microphones, video, slide projector, etc.)
- Who's in charge of lights and microphones- do we know where the thermostat is?
- Which meeting location will best suit our needs?
- Are the Organization's goals posted in the front of the room?
- How should we arrange the chairs to best suit this meeting's purpose?
- Who's in charge of set-up?
- What time will we start and end the meeting?

Agenda: The agenda is a step-by-step outline of what you are going to do at this meeting to lead to your goal. The first items on the agenda should be introductions, the purpose of the meeting and a review of the agenda. By going over the agenda, you allow others to raise issues and then agree on the final agenda: "Here's the agenda for tonight's meeting (then read it aloud). Is there anything missing?" At that time people can make changes, and you can quickly discuss the merits of adding other issues. An agenda helps everyone keep on track, and lets them know the meeting will have an end-result. Consider kicking off the meeting with a fun but quick icebreaker.

Organizational Goals: Make sure to write and post a list of your group's overall goals on a sheet of paper at the front of the room. This helps everyone get a clear vision of what the group is working towards.

Media: Inviting the media to every meeting is a mistake. Before you contact them, go over the pros and cons. Some of the cons: a) The media can initially intimidate budding activists in your community; b) The actual meeting might not be "newsworthy" or timely; c) Your group might really need "quiet time" to freely discuss important issues; d) If your goal is to plan the next step in your" battle plan," you may not want everyone to know what you're going to do, who your target will be and why, before you actually do it! If you invite the media, make sure you designate at least one person to handle them.

Action: We recommend that every meeting have an action or activity associated with it. Actions tie into decisions you reach at meetings. Once your meeting gains agreement on the problem, target, etc., have the group decide what action will best convey the message. It may be as simple as writing letters or signing petitions, or it may be a call to demonstrate later. Whatever your fight, whatever your goals, if you want to succeed, you've got to have action beyond meetings.

Speakers: Sometimes outside speakers can help the group move forward, but watch out for "Speaker of the Month Club." Ask yourself how the speaker will help you accomplish your overall strategy. S/he may be interesting, but will s/he help you further advance your battle plans, or should you be doing something else? If your meetings are consistently set up to invite a guest speaker and your members know that all they get to do is come and listen, they'll stop coming.

If you decide to have a speaker make sure the speaker is on your side. Does s/he understand your goals and your message? Speakers and outside helpers can be of assistance in your fight, but only if they reinforce your message.

What if? For every plan you've made you should plan for something to go wrong. Think through the "what if's?" For example, what if your speaker has to cancel at the last minute? Always have a backup plan.

What if industry shows up? How will you deal with them? One idea is to publicly recognize them. For example, when company officials come in, introduce them to everyone, "Ladies and Gentleman, I see that Mr. Billy Bob Toxic is here this evening. Mr. Billy Bob is CEO of Chemikill Industries. Mr. Bob, could you stand up and say hello?" You could let him say a few words, or you could have a plan that whenever you give this type of introduction, five of your friends boo and hiss, encouraging more booing and hissing, effectively ending any of Billy Bob's ideas for a proud speech

If you don't know what your opponent looks like, you could start each meeting by thanking folks for coming and asking, "Is there anyone here tonight from Chemikill?" What if five people raise their hands? Ask each one to stand up and give their name and title. Then thank them. Or, you could put their status in your members hands, "Folks, tonight's meeting is an important one for Citizens for Clean Earth members. Let's take a vote on whether Chemikill Industries can stay." You could tell Chemikill that they can stay if, and only if, they'll treat you in an equal manner. Then ask if they'll allow everyone at tonight's meeting to attend Chemikill's next executive board meeting. You also have the option of asking them to leave right away. State that your policy is members and invited guests only. Some go quietly, others do not. Be prepared.

Outreach and Involvement: You need a plan for "outreach." How do you get people to come to your meeting? Think about what makes you actually put a meeting on your calendar and attend it takes more than an ad in the paper or a flyer in the grocery store. Maybe your friend talks to you about going together, or someone asks you to help with something at this event, or you went to one of the events in the past and had a good time. Talk to people and ask them to come. Go door-to-door, go to churches, PTAs, senior social clubs, send out e-mail alerts, post announcements on places like Facebook, have your friends ask their friends. Getting the information out a few weeks ahead helps people plan and mark their calendars. But don't forget follow-up phone calls, e-mails or reminders a day or two before the meeting.

You always want new people to come to your meetings. But it can be intimidating and frustrating for new members to walk into a room full of strangers, or to not know the issue well enough to follow the discussion. A welcome committee can provide new comers with background information, escort them in and introduce people, and provide personal follow-up after the meeting.

Don't forget, if the people showing up at your meetings are all white and you live in a bi-racial community, then you haven't asked enough or all the right people to participate. If you want to win your local fight, it's essential to involve people from all walks of life in the group.

Where, When and What Kind of Set-Up? People are more likely to attend your meeting if it's located in a convenient place and the time doesn't conflict with work schedules, other community events (PTA, little league, church) or major events like the World Series.

As important as where and when to hold the meeting are considerations about the meeting's physical setting. The size and arrangement of the room can influence how people feel about their participation. Think back to EPA or company-sponsored meetings you've attended. The room is huge, their people are up on the stage behind a table looking down on you, and they have the microphones. That feeling of being overwhelmed and intimidated by space and setting is exactly what they intended.

If you want people to feel comfortable and a part of the discussion you must set the room up to make them feel that way. A small room is preferable to a large one. It not only makes the turnout feel impressive, it gives a feeling of togetherness. If you want people to feel together, sit together, don't separate leaders from members with tables, stages or microphones. Have people sit in a circle if you can. Use microphones for the audience only if you need amplification.

The Meeting: Have someone in charge of making sure tasks are done. Is the building open early enough to set up? Is someone greeting people and holding onto the sign-in sheet? Is the microphone, video, slide projector, etc. in place and working? Are the chairs in position? Is the coffee started? Each of these tasks influences the meetings and the perception of the group's competency.

Start on time and end on time. Make sure each person has a chance to participate. Set some rules and stick with them. You don't have to follow Robert's Rules of Order, but you should have some basic rules like letting folks who have not spoken speak first. Finish one thing, and then move on to the next. End with a review of key decisions reached and assignments made. Decide when the next meeting will be before you leave. Keep your sense of humor – have fun with the meeting!

Follow Up: It's important that everyone has a common understanding of what happened, feels their presence was important and that they had some "ownership" in the decisions. You can start this process at the end of the meeting by summarizing what was accomplished and outlining what steps will happen next and by whom. It's also important to get back to everyone who attended within the next few days with calls, newsletters, e-mails, postcards, etc. This is one reason why you MUST have a sign-up sheet for attendance. Follow-ups give members a chance to express additional ideas, and give shy people a chance to talk so they'll feel more

Meetings serve as the mechanism to exchange information, provide support, expand membership, build spirit and solidarity, define goals and plan actions.

comfortable speaking up next time. Sometimes follow-ups can be uncomfortable, especially if the meeting did not go according to plan. All the more reason to follow-up! This way you get views on what went wrong and you can encourage members to take some responsibility for making the next meeting better. It shows people you really care about their participation and ideas.

If you take some time to think through and plan your meetings you'll find they become an exciting and important tool toward reaching success.

Part II: Types of Meetings

What kind of meeting are you asking people to attend? There are various meeting formats for various purposes.

The House Meeting: This is the kind of meeting many groups hold when they are first forming. The location is a member's home and the style is likely to be informal. One of the biggest benefits of this kind of meeting is developing stronger bonds among your members.

The Planning Meeting: Before any major decision by a group — as well as before every general membership meeting — there should be a planning meeting. Leaders and other key decision-makers within the organization must get together to set the agenda, review the work that has been done, and plan activities. When things go wrong, nine out of ten times the cause is either poor or no planning.

The setting for a planning meeting is less important than who is invited to attend. Has your organization set rules on who comes to such meetings? If not, think about who needs to come in order to make an activity a success. Some should be invited because you can count on their good ideas; others should be invited because their participation gives them a positive role in the process and sense of ownership. One important note, consider who may cause trouble, by bad-mouthing or being disruptive if they are not involved in the planning process. You will have to decide whether you want to deal with that person in advance at the planning meeting or later when they raise a ruckus.

The General Membership Meeting: Most organizations need to hold regular membership meetings. They insure that all members of the organization share the responsibility for its actions rather than a few leaders or insiders. These meetings, however, are the hardest to carry out in a lively and productive way. There should be an agenda. The highlights of that agenda should be shared with everyone who is asked to attend. The time and location of the meeting should be chosen to accommodate the maximum number of people. Watch for time conflicts work schedules, popular entertainment such as TV or community events and other, previously scheduled events.

Running a good meeting requires good instincts and common sense. You will need a good sense of balance to deal with matters like:

- Making the meeting fun and sociable without seeming silly or frivolous
- Making the meeting orderly but not stiff

- Allowing everyone to have their say while avoiding long repetitive speeches
- Making sure decisions get made without jamming them down people's throats
- Ending the meeting on time while covering all key items in the agenda.

Good planning and shared responsibility are probably the best ways to ensure this kind of balance, and the best way to measure your success in holding meetings. Count how many people come back. People will come to the next meeting if they enjoyed the first one, if it started and ended on time and wasn't a drag, if it produced concrete results, was lively and exciting and delivered what was promised. Another simple, but crucial point: people come to the next meeting only if they know when and where it is.

The Accountability Session: An accountability session meeting includes an event tied in with your group's work on an issue. Most often, this means you have invited a public official or other decision-maker to attend and respond to your group's position on the issue. Careful planning is VITAL to making this kind of meeting successful!

The main question is: What do you want to accomplish by inviting this target in? Make sure you have invited the right person. You will be embarrassed if you invited an official and she or he does not have the power to give you what you want. You should anticipate that your guest will say: "I don't have the power to do it." Be ready with a comeback based on research showing that the official does have the power.

Make sure that you have handled the invitation properly. Don't give the target the chance to say: "I never got the invitation," or "You didn't give me enough notice." Never allow the blame to fall on the organization or its leadership.

Many groups will put an empty chair in the front of the room (with the official's name on the chair) to deal with invited officials who don't show. It creates a terrific visual for reporters. Some members might even be encouraged to pose questions to the empty chair. Most people get angry when they are treated rudely. If your guest doesn't show, this anger can often be channeled into future action.

If your target does show, be prepared with demands. Although some people are uncomfortable with the term, demands focus attention on what you want. Have them in writing on a big sheet of paper that every one can see. Have "Yes" and "No" columns next to the demands and check off your guest's answers. Avoid having a Maybe or Other column, since it is a rare public official who won't make ample use of this escape hatch. If the official wavers, then check "No".

When you have gone through the list, you should have a product that looks like a written agreement. To make it official, why not have your guest sign it, which is also a great photo opportunity for reporters. If she or he refuses, ask the official how truthful his/her answers really were. One word of caution: if the success of your group depends on action by the target or if the target is already sympathetic to your cause, you must decide in advance if this person's future support is worth the risk of embarrassing them in public.

Here are some other replies your guest may make which you should be ready for: No, we don't have the money; You do not and cannot understand the situation; You don't have all the facts; You're too rowdy and rude, I'm leaving; Let me think about it and I'll get back to you later; My assistant will send you information; You're asking for "x," let me give you "y" instead; I think we can work this out if I can just speak to a couple of your leaders privately; I agree with you in principle, but I can't give you an official answer right now; After all I've done for you, how can you people treat me this way?

Conclusions

Meetings work best when everyone takes some responsibility for making them successful. It's a common myth that organizations need strong leaders. Instead, what they need most is a strong membership. Such strength grows from leaders who share responsibility and consciously try to build people power, rather than their own power.

Chapter 7

Grassroots Fundraising Made Simple

There are many ways to go about finding the financial resources your group needs. Your options include mail, email, phone, the internet, special events, grant requests, and workplace giving. But when all is said and done, fundraising is a lot like grassroots organizing. You identify your key constituencies and find ways to reach out to them and get them involved. Build relationships that not only bring in funding, but also help you identify new allies. Talk to other groups, not only those in the environmental movement but also those in other social justice movements, trading information and leads about sources of funding.

Charity Begins at Home

While it may be tempting to focus on grants as a potential source of revenue, in fact corporate, foundation and government grants represent only a very small percentage of U.S. philanthropy and are only available to 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations. Foundations are very sensitive to stock market volatility and reduce their grantmaking in times of economic turmoil. On the other hand, 80% of Americans reliably make charitable donations every year, and many of them keep their donations focused close to home.

While getting donations from individuals can be time-consuming, it's an important investment in the long-term sustainability of your organization. It's much better to have small donations from hundreds of people than to rely on half-a-dozen large sources of funds that could dry up in hard times.

When planning a fundraising drive, you should begin by asking yourself a couple of questions that will help you frame your "case for support." What are our goals? Who is most likely to want to support this? How will this make a difference to them, personally?

Why People Give

By talking to someone one-on-one, you can tap directly into their own personal motivations for giving. People choose who they give their money to for a number of reasons. It might be because a group's mission is particularly important to them personally. In your case, your best prospects are the ones whose health and quality of life are directly affected by the environmental health issue you are working on. Gratitude can make someone who has benefited from the work of a group or charity want to give something back. Or people might give out of

a sense of guilt that they aren't doing enough to adopt an environmentally-responsible lifestyle, or they have some other secret trespass for which they'd like to atone.

There are other reasons that motivate people to give, like public recognition, or a tax deduction. But most often people give simply because they were asked. You can't expect people to wake up one morning and make a donation just because you are a worthy cause. You have to ask them. Have you ever given because a friend of yours was involved in the charity and you supported it to please him or her? The key is to involve your most active members in reaching out to people they know to broaden your base of support.

Think of your donor base as forming a pyramid, with the entry level donors forming a broad base, and your most committed donors forming the tip. Just like in organizing, you need many people forming a broad, diverse base to provide stability to your organization. Then by offering people who are new to your group or come to your events a newsletter and ways to get involved, they will come to feel more invested in your success.

Once they become regular contributors, you need to find more ways to involve them and cultivate them, and eventually the ones with the means to become major donors will rise to the top. Most people will require encouragement to move up the pyramid. So be strategic about where you invest your time to cultivate and involve the people who are most interested and most able to make a difference.

Fundraising Methods

The most effective way to get donations from individuals is to ask them personally. A mail appeal is likely to only return a gift from about 2% of the names on the list, if it's a cold list. A mailing to your previous and current donors and members will do a little bit better, potentially as much as a 20% return.

Other forms of mass solicitation like email blasts could have similar results if you have a young constituency. Phone calls work best if you have a volunteer phone bank and your constituency expects your call, etither because you do it at the same time every year, or you forewarned them to expect your call by mail or email.

Holding a fundraising event can help you broaden your base of support, because it appeals to a different constituency from the people you already know. You can't necessarily expect to renew your event donors next year just by sending them a letter. Chances are they'll want to go to another event. But if you hold the same event year after year, it will tend to grow and can help you build community visibility and other forms of public support besides donations.

Ideally, a fundraising event will require little or no up-front cash investment, offer a high rate of return, educate people about your mission, and be fun for volunteers as well as participants. Types of events to consider include dinner dances, auctions, wine tastings, concerts, bingo, garden tours, spaghetti dinners, and any number of "-thons" (walkathons, bike-a-thons, marathons, bowl-a-thons, etc.). Try to create multiple sources of revenue from every event – sponsorships, ads in a program book, ticket sales, auction, raffle, and sales of anything else you can manage like t-shirts and baked goods.

If your group has a website, it's worth opening an online donation processing account with a vendor like Google Checkout, Network for Good, or Paypal. Make sure your donate button is prominently located on every page of your website, and that your donation form is secure and easy to use. Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Twitter and similar services are helpful ways to drive traffic to your website. Subscribing to an email program like Constant Contact or Democracy in Action is a cost-effective way to send email appeals, newsletters and action alerts that link to your online donation form or online petitions. Remember to keep email communications very short and specific.

Once you have built a grassroots base of support, foundations will be more likely to invest in your group. Track down local or regional funders through the Foundation Center collection at your local library or their free "Foundation Finder" tool on their website. Don't overlook local community foundations, which often have unpublished "donor-advised funds" that

might support your group. Make an appointment to introduce yourself to a program officer at the community foundation so they will be aware of your group if one of these private donors asks them for philanthropic advice.

Regardless of which fundraising method your group chooses, the keys to fundraising success remain the same. Build relationships with potential donors. Demonstrate how donors will benefit from supporting your work. Invite them to partner with you in your efforts to create a cleaner, healthier community in which you all can live. Show your continued gratitude to donors of your group through written acknowledgments, public recognition, and membership benefits. Build enthusiasm for your work while raising funds through special events. Cultivate relationships with funders by providing exceptional value for their charitable investment and demonstrating it in your grant reports. Above all, continue to do and publicize your group's positive, health-protective work in your community. Supporters will be eager to fund your efforts.

Most often people give simply because they were asked.

Chapter 8

Getting Your Message Across

A vital part of organizing is using media coverage to get your issue out to the public. And a key part of using the media effectively is communicating what your group is fighting for through messages which resonate with the public. Developing a message which reaches your audience doesn't happen by accident. It takes work. Here are three articles that help you understand how to craft effective messages.

- Bringing Your Message to the People: Messaging as Part of your Organizing Work
- A Model for Your Messages: Problem, Solution and Action
- Visionary Vocabulary: Key Words to Convey Values in Your Messages

Bringing Your Message to the People: Messaging as Part of your Organizing Work

Traditionally, messaging, branding and advertising have been perceived as part of corporate America's strategies. We're activists, not marketing experts. We organize with the coins collected in a coffee can, not the billion-dollar advertising budgets of our opponents. This often leaves our movement with the sentiment that if we can just prove that we're right through facts and figures, then everyone will come to their senses and fight for justice. Since that hasn't happened, we should consider revisiting this essential component of successful organizing, and figure out how we can do it well and make it work for us.

Powerful and effective messaging is not born out of facts or figures. It is created by appealing to the core values of people just like us, but who may not see themselves as a part of this movement. Our work is about protecting and enhancing the livelihood, health and well being of hardworking families, and our messages should express nothing less.

The Complicated Put Simply

In 2005, many of you helped stop EPA from allowing private companies from testing pesticides on children and pregnant women. More than 80,000 individuals joined in the fight to halt that deal in its tracks. Over 70% of federal Senators joined in as well. What was it that catalyzed this effort? Simply put, it was an effective message: "We Don't Test Pesticides on Pregnant Women and Children." This message appealed to the most basic of human beliefs about a core value system, and it begs the response, "well,

of course we don't." It also explicitly stated what we were fighting for. Another example of simple messaging comes from groups we work with in Florida where local activists opposed plans by EPA to allow raw sewage mixed with heavy rainfall to by-pass waste water treatment and be dumped directly into rivers that serve as a source of drinking water. Given the two statements below, what message do you think got more attention from the general population, "Vote No on Sewage Blending!" or "No Poo-Poo in our Drinking Water!" These statements don't convey the same thing to the non-expert. Sewage blending is a technical term that sounds harmless. The second message says what sewage blending actually is, and gets through to the least technical person in a quick and compelling way. You want a statement like this that sends a clear message to the public, and you never want to use your opponent's words because it reinforces their message.

To truly win a healthy community, we must have many tools in our toolbox, including well-researched alternatives, credible science, and technical experts. But of equal or greater importance are lots and lots of people, usually for a few meetings, a petition, or a key vote. We do not need to educate a thousand people on the technical information surrounding sewage blending or pesticide testing and regulations. We simply need to tell them a story that gets them to say "Oh No, Not in My Backyard."

Memes and the People Who Love Them

According to *smart*Meme (*www.smartmeme.org*), a meme (pronounced meem) is: "A unit of self-replicating cultural transmission (ex. ideas, slogans, melodies, symbols) that spreads virally from brain to brain. A meme often operates as a container, anchor or carrier for a larger more complex story." One of the oldest memes used by our opponents is NIMBY, or Not In My Backyard. A true self-replicating meme, NIMBY was created by the PR firms hired by the polluters and was cleverly used to marginalize the leaders of thousands of local struggles. The power of this meme is that it has longevity, it says what it means to say, you can remember it, and people can see themselves within it. Those not involved in a local struggle can be persuaded by this meme into thinking that local activists are selfish and community-centric. It implies "I don't care where it goes so long as it's not in my backyard."

Thus, a successful meme conveys the essence of what you are fighting for, and when done well, it carries life and power way beyond how you ever used it. The details come after the meme. In debating our opponents, we often go toe-to-toe on the science and the process, and we often forget to reach those not yet involved in a creative, simple way that gets to the heart of what they care about, and not inundate them with so many details that they go running for the hills. In 2006, grassroots groups used some great memes to win their fights. The Coal River Mountain Watch group is fighting mountain top removal in West Virginia communities and trying to block a proposal for a new coal silo next to an elementary school. CRMW adopted the meme: "Remembering the Past, Working for the Future." It respects the deep heritage of West Virginia coal mining, while conveying what the group is working for – a healthier economy and environment. River Rescue, of Peoria, Illinois adopted the meme "Enough is Enough!" to halt the Peoria Disposal Company's proposal to triple the size of its hazardous waste landfill. This meme simply stated what the group stood for, which was that they would not accept any more pollution in their already overburdened community.

Message, Message, Message: Say it Again and Again

Consistent use of the same meme is a critical factor in successful messaging. Your main meme (e.g., Enough is Enough!) becomes the central idea or theme for all your outreach materials and activities. It must be a short (less than 12 words), declarative, and believable statement that addresses your target audience. It should be repeated over and over through the life of the campaign.

Messages can be followed by three supporting points that reinforce its' importance, uniqueness and believability. For instance: Enough is Enough! No More Landfills in Libertyville! Libertyville has a full landfill that will be in our community for

generations and has already reduced property values in the town; Landfill gases pose serious health threats to nearby residents and to the environment; Traffic on already congested Route 123 will increase by 40% if this expansion is approved. These three simple points appeal to the core values of most people: livelihood, health and quality of life.

Crafting a Winning Story

Messaging is much like story telling. To be effective, your story should be told through a consistent voice, enforce a value-based theme, and speak to a specific audience. The story itself should:

- Highlight one conflict and make the choice plain and clear
- Use sympathetic characters, i.e. the local farmer or the young child
- Show what you mean by appealing to the values of your target audience
- Offer vision - Is your group advocating going back to the Stone Age, or looking towards a vibrant, healthy, forward thinking community?

Messaging is a critical tool, along with scientific/technical information, basic organizing strategies, and direct action you need to build the capacity of your organization and to make your group a visible, compelling, well researched and persuasive advocate for a healthier tomorrow. Get smart!

Based on Messaging Workshops by the Smartmeme team at CHEJ's BE SAFE Conference on Precaution, 2006.

A Model for Your Messages: Problem, Solution and Action

The Strategic Press Information Network, also known as the SPIN Project, has helped many groups craft effective messages. Below are two articles on creating powerful messages from their guidebook, "SPIN Works! The Nuts & Bolts of Good PR, A Media Guidebook for Public Interest Organizations."

Your key messages should communicate in a succinct and pithy way the most critical components of your issue. Do not try to explain everything; instead, condense your issue down to two or three strategic messages. Try this model for creating and sharpening your key messages. Condense your issue into three media messages: 1) The Problem; 2) The Solution; and 3) The Call to Action. Literally write out a couple of sentences per message onto a "message talking points" page.

To truly win a healthy community, we need to define a theme or message and repeat it again and again until the decision makers hear it loud and clear. And then continue to repeat it until you win.

Message 1 – The Problem

What is the problem you are working to address? Forget the mountains of minutiae you have gathered on your issue. Step back and look at the big picture. Take a moment to create a message that *frames* the problem clearly, broadly, and in as compelling a way as possible. Whoever frames the problem controls the terms of the debate. Message #1 is the framing message. It will communicate the scope of the issue

or problem, and dramatize its impact.

Message 2 – The Solution
While defining the problem is crucial, if you just stop there you will be in danger of sounding like a whiner. Be sure to move on to the next message: the solution. Message #2 is the "values" message. Use it to communicate a sense of your values: In what kind of society do you want to live? How do you want people to be treated? Make sure to provide hope in your solution message.

Message 3 – A Call to Action
You have already defined the problem and offered a solution. Now, what do we need to do to get to the solution? That is the call to action. The action call may be different depending on your targeted audience. What you ask the governor, state legislature and elected officials to do might be different from what you ask regular voters or community members to do. Now that you have a model for preparing your key messages, practice delivering them — from Message #1 right through Message #3. The messages must move together: "The problem is X, but the solution is Y. That is why we are calling on the state legislature to pass Z."

Are the Messages Soundbites?
Yes and no. Consider using this three message model as an aid to help you cut through the complexities of your issue and focus on the key points. This will also help you frame the issue. Sometimes, you will not have the time to communicate all three, but only enough time--say ten seconds--to make your case. Still, go through all your messages, and the chances of one "hitting" will be greater.

Sample: CHEJ's Dioxin Message
Problem: American families are being made sick by dioxin, a toxic industrial by-product. Dioxin in our food, air and water is linked to serious health problems, such as reduced IQs and hyperactive behavior in children, cancer, infertility and birth defects. Every American man, woman and child's bodies contain enough or almost enough dioxin to cause adverse health effects. No additional exposure is safe.

Solution: Eliminating harmful dioxin discharges and cleaning up dangerous dioxin-contaminated sites will protect our health, safeguard our environment and strengthen our economy.

Action: It's time that lawmakers get tough on industries and eliminate their dioxin-spewing practices that threaten our children's health and that of every American. Elected officials need to enact, and enforce health protections that will prevent this life-threatening chemical from harming our families.

Visionary Vocabulary: Key Words to Convey Values in Your Messages

"The difference between the almost right word and the right word is a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." - Mark Twain

The way you talk about your issues can make all the difference in the world. If you want your message to have the impact of a lightning strike—and not the brief flash of a lightning bug—then vision and values are a crucial part of what you have to say. To help people understand your issue, you must first broaden your message and use language that will connect with the largest number of people. As you craft your message, it is important to use simple, specific, easy-to-understand language. No tech talk or insider jargon! Talk about your issues in a way that all people can personally relate to by linking your messages to the core values that we all care about — family, health, safety, security, respect, fairness. Help your audience understand what is at stake for them.

Use hard-hitting action words that will grip your audience by the heart or hit them right in the gut. These words are the antidote to stifling jargon and "bureaucrat-ese" that deadens much political discourse. For example, instead of saying "The factory runoff will negatively impact the surrounding residents," say "The toxic poison will imperil the lives of hard-working people and endanger their community." Words such as compassion, fairness, heritage, justice, etc. all connect with people's core values. Use these and other hard-hitting action words

to flesh out your messages. What words can you add to this list?

Activate	Advocate	Affirm
American	Assist	Balance
Bedrock	Benefit	Bold
Champion	Change	Community
Compassion	Confirm	Damage
Defend	Degrade	Democracy
Destroy	Dignity	Diversity
Endanger	Energize	Engage
Equality	Fairness	Faith
Family	Fighting	Forward
Harm	Health	Help
Heritage	Honor	Hope
Hurt	Imperil	Injure
Integrity	Jeopardize	Justice
Legacy	Mobilize	Nation
Neighborhood	Nourish	Nurture
People	Power	Preserve
Pride	Principle	Progress
Promote	Protect	Public
Relief	Respect	Responsible
Risk	Safeguard	Strengthen
Support	Sustain	Threaten
Tolerance	Tradition	Trust
Unity	Value	Working

The SPIN Project provides technical media assistance to public-interest organizations that want to influence debate, shape public opinion and garner positive media attention. For more information: SPIN Project, 149 Natoma St., San Francisco, CA 94105, 415-227-4200, info@spinproject.org, http://www.spinproject.org

Chapter 9

Research

"Research is digging facts. Digging facts is as hard as mining coal. It means blowing them out, butting them, picking them, shoveling them, loading them, pushing them to the surface, weighing them and then turning them loose on the public for fuel, light and heat. Facts make a fire which cannot be put out." - John Brophy, United Mine Workers (1921)

You do research to:

- Gather facts to weaken your opponent's position. For example: they've been breaking the law, they really DO have the money for cleanup or the authority to do what you want.
- Dispel fear and doubt. Example: Their threat to move their factory is bogus. They are so heavily invested in your town they'd go bankrupt if they left.
- Get people angry. Example: The president of your local dump makes $525,000 a year, living in the lap of luxury while his company poisons your town.
- Identify and focus on the right targets: WHO's responsible? WHO's got the power to give you what you want?
- Map out good places to recruit members. Sit down with a map and do a "community analysis" of where in the community people may have a reason to join your group (for example, because they live or work near the source of the problem).
- Pinpoint your opponent's strengths and weaknesses and, while you're doing that, find out your own. (Example: Where is your opponent getting the money to support the waste site? Is Does it come from a bank or a government bond?)
- Build leadership by spreading the work around. When people uncover facts, they "own" them; it builds their determination and will to win.

Before you begin doing any actual research, you first need to understand that your research MUST be part of an organizing strategy. You are not doing this research to gain general knowledge, but to WIN A CAMPAIGN. In a lot of ways, organizing research is more like "military intelligence" (a contradiction in terms?) than like research for a high school term paper.

Some people figure, "We don't need a lot of research if we've got enough people." In fact, they're right! You need people more than you need facts to win. But you'll be stronger if you marshal your facts as well as your members. Or you can err in the opposite direction.

It's easy to become "slaves" of research, delaying action until "we gather just a little more information, "or thinking, "Once this stuff gets in the paper, we're sure to win." This pit-fall taken to the extreme is the feeling that you have to become an expert before you do anything.

The answer to, "How much research is enough?" is another question: How much research do you need to organize enough people to win? Research is a tool, not an end product.

Some Tips for Researchers

Only believe what you see with your own eyes and have your eyes examined regularly. In organizing research, much of what you collect will be rumor, hearsay and unsubstantiated. Wherever possible, get it in writing...and get it confirmed.

When you use the phone, know its limitations. Your source can lie (I'm sorry Mr. Dixon is in conference...), hide emotions and fail to volunteer information you might uncover when you go in person.

Inside sources can be great...if you can find them and win their confidence. The best "Deep Throats" are mid-level bureaucrats who were passed over for promotion or who otherwise don't like their bosses or agency. Always protect your sources.

Know the rules for access to information and use them. Generally the public has a right to information. But in most bureaucracies, the only power the lower level bureaucrat has is the power to obstruct, plus a general suspicion of anyone asking out of the ordinary questions.

Use routine information sources and tools. Keep a newspaper clipping file. Get to know your local reference librarian, the journalists who cover environmental stories, academics and students in "Public Interests Research Groups" (PIRG'S) at the university. The internet is also a wonderful source of information, but record the date when you down-load information and copy the link. Links often come down when an issue gets "hot."

Talking to people is the most effective way to collect intelligence. Today's social media tools such as Facebook, blogs, and Twitter are another new way to make contacts and connections.

Make a plan. What do you want to know? Why do you need to know it? Where will you find it? Don't lose sight of the issue for which the research is conducted.

Your research is useless if it is (a) too complicated to be distilled into a simple fact sheet or given to leaders in a briefing; (b) too late to be used in the organizing campaign; (c) unfocussed or off-the-point, or (d) wrong.

Let people in on the fun—don't under estimate them.

Remember, no one took the housewives of Love Canal seriously when they started an in-depth health study on the effects of toxic chemicals on their community. It's amazing what you can do with a little common sense, some street smarts and a determination to fight for what is yours.

Chapter 10

Getting the Dirt on Polluters

Over the years, grassroots groups fighting for environmental justice have become all too familiar with the large waste companies—Waste Management Inc. (WMI) and Browning-Ferris Industries (BFI)—and other large corporate polluters in their communities. During this time, grassroots activists and CHEJ have compiled volumes of information on these companies and their track records. One obvious fact about the waste industry is how lucrative it is. The meteoric growth in the size and profits of WMI and BFI give ample testimony to the money to be made on all types of waste: medical, solid, toxic and radioactive.

It should be no surprise that scores of other companies would want to get in on the golden cash cow of waste disposal. Evidence of this comes to CHEJ every day from the grassroots. Dozens of unheard-of companies—newly formed or new to the waste game—are sprouting up with proposals to bring some kind of waste to communities all over the country.

These proposals cover the spectrum of waste and so-called disposal solutions. We've seen medical waste incinerators proposed in the Midwest by Stericycle, in Louisiana by Med-X, and in Montana by Western Recovery Systems; landfills proposed in Illinois by the Gallatin National Corporation, and in Ohio and Indiana by Danis Environmental Services; soil burners proposed in Alabama by Sunbelt Resources, and in Schuykill County, Pennsylvania by Klean Waste and Walport; and solid waste incinerators proposed in Canada by North American Resource Recovery, and in Kentucky by Johnson Management.

This wave of new players in the waste game presents a new challenge to local groups organizing to fight these unwanted proposals. Unlike the known trash giants, these companies do not arrive in town with notorious reputations preceding them. Yet savvy grassroots activists know the importance of careful investigations into the track records of these waste companies. Groups want to know if the process that sounds too good to be true actually is, where the company has operated before, and if it has any violations on its record.

Though these companies may be new in name, invariably their proposals are as predictable and outdated as yesterday's technology—either burn it or bury it. Often they arrive with fancy new names

for innovative sounding technologies. For instance, in the Marshall Islands, Consolidated Environmental, Inc. has proposed a "pyrolytic resource recovery system" to turn waste into electricity, fuel oil and carbon products. Then there is "neutralysis" which claims to turn municipal trash and clay into harmless "construction aggregate." Neutralysis Industries Development Co. wants to build such a plant in Wisconsin, and has also been looking for sites in Kentucky and Michigan.

Yet when it comes down to the basics of these processes, what is usually involved is burning some kind of waste—medical, solid waste, toxics, contaminated soils, sewage sludge—and using the leftovers in a dubious product or burying it in a landfill.

CHEJ has received dozens of inquiries over the years about these new players in the waste game. When we first get these inquiries, we often have little or no information on many of these companies because they have not established a reputation, or they are only known in a small region of the country. Community groups want to know where these companies are from, what other facilities they have operated, if they have fines or violations, and whether these small companies are connected in some way to the giant polluting corporations.

The Important Basic Questions to Ask

The following questions will get your group started in the right direction investigating the background of any new company with an unwanted proposal in your community.

- Who are they? Get the exact name the company is operating under and the exact spelling of the company name including initials, commas, etc.
- Where are they? Get the addresses and phone numbers of all the company's facilities including local addresses and any other locations where the company operates.
- Who runs things? Ask for names and addresses of all officers, presidents, CEOs and board members. Find out where they live. Determine if the company has only one owner or if it is a partnership or a corporation.
- Where have they been before? Ask for all locations where the company has done what they propose to do in your community. Get the names the facility was operating under including addresses and phone numbers.
- What are the connections? Determine whether the main officers or executives hold offices in other companies or if they are large stockholders in other companies.
- Are there more connections? Find out if the board members and officers are involved in similar projects. Make a list of where else they have built a similar incinerator, or run a landfill or a "pyrolytic resource recovery system."
- Is the company public or private? Find out if the company has a single owner, or is a partnership or a corporation. A corporation sells shares to the public and the stockholders are the "owners" of the company.
- How does the money flow? Determine the company's financial condition. Look at their profit and loss figures.
- Has the company been in any trouble? See if the company is involved in any litigation or administrative complaints. Find out if parts of the company are in financial trouble.

Gathering all this information might seem like a tall order. However, this information is out there, and it is your right to get it. The first and most obvious and most overlooked source is the company itself. You can request from them the entire corporation name, address, officers (or top executives), other locations where the company is operating and what facilities are there, and any violations they might have at any of their facilities. It's your right to know this. The state of Pennsylvania required WMI and BFI to document their history of violations, and fines and charges against them. You can require the same of a company wanting to operate in your community.

Use this request for information as part of your campaign against the company. If you ask for the facts and get them, great, you've just won an initial victory in the battle. If the company won't give you any information, use it against them. These companies all come to town selling themselves as "good neighbors" and saying that they will benefit the community. Yet what "good neighbor" would conceal information about themselves from the community? If they don't provide this information, it's a good indication you shouldn't trust them.

Another information source is local and state records. No matter what type of business you are dealing with, the company should be registered with the state Secretary of State and often also with the county. Even corporations that are not headquartered in your state must register if they are to do business in your state. In such cases, the corporation should be filed with the Secretary of State as a "foreign corporation." Corporations that issue stock are required to file annual reports and 10-K reports with the Securities and Exchange Commission. 10-K reports are the most useful reporting documents. They describe the business, and list the major owners and directors of the board as well as list properties the business owns. 10-K reports include balance sheets, and lists of problems the company may have such as pending litigation. Some of this information is now available on the internet.

The local courthouse should have all permits issued by local authorities for construction, dumping or any activity related to the proposal, as well as land ownership records filed with the local Tax Assessor or Registrar of Deeds (deeds are the only true proof of land ownership). Local business directories also contain information on the company and officers. Again, the internet can be a resource for some of this information.

No matter how much good dirt you have on a company, the decision to site a polluting facility in your community is always a political one. Don't gather facts just for the sake of research. Think of your task as an investigation to gather intelligence on an adversary that you can use as part of your plan to win. So don't let information-gathering detract from your group's organizing efforts. Organizing the community, gaining people power, setting your goals and developing a strategy to win remains the time-tested way to defeat a polluted proposal.

One obvious fact about the waste industry is how lucrative it is. The meteoric growth in the size and profits of WMI and BFI give ample testimony to the money to be made on all types of waste: medical, solid, toxic and radioactive.

Chapter 11
Getting and Using Help

There is a growing array of groups, agencies, and experts that offer their help to groups dealing with toxics and waste issues. Often this help is sincerely offered, gratefully received and truly helpful.

Sometimes it's not.

Too much help, or the wrong kind, can be toxic to grassroots groups. CHEJ believes almost any "helper" can really help IF your group is aware of its own needs, clear about the helper's agenda, and stays in control of the relationship between the "helper" and you, the "helpee."

Types of Helpers

Helpers you are likely to find knocking at your door include:

- State, regional or national groups who say they identify with your case and offer activities on your issues (protests, canvassing, news events).
- Potential allies who want to form coalitions with you.
- Lawyers who offer to represent you.
- Technical experts or labs who offer to sell or donate their services.
- Consultants. Some consultants even offer "packaged" campaigns where, for a fee, they promise to win your fight for you.
- Businesses wanting to market products or services related to your fight (e.g. water filters or bottled water dealers, vitamin sellers).
- Writers or film makers who think they can get your story sold to major media outlets.

Any of These People Could be Useful If...

- You have a clear overall plan for your group.
- What they offer fits into that plan.
- You ask the hard questions and insist on concrete, specific answers.
- You make a clear agreement with the helper.
- You follow a simple rule: MAKE SURE you come out of any relationship in better shape than when you went into it.

Principles for Relationships Between Local and National Groups

- Recognize the right and necessity of each participant to survive and grow.
- Acknowledge that it is possible to work together in ways which are based on mutual respect.
- For this to happen, local groups need to stand up for their rights and control their own fights.
- A national group need to be honest about their needs and what they want from local groups.
- Since the basis of our Movement is people power, we need to keep our eyes on the prize… will this (whatever you're considering working with another group on) bring more people into active participation?
- Will this build local strength?
- Complaints and criticism are important and should be offered directly and with caring.
- Bad mouthing is toxic.
- To respect differences, we must first recognize them and then struggle around them but not paper them over.

Questions to Ask About Helpers

Question # 1: Who approached whom?
Did you ask for help, or did the helper solicit you? It's common for a group that gets its first major media coverage to then be approached by other organizations, lawyers, technical experts, lab services, water filter dealers and radical political groups who offer to "help." At Love Canal, Lois Gibbs had to contend with helpers who didn't even bother to make an offer - they just parachuted in, did their thing and left her to mend the damage. It's often better to let other groups or individuals make the first move. That way, you can control the relationship right from the start. Not everyone who comes to you unsolicited is bad - just remember, check out the helper before you accept the help.

Question # 2: What does the helper get out of this? What's The Helper's Agenda?
Everyone has an agenda. Some helpers are sincerely altruistic. Others want to rip you off. Some are funded to provide the services they offer. Others want your money. Always ask helpers what they expect to gain. For instance, what does CHEJ want? We want to help you win locally and link you with other groups to build a movement for environmental justice. As you may know, we were founded as a result of Lois's struggle at Love Canal and her determination to help local groups FIGHT BACK. For a long time, we did this without getting paid. Now, in addition to member support, we get funding from foundations that helps pay for our work and our salaries.

Question # 3: What do you have to gain?
What exactly does the helper have to offer? How much will it cost? Will you benefit by being associated with the "helper"? Will the benefits outweigh the costs - for example, what if the helper is linked to another cause or institution that might embarrass you? How does the help fit into your plan? Can you do what you need to do, get what you need to get, without them?

Question # 4: Who controls the relationship?
Here's where we see a lot of problems: where the helper, in return for the help, starts to run the group. Examples: the lawyer who diverts the group's energy from organizing to working on the case (from which the lawyer stands to make big bucks); the national organization that gets you working on their national issues, taking time and energy away from your local fight; the "helper" with little understanding of what your community is all about, who starts dictating strategy and tactics; or the helper who play off one leader of the group against another, in order to manipulate the group into following their agenda.

Question #5:Where has the helper done this before?
What were the results? Ask for references. To be doubly sure, you can check with CHEJ to see if we know folks who have worked with that helper. For example, there are lots of characters running around who claim they helped out at Love Canal or take

credit for other big toxics fights. Some really did help. Some were no help at all. Some simply happened to show up one day. Others are simply lying. You'll never know unless you check out their references.

Question #6: If the help is being offered at no cash cost to you, how is the help being funded?
This is a good question people ask us all the time. The answer is CHEJ is supported by you, our members, and mostly private foundations. We take no government money and no money from corporate polluters. Some groups fund their help by canvassing your community door-to-door. This could be a big help to your community group - or it could leave the community drained of money when you try to do your own fundraising. Other organizations get grants to support their help and may want to use your story to get more foundation support. There may not be anything wrong with that provided they tell a true story and aren't in direct competition with your own fundraising plans.

There is - no such thing as a free lunch.

We all need a helping hand from time to time. Most of us were brought up on the old saying about not biting the hand that feeds you. But we've learned that while you're taking the food from the one hand, you should watch to make sure the other hand isn't picking your pocket.

The principles for relationships between local and national groups was written by the late Tom Sampson, Oakland, CA.

Chapter 12

Do You Need a Lawyer?

Almost every group considers at some point whether or not to hire a lawyer. It often comes up when people first get involved in a local community issue. Some groups have had good experiences, but far too many have found it gave them more trouble. Before you get a lawyer, think through your reasons, the price you will pay, and assess if there is a better way. Here's a typical question from a grassroots leader and our response.

We live near an abandoned factory. The land is heavily contaminated with solvents and heavy metals. The state has been working for years with the owner of the site to clean it up. Our well water smells and tastes terrible, but the state tells us there's little or no proof that anyone has gotten sick from drinking the water. One of my children has lupus and another has autism and we have been drinking bottled water for years because I don't want to let my family drink this water. Do we need to get a lawyer to get clean drinking water?

Although there are advantages to hiring a lawyer (see accompanying box), you do not need to rush out and get one. In this example, there are probably many lawyers who would take this case. They could sue both the factory owner and the city, and probably get them to pay a good portion of the funds to get a public water supply to everyone's spigots. However, there are a number of good reasons why you might not want to take this course of action.

- Courts are very slow. People are always elated when they get a lawyer to take their case and even more elated when the lawyer files the suit making lots of demands and accusations. But, the courts are the slowest institution in the world. One reason why the court process is long and drawn out is that lawyers and the experts they use are all paid by the hour. The polluters figure delay works to their benefit and so do their hired guns.
- The courts are the arena in which the defendants best like to fight. Not only are courts slow, but the opposition can use endless technical arguments to slow you down, if not to defeat you outright. Technicalities, such as the exact amount of contamination, accuracy of samples and degree of certainty required to prove danger, can all be held to exacting standards in court. Courts can demand high levels of proof about contamination and danger and make you spend lots of time and money to prove it. But in the political arena, your own belief and common sense about the water

carries a lot more weight. You can "prove" your case in the "court of public opinion" even though you'd have problems proving it in a court of law.

- Suing the government is especially difficult. In most situations, you can't sue the government unless it gives you permission. This is called "sovereign immunity," based on old English common law principle meaning you "can't sue the king." Translated to modern times, it means "you can't fight city hall," at least not in court—if you want to win. People HAVE forced the government to bring them clean public water, to relocate people from contaminated neighborhoods and to do site cleanups. But these victories are rarely won in the courts. The best way to put pressure on government

Common Reasons Why Groups Use Lawyers

- **Advice.** This is a good reason if you confine that advice to legal matters. Lawyer advice on organizing strategy can be conventional, legalistic, constraining, ineffective and often conservative.
- **Research.** This is not a good use of your money. It is better to do it yourself with advice and backup from a lawyer.
- **Representation.** In the courts, this makes sense. But never use a lawyer to speak for you at public meetings or to negotiate for you with your opponents. Let your lawyer advise you on what needs to be entered into an administrative record, but make the presentations yourself.
- **Protection.** If you are being sued or being threatened, you need a lawyer. But get one who will give you an aggressive defense and will not interfere when you apply political pressure.
- **Credibility.** Some groups think they score extra points by having a lawyer. If that is all you've got going for you, whatever credibility you've won by getting a lawyer will disappear quickly when your group does not do anything else.
- **Pressure.** Suing your opponent can increase the pressure on your opponent. But, remember that whatever your lawyer can do to them, their lawyer can do to you—and they are often likely to have more success.
- **Buy Time.** Your opponent surprises you by deciding to go ahead with a landfill permit without a hearing. This is happening so fast that you need to buy time to organize your community. A lawyer can get a TRO (Temporary Restraining Order) to block this action until you can rally your forces.
- **Compensation.** If you have suffered loss of health or property value and want compensation, you probably need a lawyer to take your claim to court. Note that most states have rules called the "statute of limitations" for how soon you must sue, so consult a lawyer for advice on your state's statute of limitations.
- **Publicity.** Sure, a flashy lawsuit will get you in the newspaper. Just make sure the short-term publicity is worth the price you pay in time and energy.
- **Escape.** Some groups have filed lawsuits after all else has failed. However, keep in mind that it is hard to walk away from a problem by filing a lawsuit. You leave yourself open to countersuit for "malicious prosecution."

agencies is through direct action that gets you lots of publicity and makes them deal with you constantly. Once the politicians realize they can't get rid of you, they will figure it's easier to give you water than to have to face you at every meeting and in front of the media and explain why they refuse to give you water.

- It is likely to cost a lot of money. There are three ways lawyers charge for their time: A) On a contingency basis; B) fee-for-service; or C) on a *pro bono* basis. Under the contingency arrangement, the lawyer takes the case in return for (or contingent on) a share of whatever you win, which is usually around 33% plus expenses. If you win, so does the lawyer. However, if you are represented by a small firm versus a big corporation, the corporation's lawyers may try to stall and jack up the costs to "starve out" your lawyer. Since your lawyer does not see a nickel until the case is settled, she or he may pressure you to accept a less-than-fair-settlement because they can no longer afford to handle your case. Then you are stuck. A fee-for-service basis, or pay as you go, gives you the greatest amount of control but will involve the ongoing agony of raising money to pay the lawyer. Hiring a lawyer to try to block a landfill in some cases could cost over $100,000. What will this do to your group? Some lawyers will take a case for free, or on a "*pro bono*" basis. This is rare, however, and can be tricky, since you have no financial control (or priority) with the lawyer. You may have no choice but fee-for-service, especially if your case does not involve suing for damages. A lawyer will only take a case on a contingency basis if the odds of winning substantial damages are high.

Dealing with your environmental problem takes a mixed approach—good organizing and a savvy use of the legal process. Regardless of how good your reasons are for hiring a lawyer, there will always be a price to pay. You can minimize this price and maximize the benefits by keeping the lawyer's role secondary to your organizing work. Have a clear contract and hold your lawyer accountable to the group. Lawyers, like any expert or politician, are tools. You want to use that tool for your own purposes and not let that tool use you.

Original contributor: Ron Simon, attorney, Simon & Associates, Washington, DC.

The Disadvantages of Having Lawyers

- Lawyers cost lots of money, unless you can get one to take your case on a contingency basis or on a *pro bono* basis (for free), which is rare.
- A large chunk of your membership may leave, thinking that, "Now we have a lawyer to handle the problem for us."
- Once a suit is filed, you have a long, frustrating waiting game ahead of you. People get worn out and bored waiting for something to happen.
- Most lawyers have opinions about group strategy. If your lawyer says "Don't protest," at least a few of your members are going to agree and the internal fights begin.
- Many groups get so dependent on their lawyer that they let the legal process govern their strategy and won't make a move without consulting the lawyer.
- Once you file a law suit, your opponent won't talk to you anymore and won't give you any information.

Section III.
Key Strategies and Tactics to Win

Center for Health, Environment & Justice | Mentoring a Movement, Empowering People, Preventing Harm
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Chapter 13

Campaign Organizing

Planning is an important part of any successful group's efforts. Pretty obvious, right? But for being so obvious, planning for the long term seems to fall by the wayside for many groups.

There are plenty of reasons groups don't get around to creating a long-term plan. Keeping up with the latest public hearing, research needs, or attending group meetings is plenty to do. Reacting to the demands and developments of a local environmental fight can leave a group strugglingto keep up. But often, reacting is all that groups are doing, when instead they need to be taking the offensive in order to win. Most environmental struggles take a long time. So take some time to step back and think about how to get to your goal.

Why plan for things beyond the upcoming hearing, group meeting, or press conference by the local polluters? Because long term planning can offer some structure to make sure that those next steps serve as stepping stones on the path toward your ultimate goal, not just reaction to the latest move by industry or regulators. Where does that task force, permit hearing, or study fit into the big picture? How does it get you closer to your goal?

To answer these questions, you have to have already defined what your ultimate goal is, who can help you achieve it, and what steps to take to reach it.

A long-term plan can also help you divide the big, daunting goal of "winning" into more approachable smaller steps. Beating city hall can be intimidating. So break beating city hall into smaller steps that can be checked off along the way.

Documents like the Cerrell and Epley reports, which described the demographics of communities that are least likely to resist the siting of noxious facilities, show us that industry has put time and effort into planning for the long term. Their long-term goal is to site and operate their polluting facilities without being bothered by community opposition. They consider that long term goal when they study which characteristics make a community least likely to resist solid waste facilities (in the Cerrell report) or nuclear waste dumps (in the Epley report), or work to weaken regulation. Shouldn't we spend as much time as our opponents deciding what we ultimately want and how we're going to get it?

Deciding What You Want

"Long-term" is a fairly vague phrase. Exactly how far into the future are you supposed to go? That depends on your goal. The amount of time covered by your plan isn't as important as what you are planning for. What does your group want? Again, a seemingly obvious point, but deciding on your goal is the first step in long-term planning.

An example to illustrate the long term planning process is a community group CHEJ worked with in Baltimore, a community that was surrounded by industrial facilities. Their health was impacted by the emissions from these facilities, their quality of life was damaged by the hundreds of trucks that roared by their houses every day, and their safety was threatened because they are trapped if an accident closed the only road which leads in and out of their neighborhood. The community group was fighting for relocation. So there was a goal - relocation. But that's fairly vague. It's not likely that anyone was going to just agree to relocate this community. And what would a fair relocation look like? The group needed to decide what they really wanted.

After lots of discussion, the group had a stated goal — to find funding for relocation to comparable houses in safe neighborhoods. And they had a list of conditions, including amounts of money needed for homeowners and renters, which would determine what a fair relocation would have to include. They were ready for the next step.

Who Can Give You What You Want?

Identifying targets will help you focus your efforts and define your strategy. Think about who has the power to make the things you have identified as goals happen. If you want a facility's permit application to be denied, then the state or federal agency making that decision (and the elected official who is their boss) is your target. Targeting a candidate for city council may not be the most effective use of your time in this case. If the city zoning board can give you what you want, a letter writing campaign to the President isn't going to be that effective.

For the group in Baltimore, this step was about finding sources of money. It wasn't likely that it would all come from the same place, so the group came up with several targets. They decided that the city, state, and federal governments, as well as the industries themselves, could give them what they wanted, which was funding for relocation. Now it was time to think about tactics.

Tactics and Milestones

You have a long-term goal and at least one target to go after. So how do you get there? It's time to think about how to break up your fight into smaller pieces. The goal of each smaller piece or phase of the fight can be marked by a milestone. When you reach that milestone, it's time to move on to the next phase. In Baltimore, the question was who to go after first. It would be exhausting and probably not very effective to try to pressure all four targets at once. So, while keeping the big picture in mind, the group decided in what order to go after their sources of funding. The milestones along the way to reaching their goal were commitments from each of the targets. Their first milestone was a commitment from the mayor. Next were commitments from the state government, the federal government, and the industries. The last milestone in their long-term plan was getting all these groups together to work out the relocation deal.

Sounds pretty simple - five milestones on the way to their goal of relocation. The long-term plan doesn't have to be complicated. It just serves as a guide to keep your efforts moving in the right direction, towards your long-term goal. Many opportunities to expend your time and energy will come your way in the course of your fight. Some of them might be worthwhile, but they could also deplete your energy, waste your time, and keep you from going after those that can give you what you want. Some common activities that pull groups off track are task forces and studies. Use your long-term plan to help you decide if something will move your group forward. Also think about timing. Participating in a task force or study now may not help you reach your next milestone, but would it be more useful in later efforts?

Be Focused Yet Flexible

Your plan shouldn't list every action or tactic you take. You can't plan everything that far in advance. You have to fill them in as you go along, considering what will work under current circumstances. The group in Baltimore had a long term plan that fit entirely onto one sheet of paper. It didn't dictate every move they would make. The plan said pressure the mayor. The group decided to picket city hall, generate media coverage, and flood the mayor with phone calls as they worked toward that milestone. A long-term plan is not an excuse to be inflexible because you've planned out every little detail in advance and refuse to adapt to new situations. It is a guide to help you focus as you work out your next move, considering what has changed and what you have learned along the way.

Revisit Your Plan Regularly

As you reach the milestones in your long-term plan, check them off the list, take a step back and look at the big picture. Remind yourselves how far you've come. Talk about how you got there and what you learned along the way. What worked? Will it help you get to your next milestone? Congratulate yourselves on the progress you've made and then start thinking about how to take the next step.

The community group that was fighting for relocation in Baltimore followed their plan over the course of six months and got the city, state, and federal governments to the table to talk about how to fund a relocation. All the parties at the table were interested in getting the fourth target, industry to commit as well. The work they did at the beginning of their fight to develop a long term plan guided them and this brought them much closer to their goal of a fair relocation.

A long-term plan is a guide to help you focus as you work out your next move, considering what has changed and what you have learned along the way.

Chapter 14

Art, Activism and Group Spirit

Our organizing and campaigns should always contain an element of fun, humor, and street theater, which can be a powerful way of generating media attention, reaching new allies and disarming our opponents. Organizing is hard, and so we should make every effort to make sure people enjoy doing it. Don't go empty-handed. Though most groups use flyers, fact sheets and picket signs, there are other props you can use to get your message across.

- Flags. In San Francisco, 300 marchers protesting PCB transformers went down the street led by the American and United Nation Flags, with dozens of flags of all nations among them rating a special, full-color photo on the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle! In Lake Charles, L.A. shrimp boats were decked out with black flags, the maritime signal for plague, to protest ocean incineration. After the procession, the black flags were recycled for a mock funeral procession as draping for cars and black armbands.
- Balloons. Groups in New Jersey and Virginia fighting incinerators used balloons released at the site of incinerators to show how wind would carry wastes all over the community. "Balloon Actions" will get you publicity and coverage on the site where you release them and, if you play it right, elsewhere. Try leading a press tour as you follow the balloons on their travels. Attach a card to the balloons for retrieval where they land stating, "This balloon was released at the site of a hazardous waste incinerator. Just as this balloon landed here, so will toxic waste. Concerned? Call Citizens Against Contamination in the Air (ACAC), 222-2222"
- "Mister Wizard." Try this at the next public meeting. Take a clear glass container and fill it with soil from the local site. Pour colored water in the top and watch how long it takes to travel to the bottom. Is your site "ideal" because of its clay soil? Set up the demonstration in advance: pour the water into the container in front of the local minister or pastor, and unveil it later at a public meeting.
- Groups in Naugatuck, CT and Baltimore, MD have done "Moon suit" actions, with simulated hazardous waste suits, purchased for $10 or less. You can also buy hard hats for less than $5 and army surplus gas masks to complete the outfit.

- In a Baton Rouge, LA hearing, citizens tried to dramatize their well water contamination by holding up a fishbowl filled with well water. The lead speaker said he would drop goldfish into the bowl and "by the time my testimony is over, these fish will be dead." The legislators were outraged by "cruelty" to animals but less concerned that people had to drink that same water.
- In Toledo, OH, another "Mr. Wizard" display was planned to fight a proposed dump site. Public officials claimed the site would be perfectly safe with a plastic liner. The "Toximatic" display involved: a blender, water, a plastic bag and two eggs. Just the week before, Toledo had an earthquake. The "Toximatic" was to show the effects on toxic waste barrels (the eggs) with their plastic liner (the bag) on ground water when an earthquake happens (turn on the blender). Props help you tell your story: "Talking Outhouses" (used by groups in Ohio and Illinois), symbolic coffins, toxic waste barrels and costumes will keep your actions lively.
- Religion: Incorporate your community institutions into your actions. Some groups use religious services as part of all of the action! For example, if your issues include waste dump trucks cruising through your neighborhood, how about a church service right in the middle of the road!
- Dry Ice. Confront the legislative opponents of "right to know" laws with bubbling containers of water and a chunk of dry ice. The lawmakers will shout, "What the heck's in that!?!" "Oh, so you think you have the RIGHT-TO-KNOW?"

Element of fun, humor, and street theater can be a powerful way of generating media attention, reaching new allies and disarming our opponents.

You can come up with your own great ideas for tactics. But, as a leader, you have to open the door! Don't be so solemn that members feel out of line when they think of creative ways to deliver the message. Some groups are so concerned about maintaining a dignified image, or in being unemotional, that their meetings and actions are about as energizing as a funeral. And they wonder why people don't come back; why only a small core group of people does all the work. The general rule is that people are most likely to come to the next group event if they liked the last one.

Chapter 15

Organizing a Successful Action

"CMA, The Cancer Starts Here!" "CMA, The Cancer Starts Here!" "CMA, The Cancer Starts Here!"

The chant was heard bouncing off the sky scrapers as 240 activists marched upon the Chemical Manufacturers Association (*now known as the American Chemistry Council*) headquarters. It has become a tradition at CHEJ's conferences that action is part of the agenda. That year, we kicked off Breast Cancer Awareness Month by sending a message to Corporate America, demanding they take responsibility for the cancer caused by the products and pollution they produce.

Sandra Steingraber, author of *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment*, gave a moving speech before we left the hotel. Following a huge banner that read, "CMA, The Cancer Starts Here," 240 people, and almost as many yellow and blue balloons, travelled by subway to the shiny new suburban skyscraper that houses the Chemical Manufacturers Association and its offshoot, the Chlorine Chemistry Council.

Police officers and specially hired security guards were waiting for us in front of the building. Traffic cones were set up to define where the public sidewalk ended and the building's private property began. Squeezed onto the newly defined public sidewalk and forbidden from standing on the retaining wall, twelve men and women from across the United States told stories of cancer and chemicals in their community. Childhood leukemia and PCB dumping in New Bedford, Massachusetts; childhood brain cancer and hazardous waste incineration in Rochester, New York; lung, liver and soft tissue cancers and dioxin exposure from pentachlorophenol dumping in Pensacola, Florida represent a few of these stories. At the end of each person's account, they turned, pointed at the building and said, "But the cancer starts here." Each time the crowd responded by pointing and chanting, "The cancer starts here!"

After the event, CHEJ de-briefed with many of the participants going over what went right and what didn't. It's always important to get together after an action with your key leaders to go over how the event went and to decide on any follow-up steps that need to be taken. Here are some general guidelines for organizing an effective action.

- **Establish clear goals for your action. Make sure all participants understand and share these goals.**
  Plan your action for the intended audience. The action was designed to be a hands-on workshop for convention participants and to call attention to the corporate polluters responsible for harming the environment and health of our communities. The goal for this event was not to attract media attention to a new campaign or to disrupt the workings of the CMA, which was why we held the event on a Saturday afternoon. If your goal is to generate media coverage than your choice of date, time and location must be made with this is mind.

- **Design your action to empower participants. Actions are a powerful way to build community participation in your efforts.**
  Actions need to feel powerful for the participants, not just for the camera crews. The people who come are putting a lot of trust in the planners. In return the planners should design an event that respects all participants. Take the needs of participants into consideration when planning logistics. Select, or create, a site where all participants can see and hear. Is a sound system or a stage needed? If the goal of the event is to get as many people as possible to turn out, is the location accessible by public transportation? If the event is outdoors, think about weather conditions. Do you need to have rain tarps on hand? Will participants be forced to look into the sun to see the speakers? Also, consider the length of the event. An outdoor event in the winter should last no more than thirty minutes, whereas an outdoor summer event can last 3 hours.

- **Make sure you have trained, easy to identify peacekeepers or marshals who are clear about their responsibilities.**
  The peacekeepers at our event helped 240 people on and off the subway system to the CMA's headquarters without a hitch. They patrolled the perimeter of the crowd, kept people out of traffic and interfaced with police officers, who were expecting more trouble than we ever planned to give. The peacekeepers' experience at previous actions, their willingness to take charge and their shared understanding of the action's goals turned a good idea into a great action.

  Identify a core group of folks to act as peacekeepers at the event. Peacekeepers are generally responsible for leading the crowd to and from the rally site, serving as liaison between police or security officers and the organizers, and making sure participants stay within legal limits during the event. Conduct a training session for designated peacekeepers prior to the event and make sure roles and responsibilities are understood. Peacekeepers should wear a brightly colored arm band, t-shirt or hat for quick, easy identification. Peacekeepers need to be able to respond at a moment's notice and, therefore, should not be expected to hand out fliers or carry signs. Peacekeepers are not enforcers, but rather the ones who keep the action running smoothly.

  Event organizers should determine, well in advance, whether or not there will be people risking arrest. If the goal is to risk arrest, decide if it's a mass act of civil disobedience, or just a select few who break off from the crowd and get arrested. No one should risk arrest without being trained in the principles of non-violent civil disobedience. Similarly, no one should ever be placed in a potential arrest situation without their consent and the advice of a lawyer. If an organized arrest situation is planned, make sure there is a lawyer present at the action so they can facilitate the legal process.

- **Anticipate surprises and be prepared for every contingency.**
  At the CMA Action, we were not prepared for the security guards hired specifically to keep us from hanging our banner and using the retaining wall as a stage. Had we thought of it, we would have come equipped with an alternative stage and megaphone. Because we were prohibited from

hanging our banner most of the participants were unable to see it. Had we brought step stools, we could have held the banner above the crowd and it would have been seen by everyone, including those driving and walking by. Nevertheless, this underscores the importance of having several visual means for getting your message across. We made placards for participants to hold, so our message was still visible.

- **Encourage bystanders to become your allies.** Identify people to distribute flyers to passers-by, explaining what your group is doing and why they should be interested. The flyer or leaflet should also tell them how to get more information on the issue and how to become involved. If your action stops traffic or in any other way interferes with innocent bystanders, your flyer should apologize for the inconvenience and explain the importance of the action's goals.
- **Recycle good ideas.** The action at the Chemical Manufacturers Association was a hybrid of an idea, which was never implemented, from the National Coalition for Health and Environmental Justice and the Toxic Links Coalition's Cancer Awareness Month toxic tours. We amended the idea to fit our situation and resources. As a result we were inspired. Some people participated in their first action, the chemical industry spent some extra money on security guards, and all of the participants can replicate the action in their own communities.

Chapter 16

Bird-Dogging Candidates and Elected Officials

What is Bird-Dogging?

Bird-dogging is a tactic that many organizations, and concerned citizens, use to pressure candidates or elected representatives to take a public stance on an issue, or to question a stance that they have already taken. It usually consists of one or more bird-doggers who go to a public event where a candidate (Presidential or others) or elected representative, such as a Senator, Mayor or member of Congress will appear. The bird-doggers ask pointed questions about issues they care about in order to elicit a response and educate the media and voters. Because members of the media often attend these events, bird-dogging plays an important role in getting candidates' positions "on record." We all know that politicians don't always keep their promises once they're elected, so this is a vital part of holding them accountable to their constituents.

Bird-dogging candidates or an elected representative is a great way to raise important issues with them, the media and voters.

How to Bird-dog

Here are some tips to help you get started on a successful bird-dogging campaign. Many of these tips come from www.birddogger.org.

A) Find out where the candidate will be.
One of the easiest ways to find out where a candidate will be is to join his or her email list, or to check the website of the candidate or the candidate's party. If you have good contacts with the media, you might be able to get information from friendly journalists, or those with a progressive point of view. Stay up-to-date with local newspapers and news websites, as they often publish calendars of candidate events. Find out as much about each event as you can, so you know what to expect ahead of time.

You could also consider organizing your own issue forum or candidate debate. This might be easier to do if you co-host the event with other organizations, or with a prominent coalition. One advantage to this kind of event is that you can invite candidates to speak only to the issues you choose.

B) Prepare your questions ahead of time.
You'll need to have your questions ready before the event. That way, while every one else is thinking of what they want to ask, you'll already be prepared. If

there is an open question and answer period your pre-planning will pay off. Most people don't raise their hands immediately. But as a well-prepared bird-dogger you can express immediate interest in asking a question - so get your hand up early and often, and sit up front.

Here are two sample questions on Superfund and "depleted" uranium.

- The Federal Superfund program has been bankrupt for years because Congress has not reinstated the polluter pay fees and as a result Superfund toxic waste sites have languished in communities across the country, including X site in our county. **Will you support reinstating the polluter pay fees to refinance Superfund this year?**
- "Depleted" uranium (DU) weapons produce radioactive, toxic heavy metal dust when fired. Inhaling this dust exposes people to radiation and heavy metal poisoning. These health hazards affect our troops, as well as communities where DU has been manufactured and tested. The federal agencies have ignored the radiation hazards and refused to conduct community health studies. Compensation cases for poisoned workers 25 years ago have still not been resolved. **How will you ensure that the manufacturing of DU weapons does not poison our communities and workers?**

C) Bird-dogging Tips.
Here are some additional tips to make your bird-dogging effort a success.

Sometimes only members of the media are allowed to ask questions. In this case, see if you can get a journalist to ask some of the questions you've prepared.

Work in teams of two or more people and disperse. Bird-dogging can sometimes make people nervous so it's best to go in teams of two or more for support. Also, if you have two people in a team, one can ask the question while another writes down the response. It's best if you can get the candidate's response on camera, but either way, get an accurate quote of what was said so you can pass the information on to the media and others.

When you ask a question, be prepared with a follow up question — you might just get the opportunity to ask it. And, this way if someone else asks your question you'll have a backup. If you have a group of people at the event, split them up. Dispersing at the event might allow everyone in the group to ask a question.

Keep it cordial. You are likely to get more of a response from candidates, and make a positive impression on the media, if you are calm and respectful in your demeanor. Hardly anyone is 100 percent opposed to your views, so try and come up with a compliment on a candidate's position that you can mention before you ask your question.

Chapter 17

Mobilizing or Organizing?

I recently helped organize a march and demonstration that brought together a lot of different parts of our community. We had a great turnout and got some great press coverage of the rally. But after the event, someone said to me, "This isn't really organizing. What about the future?" Now I'm confused and feeling like the work I did wasn't important. What gives?

The real question here is what is the difference between doing an action and doing a demonstration? In other words, what is the difference between mobilizing and organizing? Take the campaign against Proposition 187 in California. There were a lot of mobilizations - demonstrations that brought people out - but there were no targeted actions. Now, don't get me wrong. Mobilization is a thing that good organizers do. Mobilization is getting people together, moving people out. It's bringing people in to do action. It's where you're using everything including phone calls, personal visits and handing out fliers - that brings a certain level of consciousness to the community. That's fine and dandy. On the other hand, in organizing, the primary motivation for doing things is to build the base of an organization and to develop your leaders. Our actions are targeted to be able to go after a pressure point or an individual so that we can eventually sit down and negotiate our demands. They're not actions in the abstract.

So what's an example of the difference? If we look at Proposition 187, there were major demonstrations in California. In San Francisco the demonstrations brought out high school students from all over the city. But who was their target? There wasn't one. What were the demands? There weren't any, at least, nothing really specific that you could hold someone in power to. The demonstrations did serve to create awareness in the public that young people saw Prop. 187 as negative. They were trying to influence the election results on Election Day and get people to understand that the issue wasn't about economics or jobs or taxes, but about promoting a return to a society where racism becomes a way to operate.

That's all fine, but that's not organizing, unless what's going on is actively working to build your organization. In Redwood City, a march and demonstration happened that were the first-ever major demonstrations of La Raza around Proposition 187. Two thousand people marched, but then turn around and look at Redwood City today What has grown? Has an organization expanded? Built up its membership? Did they develop their leaders? The answer has to be no. The same is true of the demonstrations against the Contract with America. Many of the activists involved aren't even sure how people got there.

Mobilization is getting people together, moving people out. It's bringing people in to do action.

That's crucial in organizing - understanding how people got there, understanding and recognizing your leaders, and capturing those leaders and bringing them into your organization. For an organizer it would be important to have 100 people at a demonstration and to know exactly how those people got there. You know which leaders talked to people and can talk to them again, not just for this one event, but maybe for another campaign. An organizer would come with very concrete goals and demands. They would know exactly who they were going to go pressure and what they were going to demand from them. It wouldn't be an abstract demonstration. It would be an action aimed at getting a response, to win something, to consciously build the base of the organization.

It may be true that in the situation where you are mobilizing students, for example, you may not be able to get people involved in an organization right away. Maybe you're trying to get students to feel angry and empowered and excited about a particular issue as a beginning process to them becoming politicized. That's not totally abstract. If I was able to get the kids together at Fremont High School to walk out together around the 187 question, I need to know who got the kids to do that, who were the main kids involved who pulled out their buddies. Can I bring them back together? Because those same students, who were protesting 187 have also been raising other demands around school improvements. What kinds of bilingual education do we want — not just the words, but what classes do we actually want - and who has the power to give that? Can I bring those same students together and go after the people - the principal, the superintendent - who have the power to impact that school and make changes? Can I hold them to it with clear-cut demands?

That means knowing what you want. Not just knowing what the problem is. You can't just turn around and talk to the institution about the problem without having the demands. If you talk about the problem and just expect them to resolve them, well, that's being foolish. They're the system that's running it. They can't figure out the problem, so what makes you think they'll know the answer?

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Chapter 18

Forming and Joining a Coalition

A coalition is an organization of organizations who work together for a common goal. An individual membership organization cannot technically be a coalition, although the term is used loosely in common conversation. Coalitions come in a variety of different forms. They can be permanent or temporary, single or multi-issued, geographically defined, limited to certain constituencies (such as a coalition of incinerator groups), or a combination of some different groups.

Coalitions are only as strong as each of its member groups. If the coalition consists of 10 groups whom each have few or no members, you end up with a coalition defined by an equation of 0 + 0 = 0. However, if a coalition consists of leaders from strong organizations with an active membership base, the math is quite different as is the level of power the coalition has to achieve its goals. Therefore you need to build a local group, before you enter into or establish a coalition. If you have not built a strong group, then build your group first.

Those who join a coalition need to have some organizational self-interest. If the release of a dangerous chemical like dioxin, for example, is the issue in which a coalition effort is focused, than an organization's self-interest must be around dioxin and its related impacts on health, jobs, the economy and the environment. Each group brings its own history, structure, agenda, values, culture, leadership and relationships to a coalition. It is important for all members of the coalition to understand each other in order to build on their strengths and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

There Are Many Advantages of Working in Coalition. The advantages far exceed the disadvantages of building a coalition. One of the strongest reasons to build a coalition is to begin to speak and work with other issue groups so that we can reclaim democracy and rebuild citizen power.

Advantages to Building a Coalition

- **Win on an issue, which you could not have won alone.** Stopping a nationwide problem like the numerous adverse health problems caused by exposures to dioxins cannot be done by a single group. A group may be able to help stop some dioxin exposures by shutting down a medical waste incinerator or a PVC manufacturing plant,

but to eliminate exposures on a nationwide level we would need to go beyond a single dioxin producing site to other sources of dioxin. We would need to undertake massive consumer education, develop marketing incentives through consumer purchases, assist the labor movement in conversion of different industries such as paper and pulp to protect jobs and worker's health, change the medical institutions' product usages and disposal practices and the use of herbicide and pesticides to name a few.

- **Build a lasting base.** A single group has power but joining together with other organizations increases that power. When groups unite from different issues it not only creates more power, but it helps to broaden the group members' vision of the many injustices that exist, how they are connected and how collectively groups can create social change.
- **Develop new leaders.** Experienced leaders from coalition groups could be asked to participate in the coalition which would then leave an opening for new leaders in the individual groups. With training, new leadership will emerge, consequently broadening the leadership ranks.
- **Increase the impact of individual organizations' effort.** Not only does your involvement help you win, but you make the work you undertake more effective. There are more people who have a better understanding of your issues, and more people who can assist your group.
- **Increase the resources available.** Your group may directly benefit from additional members and may share some of the resources other coalition members have such as office space, meeting space, printing equipment or money. You may also have access to contacts, connections and relationships these other groups have established which your group may be able to use.
- **Broaden scope.** A coalition may provide the opportunity for your group to work on state or national issues, making the scope of your work more far reaching. Although the local work is the most valuable work you do, some members may feel important and excited about also doing work beyond the local issues.

Disadvantages of Working in a Coalition

- **Could distract from other work if you are not careful.** Your group's work on the coalition could take too much time away from the local efforts if leaders are not careful. If that happens, not only will the local work not be as successful but it weakens the coalitions work: 0+0=0. Your group needs to identify ways to make the issue relevant to the organization's other work to protect against the coalition's work becoming an excessive distraction.
- **Weak members can't deliver.** Organizations providing leadership and resources may get impatient with some of the weaker groups' inexperience and inability to deliver on commitments.
- **Too many compromises.** To keep the coalition together, it is often necessary to play to the least common denominator, especially when deciding tactics. Groups that like more confrontational, highly visible tactics may feel that the more subdued tactics of a coalition are not exciting enough to activate their members.
- **Inequality of power.** The range of experience, resources and power can create internal problems. One group, one vote does not always sit well with groups with a wide range of power and resources. Your coalition needs to define this power relationship to address the bigger/richer groups versus the smaller resource-poor groups.
- **Individual organizations may not get credit.** If all activities are done in the name of the coalition, groups that contribute a lot often feel they do not get enough credit.

Clearly, not all experiences are positive, but almost everyone agrees that when there is an important

shared goal, the benefits can outweigh the problems. So how do we emphasize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages? Building coalition members is different than building a local group. In a coalition you don't develop leadership; rather you need to figure out how to work with the leaders from member organizations and help them participate fully. Most of the people you will deal with already know how to be leaders. What they may not know is how to work with each other, and how to function in a coalition so that it both builds the coalition and builds their own organizations.

Another difference is that you are not creating an entry in which anyone who so desires may participate. You are carefully pulling together the appropriate groups, in the appropriate order, to ensure that all who "should" be in "on the ground floor" are invited, seemingly simultaneously. This must be done carefully, and it requires a skilled leader who can juggle a number of things at once. You must talk to all the key players at about the same time to avoid anyone feeling as if they are "the last" to be consulted or invited.

This is not to say that individuals can't join a coalition, it's just not your primary recruitment strategy. Individuals should be asked to pay dues, to agree to the coalition's mission and goals and accept that they would have a different voting role since they don't represent anyone but themselves. Maybe a formula could be developed, such as one elected representative from the pool of individuals that can vote on behalf of every 50 individual members.

Organizations will bring different strengths and weaknesses to the coalition. As long as each member understands and accepts what other members bring, problems should be minimal. For example, one organization may be able to contribute large sums of money but is unable to turn out its membership, while the opposite would be true of another member organization. Both can be essential to the success of the coalition effort and should be valued for the resources they bring.

Identifying Areas of Agreement

It is rare that all members of any coalition agree on all issues. You need to "agree to disagree" on some issues and stay focused on the priority goal in which you do agree. If the disagreements are so fundamental that they interfere with all of the work, then working together may just not be possible. You need to try and recognize those groups where there are fundamental disagreements immediately, and flag this before the disagreements infect the workings of the entire coalition.

Getting the Right People to the Table

As organizations join the coalition, their choice of representatives to the board is an indication of how seriously they take the coalition. If the presidents of the respective organizations do not participate, they should send a high-ranking board member or staff person as the regular representative. Some coalitions make participation dependent on sending an "important" representative. It is very disruptive to have a series of individuals "fill in" for the named representative on the coalition.

Depending on the level of the coalition, different working arrangements are necessary. For example, in a large national coalition, and even in statewide coalitions in large states, it is very cumbersome and expensive to bring the whole board together regularly. Such coalitions often choose a working group or committee to meet to develop strategy. As long as the board is clear on how policy is set and trust the working group to check back at appropriate points, this method can be useful. Whatever the structure, it should be clear to all coalition group members.

Recognizing Resources

One of the most frequent problems of coalition building is that of giving and receiving credit. To those who haven't had the experience of working in a grassroots organization, all of the fighting and jockeying over who gets recognition and for what, often seems petty. Some coalition organizers may feel that this is something that groups need to be cured of,

and that the proper "attitudes" will make it go away. Quite the contrary, these problems are rooted in the basic survival instinct. They will never go away, nor should they.

An organization's ability to raise money, recruit members, build power, attract staff, develop leaders and fulfill its mission depends directly on the amount of public credit it receives, particularly in the media. Coalitions that lose sight of credit concerns don't last long.

When the issue of the coalition is of only secondary importance to a particular affiliate, then credit is less of a problem. But when the issue of the coalition is also the main issue of the affiliate, than credit is a big problem. The program needs to be structured so that there are things the affiliates do jointly as a coalition, and other things that the coalition helps them do in their own names.

Keeping Out of Internal Battles

Never become involved in the internal politics of any coalition member organization. You could end up losing because you have to work with the winners which may resent your advice and meddling in their organizational business. Stay neutral during member's internal election campaigns, or fights. Be careful not to become involved in jurisdictional fights between unions in your coalition, or in turf battles between community groups. If you are unaware of these problems, it is easy to fall into the trap of having the coalition take an action which favors one side or the other.

Joining a coalition is not always the right thing to do for your group. When there's an important shared goal, the benefits can outweigh any potential problems. Groups that join a coalition need to have some organizational self-interest. Organizations will bring different strengths and weaknesses to the coalition. As long as each member understands and accepts what other members bring, problems should be minimal. Finally, you in the words of a great organizer, Tim Sampson, "The flowers of organizational relationships grow from personal interest, kindness and cultivation."

Key Questions for Joining a Coalition

- **What competing organizational self-interests exist between members? How will the coalition handle these issues?** This is important to know before any strategy decisions can be made. For instance, some incinerator fighters may want to close down the incinerator, ,but the union may want to protect those jobs.
- **Which organizations are contributing the most and which are gaining the most by participating?** If those contributing the bulk of the resources are not getting what they want, eventually they will resent seeing their resources go for things that are not a high priority for them and will stop participating.
- **Where is the money coming from?** All of the questions surrounding money are critical to understanding who has control over the coalition. If the bulk of the income is raised from the coalition partners, they will have the most control. More often, additional money will have to be raised to support the coalition.
- **Who is being excluded and why?** If certain groups are being excluded, you want to understand why, to help you better understand the politics and self-interest surrounding the issue.

Chapter 19

Polluter's Secret Plan: Expect It, Don't Neglect It

One strategy used by polluters to defeat grassroots groups involves polluters paying money to organize and advertise phony "citizens" groups. Their goal is deflecting attention away from efforts by real community organizations, confusing concerned citizens, gaining media attention, and providing politicians with an excuse to say, "My constituency is not in agreement with this facility, therefore it is up to ME to decide its fate."

Public meetings are the prime target of citizen/polluter attacks on your organization. The polluter may organize an opposition citizen group to attend and disrupt, or they may bring in workers from local or outside facilities or a legion of executives and lawyers, or hire a public relations firm to discredit you or misrepresent "environmental" claims.

If you anticipate trouble at a public meeting, consider the following:

Pre-Planning: Your group's core should plan out the meeting beforehand, but also develop a plan to handle disruptions at the meeting. Develop a purpose statement and an agenda for the meeting. CHEJ staff can be very useful for meeting pre-planning and role-plays. Once you've developed a plan, stick to it.

Rules: Outline some basic common courtesies that everyone participating in the meeting agrees to, such as one speaker at a time. Help people stick to these rules.

Jobs: The polluter will use "jobs vs. environment" during this economically depressed time. Your neighbors and workers can be whipped into a frenzy if they believe you're out to destroy their livelihoods. Involve workers in your meetings and organization before the polluter targets you, and continue reaching out to workers. Adopt a statement about protecting jobs and developing safe workplaces in your organization's goals and then work toward achieving it. Include your jobs statement at every meeting and consider raising the issue as part of your meeting's agenda.

Credentials: When anyone stands up to make a statement at your meeting, have your rules specify that each speaker indentify who they are, where they live and where they work. This precludes organized "outsiders" claiming they're taxpayers and helps

audience members understand why some people may make angry statements.

Introduce Your Guests: If you bring in an "outsider" to make a presentation at your meeting, state that your group (i.e. local taxpayers) has invited this person in to the community. If an elected official, company executive/lawyer, or others that you recognize show up to give you a hard time introduce, them at the beginning of your meeting.

Use Your Welcome Committee: Greeting people at the door and matching interested new folks with experienced veterans is not the only use of the welcome committee. If you know "yahoos" are coming to bust up the meeting, have your welcome committee ask folks how they heard about the meeting. If it's a member's only meeting or you paid for the hall, you can keep out disrupters. If you've heard threats, let the local police/sheriff know about it and ask them to stand at the door.

Maintain A Sense Of Calm: You want newcomers to leave the meeting with a positive experience. There's no point in scaring away your potential allies by getting in a "point counterpoint" shouting match. This result is what the polluter wants. Use your meeting's purpose statement and agenda to stay on track. Polluter-organized individuals will try to get you arguing or talking at length about non-issues. Example: "Do you drive a car? Don't you know that cars release more contamination....etc."

Control The Microphone: Watch Sally Jesse Raphael or Phil Donahue for helpful tips. Once a polluter, agency official or politician gets control of the microphone, you've lost your meeting and are about to become an audience member of their meeting.

Take A Break: If your plans aren't working out too well, you can consider taking a break, call an intermission and then caucus with your group. Decide what to do differently when the meeting reconvenes.

Learn From Your Mistakes: Okay, so maybe a meeting didn't go so well. We've all been there, so don't worry. Get together with your fellow meeting planners and review the experience. Talk about how you could have possibly prevented certain situations from occurring. Take notes on things to do differently and use them when you're planning your next meeting. Then try to relax and have some fun.

Anticipate that your adversary will try to control public meetings. Be prepared, develop a plan, have plan B.

Chapter 20

Reacting to Your Opponents

"To each action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."
-Sir Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion

You've just had a great meeting. Turnout was very good, spirit was high and it looks as if your organization has a good plan. Naturally, your opposition will now just roll over and die, right? Wrong! Isaac Newton's law is only partly correct when applied to organizing: The opposition's reaction can be overwhelming and unpredictable. When you develop both long-term strategies and short-term tactics for your group, you must try to calculate how the other side will react. Otherwise, you leave yourself open to being "blind-sided."

Remember this general point: the men and women who represent government or industry and on whom you are pressing your case have probably thought about action/reaction too. In fact, if you are dealing with, for example, a company's "Community Relations" representative, you can bet that he or she has received extensive training studying your psychology and your reactions. That individual's job is to get the most for the company while giving in as little as possible to you. They often think they've seen it all; after all, they've probably done similar things in other communities — and they really believe you are all probably just a bunch of hysterical amateurs. As long as you keep reminding yourselves of the "rep's" attitude, you can turn this smugness to your advantage.

With that in mind, here are some typical "reactions" you're likely to meet:

Distracting You by Raising Side Issues. You want to talk about ground contamination. They respond by complaining about government regulations. The best "side issues" for them to get into are things that you know and they know they have no control over. Your response: stay on point.

Agreeing to Something Easy. Typically, they will look to give you something easy, like a promise that "we'll take that under consideration," or set up a study or advisory committee to look into it, or a promise to give you some information--rather, than action or a definite, conditional promise (i.e., "We'll do 'X' if you can get so-and-so to do 'Y'").

Divide and Conquer. As you may already have discovered, any citizen who decides to challenge people in authority is labeled a "radical." They may try to call you or your group "communist," "socialist," or whatever; they know that this causes splits in the group. Other "divide and conquer" tactics include

offering one faction a concession to entice them to "sell out." They may also set out several inadequate choices and tell you, "You decide who should get the benefit of the limited resources we have to deal with this problem," or they may match two citizens' groups against each other, saying that one community will get the dump and it's "up to you to choose." Watch out for attempts to split your group by pitting one neighborhood against another, one race against the other, or one income group against the other. The best way to avoid "divide and conquer" tactics is to discuss this very openly in advance and to be united, while being aware of differences between groups.

Symbolic Satisfaction. Public officials know how to smile, nod and use body language and words to give the impression of agreement, when in reality they have no intention of conceding. People can then leave thinking they've accomplished something until, in later discussion of the overall picture, they realize they got nothing. Get agreements in writing, on the spot, so that everyone knows exactly what has been accomplished.

No Money. How many times have you heard, "Sorry, we just don't have the money to deal with your very worthy problem." As Cesar Chavez said, "don't 'tell us what you can't do; tells us what you can do." Be prepared to tackle this one by analyzing the budget and preparing alternatives in advance.

There's Something Wrong With You. In this category, there are a hundred little put-downs and insults that they will use to try to shake your confidence, split the group and justify turning you down. Some examples are:

- "You don't have all the information we have" (and if you did, either you'd agree with us or, if you didn't agree, you just didn't 'understand it).
- "You're unreasonable and therefore we can't continue this discussion. Come back when you've calmed down" (which means, when you're ready to give in).
- "You're too emotional. How dare you raise your voice or have any feeling for the issue that brought you here" (targets don't like to talk to people who have a genuine personal stake in the issue).
- "Who does your organization really represent?" (This routine is a slap in the face i.e., "You're nothing but a bunch of radical crazies").

If We Do This For You, We'll Have To Do It For Everybody. Maybe so but so what? In this case, ask who else has requested it or who else needs it.

I'm Only One Vote, or I Can't Make the Decision Alone. This may be true but again, so what? Here you can ask, "Then what will you do?" or "Who is your superior?"

We Need More Information. Sometimes this is a simple stall. Your opponent is most successful with this excuse when he or she not only gets you to believe it, but also gets you to go running around collecting more information.

Things You Can Do to Deal with this "Reaction"

- Carefully plan any encounter (meeting, action, etc.) you have with officials from the other side. If you're planning a general meeting, invite the guest to show up one hour after the meeting starts so that every one in your group can be clear about what the organization wants. If the guest shows up early, (as they often do, deliberately) don't let him/her in until the appointed time.
- Role play and practice the meeting or negotiation. This can be especially effective if either someone in your group knows the guest or if this is not the first time you've met.
- Have a clear list of what you want.
- Post a list of the things you want on large paper so everyone can see.
- Summarize what was accomplished at the end of the meeting.
- Discuss action/reaction among leaders in particular and with the membership as a whole if possible.

Chapter 21

Breaking the Law for Justice

The grassroots toxics movement has a long history of engaging in non-violent civil disobedience when faced with government and corporate injustice and inaction.

Mothers with babies in strollers were arrested for blocking the gates at Love Canal. Hundreds of African American and white Warren County, N.C. residents were arrested for lying down in the road to protest their community becoming a dumpsite. Community members in Oceanside, NY enlisted over 2,000 mothers, grandmothers and other average citizens to block the Oceanside dump, protesting its continued operation despite numerous violations. Mounted police charged the crowd, sending protesters to the hospital with broken bones. In Tombstone, AZ, eight senior citizens linked arms to block haulers for a mining company that dumped cyanide into the town's water supply. They were outraged that the company was only fined $10 for its crime. One community leader was arrested for assault after knocking a trucker to the ground when he shook his fist in her face. Save Our County of East Liverpool, OH had leaders arrested when they blocked the local dump to prevent toxic ash from Philadelphia's incinerator from being dumped there. Kay Kiker, head of Alabamians for a Clean Environment, had to explain her own arrest record to the Secret Service before receiving the Volunteer of the Year Award from President Reagan at the White House.

Many up-right, law-abiding leaders of the grassroots toxics movement have turned to nonviolent civil disobedience when the law seems to work only for the polluters and chemical industry. We've seen it from coast to coast in both small rural towns and big cities in places like Eden Prairie, MN, Cohasset, MA, Harlem, NY and Sumter, SC. None were professional radicals. None were Greenpeace staff where getting arrested is almost a job requirement.

What motivates model citizens to break the law? Why do people take such brave actions? The first step toward nonviolent civil disobedience often arises from despair and betrayal. When the system not only fails but also profits the rich and powerful at others' expense, then some leaders begin to think the unthinkable. In Sumter, SC, members of Citizens Asking for a Safe Environment spoke of the higher law—the principle that when a law is unjust, decent people have the right, if not the duty, to challenge

it. Concerned Citizens of Cohasset (MA) saw their actions as a necessary defense. When confronted with a threat to their lives and property, when the proper authorities failed in their duty, they felt they had the right and responsibility to act. In Eden Prairie, MN, the mothers in the Homeward Hills Association explained to their children why it was necessary and moral for them to blockade BPI's leaking landfill with a school bus.

For some of these community leaders, their law-breaking was an answer to a higher calling. "Miss Polly"—a devout Pentecostal Christian from Sumter County, S.C.—told the jury she felt she was serving her "God, community and state." Three protesters who were arrested with Miss Polly and her daughter, the president of Citizens Asking for a Safe Environment (CASE), all were decorated war heroes. Each searched their souls before and after arrest. Each concluded their act of civil disobedience was like going to war to fight for freedom.

In our years at CHEJ, we've never spoken with a grassroots leader who took nonviolent civil disobedience lightly. We marvel at how profoundly painful it is for honest people to feel so vexed by an uncaring system that they're compelled to violate rules of law they've always honored. The greatest crime is civic leaders betraying people so greatly and hurting them so deeply.

Nonviolent disobedience in the toxics movement has been positive and effective when done from conscience. In Oceanside, the dump was closed. Ash dumping in East Liverpool stopped a few days later at a cost a couple of hundred dollars in fines. In AZ, the assault conviction was overturned on appeal and the mining company was driven into bankruptcy. The police refused to arrest the mothers and children on that school bus in Eden Prairie. BFI's dump was closed a few days later and their expansion application was denied.

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The Cohasset protesters won a sharp curtailment of dumping and the jury acquitted them based on the Necessity Defense. And Miss Polly, her daughter, and the other heroes of the CASE 5 of Sumter, S.C. were found innocent by the jury because they were following a higher law.

Nonviolent civil disobedience is just one tool in the "organizing toolbox" of the toxics movement. It's one that should only be used with great care, careful strategic thought, and only in the face of serious provocation. It does work when it's done well and used only at the right time. It's been a powerful tool used in all the great social change movements.

Resources:
Act Up Civil Disobedience Manual: http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/CDindex.html
The Ruckus Society: http://www.ruckus.org

Section IV.
Organizing for the Long Haul

Bringing in New Blood

Celebrating Your Victories, Both Big and Small

Center for Health, Environment & Justice | Mentoring a Movement, Empowering People, Preventing Harm
P.O. Box 6806 | Falls Church, VA 22040 | Phone: 703.237.2249 | Fax: 703.237.8389 | www.chej.org

Chapter 22

Bringing in New Blood

As a community organizer, there comes a point when you feel like you've tried everything. One day, you hear yourself voicing these dreaded words, "Well, the people here just don't care." You begin talking about "apathy." When friends or fellow activists suggest new ideas for reaching out to involve people, your response is always something like, "We tried that, it didn't work." You feel exhausted and exasperated. The same few people keep doing all the work, and you're beginning to resent being one of those few.

If you've reached this stage, it might be time for some reflection. Something has to change, or you and your entire group may end up on the "burn out" list. Unfortunately, just as you've learned there is no "magic machine" to make solid and hazardous waste disappear, there is no magic solution to this organizing dilemma.

We can, however, start you on the road toward renewed community commitment and group strength. Take a closer look at your problem. How is it that you've reached the conclusion that nobody cares? How many new people have you talked with and listened to in the last six months? When is the last time you went door-to-door within your community?

To build or rebuild your organization, there is no substitute for face-to-face contact. You can call people on the phone, send flyers in the mail, send out e-mails, distribute leaflets and get media attention but, to build the relationships that will hold an organization together and win issues, you must meet and talk with people one-by-one.

Before you talk with new people, think about how you explain your issue. When you've been involved for a long time, it gets hard to tell people the basics of what's going on. The issue becomes muddled in a sea of legal, and technical mumbo-jumbo. Get your group together to practice your "rap." Does your rap relate to people's concerns and self interest? Do they need a degree in organic chemistry to understand what you're discussing?

When going door-to-door, always remember to include the following:

- I am (your name)
- We are (describe your group)

- This is (quickly explain the issue);
- We want (ask them to do something — sign a petition, come to a meeting, etc.).

Establishing credibility: When you get ready to hit the streets, consider how you're going to make yourself credible to a stranger at their door. If you can say, "I was just talking to your neighbor, Mrs. Jones, and she said you'd be a good person to talk with," or "Reverend Smith is working with us - he's letting us use the church basement for our meeting next week," you have "borrowed credibility" and a few more seconds at the door. The person behind the door knows you're there for a reason.

What you want: Make it clear at the start what you want. Are you passing around a petition? Petitions are excellent door openers, even if they're not really helpful for winning your fight. Most organizations use the petition simply as a way to begin a conversation with new contacts and build the member/call/e-mail list.

Ask questions and listen: Once you get inside the door, your job is to get the other person talking. Listen to their story, their reaction to your group's issue, how they tie that into their own experiences and future aspirations. Take note of their leadership possibilities. The more people talk to you and the more you listen, the stronger this bond will become.

Different levels of engagement: Use your judgment to gauge what the person can "afford." Everyone can do something. Signing the petition is the easy way out - as is making a half-hearted promise to come to the meeting. Explore ways the person can become actively involved. Ask if they have other contacts. Ask if they will come door knocking with you, or to make two to five contacts themselves. Maybe they can make signs, write a letter, or do child care at the next meeting—anything to make him or her feel more a part of the organization.

Closing the sale: There comes the time when you have to close "the sale." In organizing, the sale is a commitment to do something. To make the sale, you have to show how it is in the person's interests to get involved in the organization. People act out of self-interest. You want them to see how their needs and desires fit in with what you are doing. Usually, there is direct self-interest—the organization is working on an issue that directly affects them. Sometimes, self-interest is less direct: the desire to help, to do the right thing, to socialize, to be connected to something exciting.

Next steps: Close out your discussion by being sure you and the new person have a clear and concrete understanding about the deal: how many people they will contact, how many they can commit to getting to the meeting, etc. Before you leave, let that person know how happy you are with this meeting and, more important, how essential he or she is to building the organization. Make sure they know you'll be back in touch to see how things went.

You are on your way toward developing a relationship with a new person who looks like a good prospect for active involvement in your organization. There will be many other people out there who are also ready to get involved once they are asked. Continue asking. It is so often the tendency in fighting toxic issues to become caught up in the details of parts per million, emission standards and other scientific and regulatory information.

The process of talking with and listening to people one-on-one, of rechecking with people in the community about how they feel and what they will do is vital to your group's survival. New people will bring new ideas and new energy. But you won't find this renewed strength until you invite people to participate fully in the organization, and in the decisions affecting their future.

Chapter 23

Celebrating Your Victories, Both Big and Small

The group that celebrates together stays together. During our years of involvement with the grassroots environmental justice movement, we've been in contact with lots of grassroots groups. It seems the groups who are most successful in keeping their members involved for the long haul are those who make the most of their victories. The battle is long and hard and the rewards are few. So taking time to appreciate our accomplishments in the fight to protect our health, children, homes and the environment are all the more important.

Most of us set very important goals for our groups, goals that take a long time to achieve. It's our "Holy Grail." But along the road to winning those long-term goals, we achieve many important victories-we call them "little treasures."

CHEJ was once invited to be a guest speaker for a local group, RAGE, in Blairsville, PA. They were celebrating their first anniversary with a dinner dance. During the festivities, they held an awards ceremony to publicly honor and thank the people who had helped RAGE during its first year and present them with an appreciation certificate. RAGE leader Joni Dixon reviewed the year, month by month, and highlighted all of those "little treasures" they had won. Here's a group in rural Pennsylvania that was doing what the common wisdom says is impossible: they were fighting the world's biggest dumper, Waste Management, Inc., to stop it from building a landfill in their community. This celebration was important as a reminder that their small community has tied up in knots a company with annual revenue of billions of dollars!

RAGE took the solidarity theme even further. The event itself was an example of how to get people involved through effective use of a committee process. Hats off to the decorations committee, for example, for the brilliant idea of covering the walls with the names of all the members of RAGE, as well as their signs, slogans and stories about their actions.

Is this frivolous? Should they have held off celebrating until they've finally beaten WMI? Absolutely Not! We often forget our groups are mainly volunteers, people who've never done this before. There are always those nagging doubts, "Are we doing this right?" "Do we really have a chance?" "How can I inspire others to get involved when I have doubts myself about whether we can win?"

The truth is, environmental health and justice groups win all the time. They win through a series of day-by-day, step-by-step actions and a careful process of building people power. Many subtle victories occur along the way which should be celebrated. But there are also reactions from the opponent that sometimes shake our confidence.

This is a normal "Action/Reaction." We act. The opponent reacts. Rather than get upset when the opponent reacts, we should consider the reaction as a victory in itself. As an example: a group opposing an operating landfill pickets the site. Days later, the company puts up a huge fence around the dump. This is not a setback. It's a victory on two levels. First, you've forced the dumper to acknowledge the group as a threat and, second, that fence will protect children and other innocent people from being hurt by wandering onto the site.

Every reaction by an opponent could be seen by pessimists (and we all have plenty of those in our groups) as a setback. But there are positive aspects to every negative. Good leaders should look for that positive, hold it up for every one to see and celebrate! Display your victories proudly, especially when times are tough! Some call this making lemonade from lemons.

Long-range goals are vital to group planning. But long-range goals alone, without short-term goals and appropriate celebration, can be a burden that saps community strength and drains group spirit.

For groups dealing with proposed facilities, the long-range goal is to block the site. This can happen quickly (the all-time speed record is 23 hours and 30 minutes) or it can take as long as the 10 years it took SOS of Ascension Parish, LA to beat IT Corp.

For operating polluters, the long-range goal may be to close them down or force a clean up. This too can take a very long time, as it has for STOP to close the Four County Landfill in Culver, IN or for Citizens for a Cleaner Environment to shut down the Kim-Stan Landfill in Alleghany County, VA.

And at contaminated sites, especially if they're still operating, the struggle for justice is very long and hard. The long range goals of closing the site, cleaning it up, relocating residents and compensating those who choose to stay aren't easy to achieve.

At every site, in every group, we should hope for the best — that we'll win quickly and completely — but plan for the long haul. If the only goal we see and the only achievement we celebrate are the long-term ones, our groups may never live to see that day. Without those short-term goals and frequent celebrations, we might feel like the character in Greek mythology who was condemned to roll a rock up the hill, only to have it roll back down when it nears the top. We can win. We will win. And, the truth is, we win every day we get up in the morning and carry on the fight, as well as through our very real, concrete victories.

Section V.
Overcoming Challenges Your Group Will Face

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Chapter 24

Stress and How to Deal With it

"Where are my clean jeans?"
"I'm sorry, but I just can't give you more time off work."
"Honey, here's a notice from the bank saying the house payment is past due!"

If these comments sound all too familiar to you, you must be a grassroots leader! And as a grassroots leader, you have felt or will feel stress in some form or another. These different kinds of stresses include those that come from your family, your workplace, and your friends and neighbors. Worst of all, stress can come from within the grassroots group you are a part of. In this article, we will try to pass along some ideas on reducing stress in your already hectic life.

Stress On Your Family

Lois Gibbs tells a story in her book about coming home exhausted from a meeting late one night and finding a delicious looking cake on the table. She sat down and ate most of it before realizing it was her son's birthday cake that his grandmother had made for him. Forgetting a child's birthday, not having a clean house, leaving the children alone — these are all sources of guilt and stress. One way to over come this guilt is to include the children and your spouse in as many of your group's events as possible. Some organizations have started a youth group which meets regularly just like the adults. Another idea for including children is to put your children on your lap or on the sofa next to you during a television interview. After all, the children and their quality of life are usually the reason we get involved in these fights, and having them with you will personalize your issue.

Another stress for your family is fear. Imagine how you would feel if you received an anonymous telephone call asking four simple words: "Where are your children?" The ten or fifteen minutes it takes to call the school and check the whereabouts of your children will be the longest minutes of your life. Fear is a real form of stress for families. Suddenly you are involved in something that is almost always political and controversial. You are bound to find people who don't agree with you and don't appreciate you being vocal about the issue. You can alleviate some of your fear by asking your spouse or a friend to accompany you when you are going door-to-door or traveling. It always makes good sense to do these types of activities in pairs.

Stress On Your Job

Many grassroots leaders find themselves taking sick time and vacation time from work to gain enough hours in a day to be an effective organizer. While taking some time off may occasionally be necessary, a good leader builds leadership in other people; groups of leaders work together so that no one person faces lost wages. While it can be very difficult to stay focused on your job when local situations become so demanding, losing your job will only make the situation worse. Some employers are more understanding than others...some tell you flat out that if you want to keep your job, you'd better keep your mouth shut. What to do in this instance is up to you. Just know that you are not alone. Many workers are "secret supporters" of local groups — they may help the group, but do so strictly "off the record." Everyone should respect their position and their privacy.

Stress On Friends and Neighbors

Not all your friends and neighbors will agree with your side of the issue. Some people at Love Canal were furious with Lois Gibbs for making the dump such a national issue that property values dropped and they could not sell their homes. Being patient with people (especially those closest to you) and respecting their opinions can be difficult. To keep your friendship intact, you may have to agree to disagree. As time goes on, your friend may "see the light" and agree with you...in the meantime, you haven't spoken any harsh words to prevent this from happening.

Sometimes you will find people in the community who agree with you, but who also don't seem willing to get involved. It becomes very frustrating when you know everyone in the community will benefit from your group's success whether or not they are a part of your group. Try reminding yourself that people often assume "someone else" is looking out for their best interests. Those of us who don't believe this philosophy need to find a way to "hook" the others into the organization.

Stress Within the Group

A good grassroots group is structured in a "wheel" where there is no "chairman for life" at the top (see Chapter 4). This structure helps remedy the stress associated with one person always being the decision maker and spokesperson. A grassroots group is made up of people from different age groups and different political, educational, religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It is important to respect these differences and to realize that it won't always be easy to get along. Some people in the group may believe that the "system" really works and that "the EPA and politicians will protect us." Others in the group may be more activist-oriented and believe that the "system" will only work if it receives political pressure. These different opinions are valuable organizing tools. Members who feel actions, such as picketing, are important should be allowed to carry out these actions if the majority of the group agrees. This is democracy - the people in the group decide what is permissible. When a group becomes a "dictatorship," with only one person or a small group of people dictating policy to the group, internal problems will arise very quickly.

Getting more people involved in your group is always a good way to eliminate some of the stress of being overworked and under-appreciated. When new people come to your meetings for the first time, you might want to do a telephone follow-up. Ask them what they thought of your meeting; what went well, what needs improvement. Tell them how glad you were to see them and that you hope they will become an active part of your group. Treat the newcomers the way you would want to be treated. Make them feel welcome and needed. Ask them if there is any way that they can help your group. You might be surprised at how much less work and stress there is when the tasks are shared.

Stress often occurs in a group when the group is inactive or is spending too much time in group meetings, but not really "doing" anything. The cure is usually simple: get active. Plan and carryout some sort of unifying action. For example, if you haven't heard from your opponent in a while, pick a fight—you've obviously got them on the run, now make them respond. One good stress eliminator for a group is to take the time to CELEBRATE and

PARTY. If it seems you are not appreciated in the media or in the greater community, but you know in your heart that you're on the right side of the issue, pat yourselves on the back for a job well done.

Stress is unavoidable in the work that we are all doing. Knowing you are not alone and trying some of the above suggestions may help to make the stress more manageable. Sharing the work load with others makes even the best organizer better.

Chapter 25

Burnout: How to Recognize It and What to Do About It

"The best way to stop being burnt out is to get fired up." — Grandma Beckwith

Your eyes are glazed, your back is stooped. Your temper is short. You forget to keep your promises like you used to. You're skipping meetings. You end most sentences with "What's the use?" *You're getting burnt out.*

More and more, those industry people sound like they make a lot more sense than your members. You feel like taking that invitation to join that "Roundtable" or "Community Advisory Board" even though it's dominated by industry. It's a lot more fun to run around and go to other groups' meetings than your own. You're beginning to see "two sides to the issue." *You're getting burnt out.*

You scold and abuse people and talk behind people's back. You criticize the people who come to meetings because of people who didn't ("Gee, this is a really terrible turn-out.") *You're getting burnt out.*

You ask people to do things and they don't respond. You get promises from people but they're not kept. The meetings you sit through are stupid, boring, and inconclusive. Is everyone else a moron? *You're getting burnt out.*

You're paralyzed. You cringe when the phone rings. You feel like screaming whenever you hear people talk about your issue. You're thinking about moving to Australia. *You're getting burnt out.*

Are you normal? Are you a bad person for feeling this way? Probably not. But you need to do something about it.

What?

Nobody said organizing was easy. Industry and government opposition is tough. The facts are complicated. It's hard work getting a group consensus for action. All of this can build up.

- **The leader's most important job is to help other people become leaders**: That will never happen unless you give people a chance. When you start out, spread the work around the membership. It's an almost sure trip to a rubber room to take everything on yourself and not delegate. It's also lousy organizing.
- **Talk to yourself, say**: "What would happen if I DON'T do it all?" If the answer is, "Everything will fall apart," then my friend, YOU have an overly high opinion of yourself.
- **Talk to others**: Organizations should do more

than just win on issues. They should build a sense of people power and they should build community. You have to talk about it - how you feel - and who better to do it with than your friends and neighbors in the struggle?

- **Think Tasks and not Titles**: Many leaders try to delegate to others by creating a job title and insisting that people take it. For example, "Will you be the Chairperson for our Permanent $100,000 Fundraising Committee?" Consider that most people in the organization have never been leaders before. Such a request is so intimidating that they might not just refuse, but feel so bad about themselves that they'll drop out of the organization. Instead, break the job down into digestible tasks: "Will you be sure these twelve people are contacted about Thursday's meeting?"
- **Keep Your Eye On the Prize**: Your organization came together for a reason and it wasn't to crown you king or queen. The members are not your subjects. If anything, your job as a leader is to serve and not be served.
- **Keep Each Other Honest**: Egomania is a key but less obvious sign of Burnout. The leader who gets "too big for his britches" can be even more dangerous than the leader who gets fried and just drops out. Watch for the danger signs: the overuse of "I," the hunger for media coverage, and unfair criticism of other leaders. Your opposition will often try to "buy off" leaders and split the group by offering seats on various pointless committees, commissions and study groups. When you jump at these chances, you may end up being duped into selling out your group. The other danger is "Coalitionitis." When a leader gets tired of his or her own group, or gets frustrated with the day-to-day tedium of fighting the local issue, making a "coalition" with somebody else can seem irresistible. Going to other people's meetings can be a lot more fun than struggling to make your own be successful.
- **Let It Go**: Most groups make mistakes, either by act or omission. Most survive. But it's hard on perfectionists or on leaders who would rather DO IT than let it go. Sometimes, the only thing to do is to let things slide, let the mistakes happen, so that others will understand that they, too, must take responsibility. "United we stand, divided we fall."
- **Celebrate Your Victories**: Just the plain fact that you organized is a victory in itself. And you do have victories, though sometimes you're too self-critical to accept them. Every time you do win SOMETHING, anything even if it's super small, you should acknowledge it and CELEBRATE it. And be sure you give each other credit. Give the strokes to all of the people who made it possible.

Burnout can hurt. Sometimes there is nothing you can do about it but treat the burnt-out case with kindness and understanding. But generally, let the group's actions serve as the cure. It's like falling off a bicycle. Get right back on.

Chapter 26

Infighting: What to Do When it Happens

From the day your group starts until it ceases to exist, you'll have to deal with infighting. It may range from simple disagreements over tactics to explosive divisions that lead to "splinter" groups.

Why Does Infighting Happen?

One of the most common reasons is that people aren't necessarily going to like each other, no matter how strong their common interests may be.

Another common cause of infighting is the power play. Many members of a community organization have had little or no experience in dealing with power. For some people, their first taste of power can be very intoxicating and they want more; and will do almost anything to get it. Other people feel that they increase their own personal power by taking it away from someone else.

Boredom and frustration also cause infighting. When the group is not actively dealing with the issue, or has suffered some set-backs, members may find it easier to start attacking each other than to deal with the original common enemy. This happens a lot when the weather is bad or the group finds itself between phases of a campaign.

Scapegoating also causes a lot of pain, especially when things go wrong. Trying to pin the blame on someone else is a lot easier than accepting personal or collective responsibility.

Poor planning and lack of focus are common structural causes of infighting. For example, if your goals are not clear or are not shared in common by the members, there will almost always be infighting of the worst kind over the purposes of the organization and how it should carry on its work. Another example of poor planning is to make bad judgments over who should be recruited into the group. If you try to recruit everyone and keep them all happy, you may find yourself paralyzed as you try to arrive at "consensus" positions that won't offend anybody.

What Can You Do About It When It Happens?

You can try to ignore infighting, especially when it's minor, and let people find their own levels. This approach means that you concede that people will probably always fight and that your job as leader doesn't include holding people's hands. Of course, you should use some sensitivity and judgment to

know the difference between minor and serious problems. A problem is serious when it blocks a group from doing what it has to do.

You can try the "touchy feely" approach of raising internal disputes for group discussion and forcing people to focus on what they are doing, why they are doing it and what they could do to resolve it. This approach usually works best when you deal with problems early, before they reach the point when the group discussion turns bloody because people have very deep-seated feelings.

You can try to mediate differences between the "troublemakers," by taking them aside and playing "referee" while they work out their differences. You should also decide how important the people are who are fighting and whether their value to the group is such that it's worth your time and energy to get involved in this way. If the dispute involves other key leaders, this approach may well be worth the risks and costs involved.

Have clear rules of operation. For instance, if your group normally conducts meetings with a set agenda and a stated purpose, you as a leader could gently, but firmly, get things back on track by reminding the infighters about the purpose of this week's meeting. For members involved in power plays, clear rules allow you, as a leader, to enforce proper rules of behavior.

Examples: "Look John, we have a rule in this group that only the Executive Committee can make statements to the media on behalf of the group." Or, "Jane, if you don't think Jim is doing a good job as a treasurer, why don't you run against him in the elections next month?"

The best response to a splinter group is to try to make a peace with them that acknowledges your differences. If you try to fight them, or denounce them publicly, you serve no one's interests except your opposition. "Agree to disagree," if you can. It doesn't hurt to make conciliatory gestures, like asking to work together on things where you still share a common interest.

What Can You Do to Prevent It?

As we've already mentioned, having a clear focus, statement of purpose and a good plan is all-important. You can prevent the problem of splinter groups by thinking through whom you need to recruit in order to win — don't try to recruit the whole county if all you need is your neighborhood.

Set up your organization with a clear, but democratic structure, with reasonable rules for procedure and behavior. Develop good leadership skills in yourself, encourage them in others and work toward building new leaders. The most important job a good leader has is to share leadership with others. Tinhorn dictators deserve all the infighting they cause. Involve others in decisions. Work to develop the utmost participation. Share duties and responsibilities. Help other people work out their differences by acting and working together on projects and committees.

Finally, keep at it and stay busy. When people are working on issues, they have less time to hassle each other over personal problems. Keep it lively and fun. That'll keep moral up and prevent people from being at each other's throats.

Chapter 27

Conquering "Divide and Conquer"

In Southern California, a Native American child is harassed at school by white kids because a local battle over a proposed garbage dump has split the Indian and non-Indian communities.

In Texas and South Carolina, waste companies are charged with actively splitting the African-American and European-American neighborhoods in an attempt to divide citizen opposition to waste proposals.

Unwanted waste industries have long used racially motivated "divide and conquer" strategies to disrupt local groups' fighting for environmental justice. Even homogenous communities find themselves separated by money, power, and environmental debates over out-of-state waste proposals. A story in the *News and Observer* newspaper out of Raleigh, NC, details the controversy which often surrounds large scale waste projects. Headlined, "Incinerator Battle Tearing County in Two," the story tells of the proposed Thermal Kem toxic waste burner's negative effects. Local political leaders were quoted as saying that 'This thing has split the county worse than anything...it's split the churches, it's even split families."

Community activists have long recognized the waste industries' tactic of dividing communities in order to sneak in their pollution for profit plants. Do not be surprised. Newly formed grassroots groups should expect that waste companies will try this tactic. In fact, most polluters begin by trying to cut "backroom" deals with local politicians or land owners so that many times the general public does not hear about a proposed dump or incinerator until after the company has begun negotiations with local government. This has the effect of making sometimes well-meaning politicians into "enemies" right off the bat.

Prevention is a good way to head-off this situation. Many citizens are now asking their city and county officials to pass resolutions announcing their opposition to waste projects before any company approaches them. Just because no one has yet proposed a dump or incinerator in your area doesn't mean it won't happen. When these surprise pollution plans are announced, form an opposition group quickly and go immediately to your politicians. Tell them you appreciate their efforts to bring tax money and jobs to your area but

firmly assure them that pollution schemes are not what the voters have in mind. In essence, give politicians a face-saving chance to back out of such deals before you label them "the enemy." Of course, if the politicians don't take that opportunity, blast them.

The most effective counter-tactic to the "divide and conquer" routine is to use the first rule of organizing—Talk With People! This means talk about the issue with everyone. It is a natural tendency to look for support among friends, relatives and familiar groups, but the best organizers seek out all sections of society.

It is often important for community organizers to recognize their own prejudices. All of us sometimes feel uncomfortable around people or neighborhoods which we are not familiar with. When we fight for justice in our communities we must fight for the whole community, not just our "own kind."

Realize that community leaders already exist in neighborhoods, ethnic groups and towns, so it is not necessary to blindly approach folks. Do a little checking, find out which people are seen as leaders by the community/neighborhood you wish to include in the fight, and then try to meet with those leaders.

When CHEJ was organizing in an African American community within a very segregated section of Alabama, we had a name of a longtime political leader in the area. He took us to churches where we met other respected leaders. Through this method we were able to tap all the citizen energy in an area where cold door knocking would never have been accepted by an outsider. We ended up defeating the proposed hazardous waste burner, while making lifelong friendships and partnerships.

When approaching any community/neighborhood different from your own, keep two things in mind. One, be respectful. We too often hear that organizers are not outreaching because "Oh, those people just don't care." Or, "those people won't understand these issues." As long as your attitudes and language categorizes "those people" you will never be accepted because you yourself are unable to accept. There is no ethnic group, community or sector of society which is not intelligent or concerned enough to understand protecting their children's health.

Secondly, show patience. If you are apprehensive about approaching a "different" community, they are probably going to be a bit suspicious about you and your intentions. Often we hear from groups that "We've sent flyers inviting 'them' to our meetings but they never show up." This is a case where it may benefit you to contact a specific leader in that community and invite him/her personally. Or at least make a concerted effort to personalize the invitation by asking for input from "the Cedar Heights" neighborhood, this shows folks that you are interested in their views.

To get help you must give help. If a certain neighborhood seems unwilling to respond to your general invitations, you could try to respond to their general invitations. Such invitations may appear in the neighborhood's church bulletins, local news paper's announcement of meetings, yard sales, or community performances. A couple of people from your group could show up and maybe make some contacts or at least get on a mailing list to show you are genuinely interested and friendly to the issues and/or activities already important to that community.

When you do make that initial contact, realize that each neighborhood/community has its own way of doing things. Do not expect that new folks will immediately join your efforts or that they will be willing to fall in line with your group's methods. Ask them about how they would describe the problem, the solution and listen to their ideas for tactics or actions. A good approach to any community is to appeal to children or have conversations about children. Kids are often innocent to racism and classism, so finding ways to support and encourage their participation could be a start.

It is ideal for your area to have one large citizens group working against the dump, but if people are more comfortable working in separate groups-which are in close contact –that is not a bad way to start. Do not preach or talk down to new folks and never speak for their neighborhoods without specific permission.

Maybe the most important step in uniting various people is to get to them before the pollution company does. Do your outreach as soon as possible or you may find that "the other side of town" has already been offered bribe money by the pollution company, thereby making your job that much more difficult.

Keep in mind that time heals wounds and when you feel discouraged about the difficulties in uniting people, think of the case of the Good Road Coalition. Good Road is an Indian and non-Indian coalition fighting a proposed mega dump in South Dakota, a state famous for its racism against American Indians. A Good Road leader told CHEJ of standing on a white rancher's porch as they looked out over the beauty of the prairie and the rancher remarked, "I would have never believed that I'd be working with American Indian Movement people....but I'm damn glad I am."

Section VI.
Experts, Politics and Public Hearings

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Chapter 28

User's Guide to Experts

"Figures don't lie...but liars often figure." - Courtesy of Hugh Coombs

Experts are: (a) Invaluable; (b) A royal pain in the neck; (c) Indispensable tools; (d) A major handicap; (e) All of the above. Every group that deals with waste issues quickly finds out that experts are hard to live with and hard to live without. This article touches on some of the opportunities and pitfalls in using experts.

The Advantages of Experts

- To understand what you are dealing with. What kind of waste is in your environment? How can it affect you?
- To advise you on alternatives.
- For credibility.
- To reassure your members who are feeling insecure about the issue. "How can we understand this stuff since we're just housewives, farmers, factory workers or whatever." Sometimes getting an expert is seen as the only way to get over this self-doubt (even though it sometimes adds to this lack of self respect).
- To counter-balance the opposition. "They've got experts, so we'd better get some, too."
- To represent you.

The Profile of a Good Expert

A good expert has the right credentials to get respect from the public, media, and even the opposition. S/he has the right experience, charges a price you can afford, is accessible, and talks like a person. A good expert doesn't interfere by giving "advice" (orders) outside of his or her expertise. S/he builds your self-confidence by reinforcing your ability to act and speak for yourself, keeps commitments, helps you learn for yourselves, is honest, isn't afraid to say, "I don't know," and doesn't dominate or take over the group.

How Does Your Expert Rate on These Standards? What If You Can't Find Such an Expert?

You may have to create your own ideal expert out of the expert you can get. Do this by clearly setting out your "contract" (meaning the terms of your relationship) with the expert. Be very clear about what you need (and don't need) and how you will need it and make sure your expert is not allowed to run amok. Many leaders deal with experts the way

most of us deal with doctors; being afraid to speak up for fear of offending them.

Are You an Expert?

Many of our members are self taught experts. Some rate highly on the "good experts" standard. Others can, however, be as bad as the worst Ph.D. The worst is the leader-expert who insists that "we shouldn't do anything until we've done all of the research." Then there's the leader-expert who won't share information, won't let others help out, or refuses to teach others research skills, or the one whose idea of a good fight is debating your research against "their" research.

Many leaders walk around with suitcases full of their research and can't carry on a conversation without first insisting that you read their suitcase. Others have lost their ability to talk like regular human beings. Self-taught experts can be the best kind. You'll never find any outsider as deeply committed to your community. But the group will have to keep that leader from becoming a "data fanatic."

Getting the Most Out of an Expert

Experts are tools. As with any tool, you have to get the right one for the job. To do this, you must know what kind of expert you need. A health scientist is unlikely to be an expert on physics or hydrology (though he or she may have valuable experience). Nor do you want to hire an epidemiologist to give you advice on community organizing.

To get the most out of your expert, know what you want and then make sure your expert understands this. It's okay to put it in writing (maybe in the form of a simple letter of understanding) even if your expert is serving you for free. Try to understand your expert's constraints (example: very short on time) and adjust your behavior accordingly. If your expert is always over-extended, don't just dump materials on him without including a summary and an annotated list of materials.

Some Common Pitfalls

"Our expert won't agree in advance to our position." Your expert insists on being objective, and it's driving you crazy. Why should you pay this person all that money and still not get an assurance that he'll agree with you? There's something to be said for objectivity and it's okay for your expert to be objective. Experts who "shoot from the hip" and take a position before even seeing any data, may not have enough credibility. This doesn't mean, however, that all experts are objective all the time.

Dueling Experts

The main reason most groups want experts is because their opponents in industry and government have experts. This is a poor reason: for every expert you can find, they can get a dozen. Industry and government agencies have lots more money than you do and can afford to "buy" the kinds of expert testimony they want. If you've got the bucks, you can certainly find someone who'll say what you want. But, it may be a waste of money. More often than not, decisions about chemical exposures are based more on politics and economics than on science.

Having Experts Speak For You

Groups often fall into this trap. They give over their issue to a lawyer or rely on scientific experts to carry the ball at public forums. It's okay to have an expert speak about your issue in a public forum, but only as a supplement to the people in your community who are directly affected by the issue. It takes away from your self confidence and causes the debate to be conducted at a level where most regular people can't (or won't) go.

Summary

There's a place and a role for experts in your campaign strategy. To be successful requires a solid organization, good issues, well-developed plans and the determination to win. Experts can help build your confidence and contradict the lies of your opponents. But no matter how good your expert may be, policy makers will say "So what?" You must also have the political muscle to fight to win.

Chapter 29

All Politics is Local

The best predictor of future success is learning from successful past performances. The reason CHEJ doesn't endorse anyone for President is not because we don't care or because, as a tax-exempt organization, we can't. Instead, it's because we agree with a point made by our friend Richard Grossman: no matter who wins in November, we have to work to organize, protest and push the new President (whether friend or foe) to deal with the agenda and demands of the Grassroots Health, Environmental and Justice Movement.

"All politics is local," House Majority Leader Tip O''Neill used to say "back in the day". CHEJ finds this remains true today. Remembering this fundamental truth has helped many grassroots groups succeed. They took action at the local level, but they thought globally.

Opinion polls say that a vast majority of all Americans see toxic waste and pollution as a "serious concern" and one of the top environmental issues. As a result, almost every time toxic issues were put before local voters, the community won. Examples: Concerned Citizens of Blackhawk County, Iowa: convinced voters to buy a leaking private hazardous waste landfill to shut it down. Residents in Fayetteville, Arkansas, voted to terminate an already approved trash incinerator. Voters in the Kiski Valley of Western Pennsylvania voted several times on a toxic incinerator sorely desired by their major employer, Babcock and Wilcox, and rejected it every time. Voters in California, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York approved grassroots-sponsored state referenda by hugh margins. Voters in Foster Township, Pennsylvania, and Tuxedo, New York, voted in pro-movement candidates and voted out pro-dumper rascals with write-ins! The number of grassroots toxics leaders elected to local office continues to grow.

Communities are learning to win with local legislation. Even though there are some good national environmental laws, the politics of compromise and the lack of enforcement at the national level have made our own local governments the most useful place to draw the battle lines. In the eyes of the law, "environmental protection" is technically the job of federal and state government officials. They protect their jobs by having the right to override local government or private citizens who try to fill the enforcement void by doing their job. In our

moral consciousness, it is the local citizen's right and responsibility to protect their community from harm.

States as diverse as Virginia and New Jersey don't trust their citizens enough to grant local authorities the right to make decisions on the siting of new waste facilities. But many states (especially Southern states like Tennessee, Kentucky, Texas and Oklahoma) have given back the right to local governments and voters to decide on siting waste facilities. Others (like Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina and New York) have asserted their right to control waste facility siting with standards of environmental protection which are stronger than those set by the federal government. In one example, Alabama has just re-established state control over hazardous waste siting.

Local governments and grassroots groups are rediscovering how historic powers to govern land use, control nuisances and protect public health and safety can be applied to waste and toxics issues. Examples include a local ban on styrofoam food packaging, using local business licensing laws to keep bad companies out, closing dumps and incinerators as public nuisances and making the link between zoning and protecting health and the environment. In Chickasaw, Alabama, the Community Affairs Group got the town council to use its power to regulate traffic to create conditions that made it impossible for Waste Management to use a toxic waste site, accessible only by going through the town. Communities in Louisiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia, both won bitter fights against proposed toxic sites by zoning them out of business. Local waste sites in Mitchell County, North Carolina, Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Lenoir, North Carolina were ordered closed as public nuisances. One Vermont town set "no styrofoam use" as a zoning condition for McDonalds. Oregon, Ohio fought all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court to win its right to apply its "police powers" to control the Fondessey Landfill. No Waste in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma not only fought for and won a state law giving residents living within a mile of a proposed toxic incinerator the right to vote on it, but went one better. They also got their county to pass an ordinance giving the citizens the right to veto any proposed siting.

Stop Tox of Palestine, Texas beat a planned hazardous waste scheme in two innovative ways. First, they got the county to condemn the site under eminent domain (with a plan for a county park). Second, they managed to have their area designated as a new water district, giving them (under Texas law) the right to vote-and of course they won the vote, hands down.

The solutions are in our own backyards. While Presidents come and go, we're still here, where we live and where we work. So are the problems that are already in our communities, the result of corporate greed and government neglect. So are the challenges that seem to unendingly test our will to fight. But we must re-learn how to win the old-fashioned way-through grassroots organizing. No matter who wins the White House, even Barack Obama, let's not give up the proven formula for victory—local community based organizing.

Chapter 30

Public Hearings: It's a Hearing, But is Anyone Listening?

"A public hearing is an official event on a public issue where the public speaks and the officials don't listen."

Activists spend endless hours sitting and testifying in public hearings. Local leaders often have endless patience in these exercises in futility. Hearings are generally convened in inconvenient places, at inconvenient times, with the room setup to intimidate. When a public agency initiates a hearing, count on them to publicize it in the most obscure way possible. If an agency is being asked to hold the hearing by the citizens, count on them to resist.

Public hearings chew up a huge amount of time and burn out leaders. They alienate members who have such a lousy time that they never come to another group activity. Often, they have no effect on public policy. When asked why they go to hearings in light of such bad experiences, here's what some local leaders said:

- **We don't want to miss anything**. There could be useful information, though this is not the only place to get it.
- **It's a chance to tell our side**. Sure, after the "experts" for the agencies and polluters drone on for hours, knowing the news media leave after the first hour.
- **Our lawyer told us to enter certain evidence into the record**. This usually means people expect to lose and are looking ahead to a court challenge, which as a tactic, usually fails.
- **Isn't that what you're supposed to do? If they hold a hearing, aren't we supposed to go?** The typical public hearing is a gross distortion of democracy. It's no accident hearings look the same. Hearing officers are trained to control public hearings. Much has been written in industry literature about the art of public hearings and how to control them.

For example, a local hearing in Homer, LA was held for a proposed uranium hexafluoride plant to be built by Louisiana Energy Services (LES). Homer is a small, majority low income, black town near the Arkansas border. A lively group, Citizens Against Nuclear Trash (CANT), was organizing to block the plant.

The hearing was in the high school auditorium which swallowed up the big turn out of over 600 people. Officials and "experts" lined the stage behind cloth-covered tables, 10 feet above the audience. They

Public hearings chew up a huge amount of time and burn out leaders. They alienate members who have such a lousy time that they never come to another group activity. Often, they have no effect on public policy.

had their podium, slide projector and huge view screen. There were microphones and recorders everywhere. They explained the rules. The experts would speak first, for about 75 minutes (which turned into over two hours). Then people could ask questions, if they were polite. Extra police were brought in and placed strategically to ensure security.

Speakers droned on about the wonders of the project. There's no cause for alarm. The plant poses less risk than eating a peanut butter sandwich. The plant would revive the local economy and provide hundreds of jobs. It'll be state-of-the-art, using best available technology, modeled on totally problem-free European plants. A state politician made commendable remarks about the project. No accidents would occur, but if they did, he said, there's absolutely no danger either from radioactive material or poisonous uranium hexafluoride gas.

The TV lights went out and newspaper reporters closed their notebooks shut and left to meet deadlines. This was the cue for a change of pace. As the lights faded, the county government official took the podium to chair the public Q&A portion of the meeting. He re-explained the rules: one question per customer; no statements; behave yourself or else.

The folks from CANT sat there initially as they were told to do so. But then, about a half dozen of their members rose to poke holes in LES's plan. Is it true LES has no market for their product? Is it true LES has no insurance and no prior experience with this sort of project? Is it true there's no real plan in case of a uranium hexafluoride gas leak? Is it true no one in Homer would qualify for any of the decent paying jobs? Answer: mumble, mumble, evasion, half-truth.

Up to the mike stepped Tony, one of CANT's core leaders. "Gentlemen," he asked, "You've said you won't come in to any town where the people don't want you. Would you be willing to put it to a vote?" He continued: "If the majority of the people here showed you they don't want it, would you accept that?" The hearing chairman replied, "Well, that would only show a majority of those here."

"But this is your meeting and there are lots of your folks here, "said Tony." Let's try it anyway." Tony turned his back to the hearing chairman and spoke to the audience. "OK people, vote with your feet, "he said, pointing to the back of the hall. As one, two-thirds of the audience, over 400 people, got up and walked out, to the shock of the officials on stage and the startled, scattered applause of a few of the LES supporters in the audience.

The police locked the doors after everyone had left. Outside, there were 400 jubilant residents. The consensus was expressed by one CANT member: "THAT WAS SOLID!" This was a planned walk-out that provided incredibly effective "testimony."

Your opponents will use public hearings to TEST you. Will you sit there and take it? Can they force you to conform to their rules? As the saying goes, "if you take what they give you, you deserve what you get."

Do you have to go to public hearings? No, you don't. After seeing the power CANT displayed, it's easy to treat bad hearings with scorn. If a public hearing ignores your needs, you can boycott it. You can hold a protest outside and denounce it. You can send a speaker inside to say you refuse to acknowledge its legitimacy. And you can organize a mass walk-out.

You can even organize your own "People's Hearing," one you run that deals with the truth.

Or you can attend, but insist they take their rules and throw them out the window. Let the people speak first. Let them do it their way, even if this means crying mothers speak, instead of the "techies" hearing officials prefer. Insist officials and "experts" respond, point by point. Use the hearing to present specific, concrete demands and insist on "yes" or "no" answers on the spot.

If they don't cave in to your demands to do it your way, pull a mass walk-out. When denied the dignity of meaningful participation, the United Farm Workers would signal members to kneel in prayer and sing hymns.

At one public hearing, Concerned Citizens of White Lake (MI) were shocked when hearing officials turned out the lights when it was the citizens' turn to speak. At the next public hearing, each member brought a lit flashlight.

At another hearing on contaminated water in Muskegon, MI, the Concerned Residents of Muskegon showed up with water jugs. Their "testimony" took the form of queuing up at water fountains to fill their jugs from the city water supply they wanted hooked up to their neighborhood.

The Concerned Residents of the Yough (PA) were frustrated by hearing officials routinely adjourning hearings whenever community spokespeople turned up the pressure. So they organized a plan for their next hearing so that when the hearing official went to adjourn, they took over the stage and blocked the exits, literally holding the hearing officers hostage.

At Love Canal, Hooker Chemical officials constantly attacked residents' participation by challenging their "standing" and raising "points of order." But Lois Gibbs organized her neighbors to destroy this tactic. Every time they would challenge residents' "standing," the signal would be given and everybody would stand up. When they argued "Point of Order!," the whole audience would yell "Cheeseburger." And if the hearing wasn't addressing their issues, the crowd would chant the Love Canal slogan, "WE WANT OUT!"

The best way to handle the media black-out that results when community testimony is not given until after the media leaves (and after hours of testimony by the "bad guys") is by calling the news media. Tell them you're holding a news conference at the hearing site 30 minutes before the hearing time. Tell the media you're sensitive to their deadlines and for their convenience, you will give them this news conference so they can get both sides of the story.

One group in New Jersey insisted the hearing begin with the Pledge of Allegiance. They forced hearing officials to scramble to find a flag. Then they insisted on singing "America the Beautiful." By this time, the hearing officials were totally flustered and found themselves singing along - except halfway through the song, they discovered new lyrics the group had written to tell their story. Other groups added to this by insisting a local minister (a member of their group) give an opening invocation that also spoke to the group's concerns.

Citizens Against the North Mountain Site (WV) won their first big victory when their key "testimony" took the form of a children's delegation giving petitions to the governor. The high schooler's spokesperson "testified" and challenged the governor to "just say no" to dumping toxics, just as young people are challenged by adults to "just say no" to drugs. The group's message was enhanced by a profuse display of banners, signs, balloons and costumes.

You can go to a hearing as a group, even in the form of a motorcade or parade. Set a time and place in your neighborhood for people to meet so they can go to the meeting and sit together. It's more fun. It boosts turn-out and your folks enter the meeting room united.

At a hearing in Maryland, Lois Gibbs stunned local leaders with a small but powerful tactic. As she testified, she saw officials weren't listening. Lois stopped and stood silent at the microphone. After a long pause, the hearing official saw she wasn't

talking. “Er, ah, Ms. Gibbs, are you through?” “No sir, “Lois replied, “I was simply waiting for you to start listening. When you’re ready, I’ll continue.”

We’ve advised groups who’ve been shut-out, silenced or scorned to physically display their response. Accordingly, groups have shown up wearing gags, ear plugs and in a couple of instances, wearing cardboard cut-outs over their ears bearing the label “B-S Protectors.”

In Alabama, some years ago, a group pulled off this outstanding tactic. A hearing was held in a level hall with folding chairs. The spokesperson for the group stood and addressed the hearing officials. She expressed her sympathy for how hard it is to understand how deeply concerned people are. She then turned her back, faced the audience and asked people to stand if they were concerned about Issue #1. Everybody stood. “And if you’re also deeply concerned about issue #2, step forward.” Everyone picked up their chairs, moved one step forward and slammed their chairs down in one loud crash. She asked again, and people stepped forward and dropped their chairs with a crash. And then again, and again. When she read off the last demand, the front row of chairs was in the faces of the hearing officers. Then she turned around, took her seat, nose-to-nose with the top official and said, “Now what are you going to do about it?”

What you do with a public hearing is up to you. Hearing officials try to carry out a controlled agenda that’s little more than going through the motions. How you respond will be the subject of intense post-hearing staff meetings by your opponents. If you behave, you’re written off as wimps. If they control the meeting flow, they’re assured of prime media coverage. If they seduce you into dealing with “just the facts,” they’ve got you in the “Dueling Experts” game they are sure to win.

The group in Homer, LA. provides a great example of the strength, creativity, and courage of the grassroots environmental justice movement. Whether you take what they dish out is up to you.

“Er, ah, Ms. Gibbs, are you through?” “No sir, “Lois replied, “I was simply waiting for you to start listening. When you’re ready, I’ll continue.”

Chapter 31

Using Local Ordinances

Citizens across the country are struggling to protect their communities from the onslaught of proposals to build mega-dumps, incinerators, power lines and to apply sludge and contaminated soil, as well as many other environmental threats. In communities from Florida to California people have seen federal and state agencies fail to control, regulate and protect communities from facilities that could destroy their ground water supply, farmland, or air quality.

In response, communities across the country are using local zoning and passing ordinances to fill in the gaps where state and federal laws have failed. In many cases, local control is the only way to regulate where a facility can operate. Rural communities constantly find themselves fighting facilities due to a lack of zoning or siting ordinances that prevent such facilities from being located in their communities. Once a facility is operating, it is often exempt from any new criteria. This is known as "grandfathering."

For example, Lee County, located in southwest Virginia in the coal fields, has been targeted with proposals for ash dumps, landfills, sludge dumping and other threats. Faced with a proposal by a large out-of-state landfill company, the local citizens decided they wanted to control and run their own solid waste facility. In cooperation with county leaders and attorneys, an ordinance was drawn up and implemented that withstood a court challenge by the garbage company in Virginia state court. Many consider the Lee County ordinance a model for communities in Virginia.

This ordinance strictly regulates the processes of waste management and prohibits the establishment of commercial waste facilities in the county. It gives the Board of Supervisors the right to review and consider the companies' operating record, violations if any, financial stability, and all environmental impacts the proposal could have. In other words, the supervisors have the "right to say no" if the proposal is deemed unsafe and unneeded by the community.

An activist in Lee County said that citizen participation was the key to getting the ordinance passed. "We know that it was the citizens input and push that stopped the company from siting a dump in our community. We were able to get a strong ordinance to make sure we don't have the same fight again."

A local ordinance can protect your community by prohibiting activities that threaten public health and the environment such as sludge application compost farms, landfills and other waste storage or disposal facilities.

Many ordinances now being implemented in communities like Lee County have clauses that prohibit landfills, incinerators, nuclear waste storage or disposal, or ash and sludge disposal. There are many different ways to approach regulating and prohibiting waste activities and how it's approached will vary from state to state depending on the laws the citizens must work with on these issues.

Here are a few examples of how other communities across the United States are using local ordinances and zoning to protect their neighborhoods.

- The city of Riverside, California, implemented a strong "bad boy" section in an ordinance regulating waste activities and toxic substances. "Should the contractor or any of its officers be found guilty of felonious conduct related to the performance of this agreement, or felonious conduct related to anti-trust activities, illegal transport or disposal of hazardous or toxic materials, or bribery of public officials, the city reserves the right to unilaterally terminate this agreement." This language is very strong and can help keep large waste companies with less than reputable operations from moving into the community. This is what is meant by having a "bad boy" clause in the ordinance.
- In Georgia, over a dozen communities have passed moratoriums on the siting of new hazardous or solid waste facilities until land use plans can be implemented. Hall County passed an ordinance to regulate solid waste imported for incineration. The ordinance has strict guidelines including a $1,000,000 filing fee and extensive liability insurance requirements, making it very hard for a waste disposal company to move in.
- West Virginia, Tennessee, Virginia and other states have passed moratoriums prohibiting any new medical waste incinerators until the issue can be studied and alternatives considered.

The Basic Ordinance

When working on your plan, make sure you know what a proposed ordinance means and covers or you could be "hoodwinked" by local officials and lawyers that come up with strong language but no real teeth to protect you. You may want a lawyer who is working for you to check the language in the ordinance to make sure there are no loopholes. In Floyd County, Virginia, the Floyd Environmental Action Team (FEAT) had developed a draft of a waste control ordinance that was discussed and worked on by county officials for over a year. "Every time we settled on a version after we requested stronger provisions, we discovered more gaps or loopholes for companies to escape," said one FEAT member. So vigilance and an eye for detail are a must.

Here are a few of the basics to include in your ordinance:

- **Siting criteria** - Protect sensitive regions in your community. Identify how close to water resources, schools, roads, houses, etc. you will allow facilities to be sited. Many waste companies will not be able to operate under these conditions and criteria.
- **Operating provisions** - Determine how a facility is to be managed, maintained and operated. Set limits on what processes will be implemented, what materials will be used, what will be produced or discarded, and how the facility will report to local officials. Set up timelines. Make sure you know exactly how a plant is operating in order to avoid having a "new process" sneaked in such as a facility changing fuel from coal to hazardous waste.
- **Prohibition** - In some cases you may want to completely prohibit certain types of operations such as landfills, incinerators, or nuclear waste facilities.
- **Escrow accounts and insurance** - To pay for researching company records, past operations, or financial stability, some communities require an upfront escrow account to ensure that these expenses are covered. Similarly, some ordinances require the company to have a paid insurance policy to protect the community should an accident or disaster occur. Most waste companies have inadequate insurance for spills, fires and other environmental damages. Communities across the country are struggling to clean up dump sites left behind by now defunct corporations.

An ordinance is not a substitute for having a strong grassroots organization in your community to guard your health and environment. Zoning and ordinances are only tools that groups can use to protect their neighborhoods and control the types of industry and jobs that come into their community. We all want good jobs and responsible industry in our towns and cities, yet if we do not establish criteria, we will end up with undesirable businesses that will manipulate our elected leaders, operate without control and leave us a legacy of contamination and destruction.

Do not wait until the wolf is at the door to strengthen your local laws, zoning codes and ordinances. Start researching your local laws today. You can bet the waste companies are already studying your local ordinances and will be ready to use them against you.

With most state regulators and the EPA out to lunch, it is apparent that local control may be one of the only ways we can have a say in what happens in our communities.

Section VII.
Science for Organizations

Center for Health, Environment & Justice | Mentoring a Movement, Empowering People, Preventing Harm
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Chapter 32

Science Lessons for Community Organizations

It is common to think that the answers to your questions and the solution to your problems lie in science and technical information. Unfortunately, this is rarely if ever the case. Science and technical information are important and they play a role in helping to achieve your community goals. But understand that they are just one part of the work you must do.

Lesson I. Science and technical information alone will not solve your problems.

It's a common mistake to think that if you hire the best scientists and engineers and make solid technical arguments, that the government decision-makers can be convinced of your point of view. When the government discovers a problem, it is very reluctant to determine the full extent of that problem. This is because if the government documents contamination that threatens people's health, it then has to do something about it, like evacuate people and clean up the contamination. These steps cost money that government doesn't want to spend. Such action might also set a precedent, establishing cleanup standards or unsafe exposures levels that would mean spending more money at other sites. So, scientific data and information play a small role in decisions about cleanup and environmental threats.

Lesson II. Public health official's primary responsibility is to maintain control.

The government's prime responsibility in responding to the discovery of a pollution problem or to concerns about health problems in a community is to maintain control of the situation and to assure the public that everything is alright, whether in fact it is or not. The government cannot afford to be honest with people and say what they really know about the situation, which is often very little. If they did that, then the public would demand action that they could not scientifically justify taking. They would also be facing some angry people and an observant media watching their every step. Both are situations they want to avoid.

Lesson III. There are few answers to the many questions about exposures to toxic chemicals.

Scientists actually know little about the adverse health effects resulting from exposure to combinations of

chemicals at low levels. As a result, when politicians and bureaucrats look for answers, the scientists don't have them. Science is not one single body of knowledge. There are areas where scientists know a lot, and others where what is known is very limited. Some things, like cause and effect, can be very hard to prove. Other research areas are poorly funded, so we don't know what can be proven.

Lesson IV. Scientists rarely admit they don't know the answer to a question.
The words "I don't know" are not part of the lexicon for most scientists, especially those in government agencies. Instead they introduce the concept of "risk" and begin a debate over what is "acceptable." This is best illustrated with low exposure levels of toxic chemicals. The government's response is usually to downplay the results, stating that the levels are very low and within "acceptable" limits. The real issue here is that scientists don't know what happens to people when they are exposed to low levels of a mixture of toxic chemicals, especially when one or several of these chemicals cause cancer. This uncertainty gets lost in the use of "acceptable" limits, which are based more on opinion than scientific fact.

Lesson V. Scientists are not objective.
Scientists have their biases like everybody else. Uncertainties and incomplete information force scientists to make judgments and give opinions that have considerable political and economic consequences. Consequently, scientists are pressured by politicians and corporations with economic stakes in the outcome to make the "right decision" which is to protect their interests and not the public good. These pressures often make decisions very difficult, especially when there are so many uncertainties. In addition, many good scientists have given in to the pressures brought on by controversy and threatened job security.

Lesson VI. The right information used in the right way at the right time can be very powerful.
Science can be a powerful tool for community groups if used wisely. For scientific information to be useful, you must recognize what it can tell you and what it can not, and learn how to use information — not just collect it. Learning how to use scientific and technical information is an organizing skill. The key is to integrate scientific information into an overall organizing strategy and to use this information to help people take action and have power over their own lives. Science should not be used to try to "match" or "outdo" the claims made by government or corporations.

Science and technical information are important and they play a role in helping to achieve your community goals. But understand that they are just one part of the work you must do.

Although scientific information cannot provide clear answers about health and environmental impacts, we cannot abandon science. We need to learn what it can tell us and what it can not. We need to recognize that most bureaucrats and politicians use science to justify their decisions which are based not on facts, but on the political and economic pressures they face.

It is important to use scientific information to educate the public and the decision-makers and to provide the back-bone of your arguments, but by itself it will not change anything. What will ultimately make a difference is how you use what you know as part of your organizing efforts to harness people power against the power of corporations and government.

Chapter 33

Role of Science in Community Struggles

We get many calls from people seeking information that they think will convince their state or local officials to take action. When people first get involved in toxic problems, it's normal to think that government is there to help them and that once the government understands what's going on in their community, it will do the right thing to correct the situation.

So many people try to get their state and local officials the "facts," thinking that if you give a reasonable and honest person enough evidence and information on health problems or contamination, that person will be convinced that there is a problem that must be dealt with.

Most people, however, find out the hard way that life doesn't work that way. Government is not going to help people and it will not do the right thing unless there is organized public pressure forcing it to take action. It's not in the best interest of government (nor industry) to do anything about health problems in communities. Why not? Because government and its corporate friends are responsible for cleaning up the problems and they don't want to pay for health and environmental damages.

Let me tell you how I learned this lesson. It happened more than thirty years ago during my work at Love Canal. I had been hired by the state of New York to be a technical adviser to the residents, mostly represented by the Love Canal Homeowners Association. It was clear from the beginning that the state perceived my role as a "buffer" between it and the community. They thought it would be easier to deal with a professional than with "emotional, uncontrollable and unpredictable" residents.

At first, I was accepted by the state officials as a one of them. After all, I was on their payroll. The community had doubts about my value to them for the same reason. I decided not to take sides, but to let the facts guide my judgment and decisions. I naively thought the state scientists I was working with were thinking the same way.

I worked with Lois Gibbs and other community leaders to collect information on health problems and contamination at Love Canal. Then, I went with a research scientist from Roswell Park Cancer Institute who was working with the residents at the time to Albany to present new health findings to several epidemiologists and toxicologists working for the New York Department of Health. They listened to us and carefully evaluated the data we put before them.

We had considerable discussion that I perceived as reasonable scientific debate, not hostility. We left the meeting feeling the state had heard our message and was going to investigate the information we had left with them.

With shock, I read the headlines in the papers the next day. The state scientists called the new data on health effects in the Love Canal community "Useless Housewife Data." They were so reasonable in the meeting. What was going on? I soon found out.

My new found knowledge came after a long emotional public meeting. I got back to my hotel late that night. I was staying at the same hotel as all the state representatives. I wasn't tired, so I went to the bar where I found most of the people from the state, drinking and talking about the meeting. They invited me to join them. I sat down not quite knowing why, since I was quite upset that so little had been accomplished at the meeting. The community was angered by the way the meeting had gone and deserved to be. Few of their questions had been answered.

The state representatives had apparently been at the bar for some time. They were talking quite freely about the meeting and how they felt. The Deputy Commissioner of Health, who chaired the meeting, was doing most of the talking. He openly bragged about the way he had handled the meeting, 'I didn't give them anything,' he repeated over and over with a clear sense of pride.

He was proud that when the community had asked hard questions about why their children were so sick, or why they couldn't be relocated, that he had not given "in" to them, that he did not answer their questions, that he had "won the battle." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Here was the number two person in the New York State Health Department bragging in a bar that he had not given the community any information at a public meeting!

I realized then that the Health Department understood what was going on in the community. It didn't need the information that the community was collecting. No matter what the facts were, the state officials were not going to tell the public anything.

The governments' main role, and they saw this as their primary responsibility, was to maintain control of the situation and to assure the public that everything was alright, whether in fact it was or not. The government was not being honest with people. They could not afford to say what they really knew about the situation, which was very little. If they did that, then the public would demand action that they could not scientifically justify taking.

Government officials and political leaders want scientists to provide them with answers and information to justify any decisions they want to make. When it comes to evaluating health problems from exposure to toxic chemicals, scientists know very little about cause and effects. To this day, scientists cannot provide clear answers to why people are suffering from so many health problems in a community despite, as was the case of Love Canal, the obvious presence of a leaking landfill in the middle of the community.

At Love Canal and at so many other communities, science and the facts had little to do with the decisions being made. What mattered most was control and protecting economic and private interests. If the Love Canal people were sick, how would the state take care of them? Where was the money going to come from to pay for their health care and to clean up the site? How would this affect all the other sites in New York or, for that matter across the country?

Scientific facts and information are important, but it is not what the government uses to make its decisions. Decisions are 90% political and 10% based on scientific facts and information. How you play the politics of the situation is what matters. Apply enough pressure on the right people, and you'll get your site cleaned up. Spend your time digging for facts, and you're playing right into the hands of your opponents. Government won't be convinced by any facts you come up with unless you back-up your facts with well-focused, well-organized political pressure.

That's how the residents of Love Canal won. That's how communities all across the country are winning.
Stephen Lester, CHEJ Science Director.

Chapter 34

Assessing Health Problems in Communities

Imagine this whether your group is new or has been organized and fighting for cleanup of a polluting facility in your community for years. One of the most pressing questions everyone has had since the fight began is about health effects. Now after (enormous public pressure) years of fighting, the state has agreed to ask the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to do a health study. Initially, you and your group were excited because you thought that someone was finally going to provide some answers about health problems in your community.

Then you hear rumors about the failures of ATSDR to meet the needs of local communities. Now you're confused and unsure what to do. Is ATSDR going to treat your community like they have every other community? History tells us they will.

Many people in your community are sick and have fought long and hard to get someone to evaluate their health problems. Because they want answers so desperately they may not want to turn ATSDR away. So, you and your group decide to go along with the study. Now, it's not only important to know what to expect from ATSDR, but it's critical to have a plan on how to get the most from them or any health agency or institution who wants to investigate health problems in your community.

One important step is to define *as a community* what you want. Do you want a typical epidemiological study where a questionnaire is distributed throughout the community asking about health problems and the results are then compared to a matched unexposed community? Do you want a clinic set up in the community where people could be tested to evaluate their health? Maybe some portion of the community wants to be relocated or evacuated and you want ATSDR to recommend such action.

Once you're clear on the things you want, then you need to figure out how to achieve these goals. The investigating agency, whether it's ATSDR or someone else, is one of your targets. They are the ones who can give you valuable information and ammunition to help you get what you want. In most cases, they are only coming to your community because of the media, public attention, and pressure your group has already managed to put on the politicians and decision-makers. Be careful not to get totally distracted and let up on that pressure. It's vital to maintain this pressure, even while a study is being

conducted in the community.

How can you tell if the investigating agency is friend or foe, or if the study will really help you achieve your goals? You need to ask three fundamental questions, the answers to which will give you a good sense of the intent of the investigators and the limits of the study:

- What are the goals of the investigation?
- How will the investigators get the information they need?
- How are they going to release the results?

Based on what you find out, you may decide that you don't want to participate in this study. Or you may decide you want to change the agency's plan to something that will be useful to your group. Changing their plan will require a strong organized community effort and a plan to get your points across to the agency.

Involvement and Input at Every Step

The key to influencing the design of a health study is to have input at every step of the investigation, including:

- How the study is designed
- How the study is actually carried out
- The evaluation and interpretation of the results
- The dissemination of the results
- Deciding what actions need to be taken as a result of the findings of the study

The most critical of these steps is the first one. If the study is poorly designed, then nothing will come from the study. No amount of after-the-fact analysis can change a poorly designed study. You may need help to review the study design and protocols in order to understand if the study is properly designed, but groups often need money to hire medical or scientific experts to review the design of a health study. One demand you can make is for funds to hire your own experts. Anywhere from $10,000 to review a study design to $50,000 to participate in all the steps outlined above is reasonable.

Boycotting the Study

One way to change a study is to refuse to participate until you get what you want. By simply saying "no" to the study, you have a great deal of power. Unless the community participates, the agency has no study and will lose credibility if they fail to conduct a study because they didn't meet citizen demands for public participation.

Boycotting a study is not easy to pull off, (but it is doable). Just ask the Concerned Residents of the Yough (CRY) in Pennsylvania. After years of fighting a hazardous waste treatment and disposal facility, CRY finally convinced the Pennsylvania Department of Health to do a health study of the community. CRY asked for and received the study design. With the help of CHEJ, the community quickly found out that the study did not include specific questions about cancer, the number one concern in the community.

After much discussion and debate, CRY members agreed to boycott the study until it was changed to reflect their concerns. At first, the Health Department ignored these residents but found virtually no doors open to them as they went through the community. It wasn't long before the Health Department went back to CRY leadership with a new questionnaire that included the questions they wanted.

A Registry Versus a Study

An alternative to the traditional health study is to do a health registry. A health registry is conducted much like a health study. A questionnaire is developed and circulated throughout the community. The data is reviewed to determine the occurrence of health problems in the community and if any disease patterns exist. However, a control population is not needed. Changes in health outcomes can then be tracked over time.

The biggest advantage of a registry is in the interpretation of the results. By looking at the rates of health problems in a community, you might

find enough information to justify making demands for a clinic, a full scientific study, evacuation or whatever your goals are. At the same time, if you don't find much, you lose little, which contrasts with a full health study where if nothing's found, your community goes to the bottom of the list for action since you "proven" there's no problem in your community.

Before the Study Begins

If someone is going to do a health study in your community, here are guidelines you could use to help assure that the best possible study is conducted:

- The community must be given the opportunity to review the study design and protocols before the study begins (funds will likely be needed to hire someone with expertise to review this work)
- The study must address specific chemical exposures and adverse effects observed in the community
- Avoid tests that generate results that cannot be interpreted
- The study must have reasonable "power" to detect an effect if present (power is a statistical test that measures the "sensitivity" of a study to detect a certain outcome)
- Individual medical results must be reported to each individual before being released to the public (if applicable)

It's also important to have good experienced scientists do the study. While in theory this is possible, it's often hard to achieve. Many communities where health studies are needed are high profile sites that quickly become politicized. Bureaucrats and politicians are under a lot of pressure at these sites to "do nothing," resulting in studies conducted by government agencies that are often inconclusive by design.

The best you can do is to make sure that the study design is critically reviewed, up-front, by experts working for the community, and that the study meets the criteria listed above. This approach should provide an honest assessment of what's going on in the community, even if ATSDR conducts the study. But don't be misled. No single study is likely to answer all of your questions, but a study design that benefits from community input and outside review is a good start. If you or your community would like to know more about how to influence the study design process or need help evaluating a study that has already been conducted, please contact CHEJ.

The key to influencing the design of a health study is to have public involvement and participation at every step of the investigation.

Chapter 35

Community Health Surveys

Do people in your community wonder if long time residents are getting cancer from ground water contaminated by the nearby landfill? Are people concerned that the fumes from the local factory are related to the high incidence of asthma in children? Do you think if you could just prove that there is too much sickness, you could get government officials to clean up the contaminated site and force the polluter to clean up their act?

If you've had this discussion in your community, someone has probably come up with the idea of doing a health study—an analysis of how many people have different illnesses and how these illnesses might be connected to the pollution problem you're trying to address.

A community health study can be a great addition to your group's effort. Or it can be a huge time-consuming dead end. Even with the best design and unlimited resources, a health study may not clearly link the rates of illness in your community to a pollution source. But it may provide compelling data to fuel your organizing efforts to shut down a polluter.

The key question to ask is how does the health study fit into the organizing work of your organization? Can it help you to achieve your group's goals? You need to be clear about what your group is trying to accomplish as a community and to evaluate whether a health study can help you achieve this goal(s).

Advantages of Health Studies

A health study can provide several opportunities for a community group. Health studies are labor intensive, so doing one gives lots of people an opportunity to get involved. Conducting a study can also serve as a way to show that your group cares about people's health and is involved in the community. And, it can build the credibility of your group in the community. By taking the initiative to do a study, you not only educate yourself about the health of the community, but you can also become a resource for others on this issue.

The process of doing a health study can lead to an understanding of the type, amount, and degree of illness in the community. More importantly, it may provide evidence to help achieve strategic goals or motivate more of the community to become involved and organized. A health study may also

identify health problems that you were not aware of. For example, the residents of Love Canal were motivated to survey their community by the large number of children with health problems. After they surveyed the community, they discovered high rates of miscarriages, birth defects, urinary diseases, and nervous breakdowns. In addition, they found that effects were clustered geographically, which led to the identification of several paths of contamination leaving the dump site and entering the surrounding neighborhood. While this health survey showed elevated rates of several health problems, it wasn't enough to get the residents of Love Canal evacuated; however, it did provide compelling reasons for residents to continue to work together to pressure the government to do the right thing.

Disadvantages of Health Studies

A health study is not the same as an organizing or recruiting drive. In fact, a health study should never be used as a preliminary organizing tool. Some leaders may think, "Gee, a health survey is a great way to get people to open their doors to us" or "what a great way to build awareness of our issue." While this is somewhat true, there are enough things that could go wrong with a health study that you should look to more tried-and-true techniques of reaching out to people. One reason for this is that people in a loosely organized or unorganized community will not be convinced or aware enough to believe there is reason for such an effort. Nor will they have gained enough trust in your group to be willing to give you their very personal health information.

Even if an individual or small group overcomes the barriers of mistrust, time and the high financial costs of doing a health study, it will not likely be enough. Without an organization to follow through on demands for environmental justice (whether that's compensation, health treatment for the victims, or government action to stop polluters from polluting), industry and government regulators will simply ignore your findings. They will assume that you don't know what you're talking about or that you "cooked" the data. And even if you're right, they're likely to assume that there is no community power behind the health report to put up a fight, and they will just ignore you.

Because doing a health study is such a big job, doing one can overwhelm your primary organizing efforts. Collecting health information in a community is not easy. It requires a tremendous amount of time, energy and hard work to be successful. Before beginning, your group should decide if it can afford to give the amount of time that is needed to carry out this type of project.

Another potential problem is that your group may end up constantly trying to defend the study's credibility. Health studies are subject to many complicated scientific tests and are often challenged on the grounds of the size of the population studied, possible bias in collecting health data, or the lack of comparison to an unexposed "control" group.

Doing a health study may lead to things you are unprepared to deal with. What will you do if you find an increase in health problems? People will want to know what they should do to protect their families now that an increased risk has been documented. These concerns cannot be ignored and will likely be directed at you since you identified the problem with your study. What will you do if you identify health problems in people for which they are not being treated? Do you now have an obligation to help them find the medical care they need?

There can also be legal issues involved in doing a community health study. You will need to maintain confidentiality for the personal health information that you do collect. Government or industry may try to force you to turn over the results of your study by asking for this information. How you respond could hurt your credibility with people to whom you promised confidentiality. Also, by "discovering" health problems that may be linked to a certain exposure, you may start the clock for taking legal action. By causing people to discover their injury through your survey, you bear some responsibility for helping people to protect their legal rights.

A health study could also undermine your organizing efforts. What will your group do if you find no significant increase in health problems? If there is no evidence of increased health effects, industry and government officials will use this against you. You could be giving them ammunition for not cleaning up a contaminated site or putting your problem at the bottom of the list for attention.

Important Questions to Consider

Having considered all of the pros and cons, your group may decide that you want to do a health study. If so, there are several questions you need to answer before you begin.

First, what do you hope to accomplish? Do you want to convince your neighbors or elected officials that there is a problem? Are you planning to use the results to pressure health authorities to conduct a comprehensive scientific study? Or, do you want to use the results to put pressure on the government to evacuate or clean up a polluted site? It is important to define your goals so you can decide if a health study can help you achieve them.

Next, what is the purpose of the study? Do you think there is an increase of a specific disease in the community? Or do you want to determine the current status of the health of the people in your community? Do you think it will give your community the necessary leverage—the "proof"—to convince the government to take action?

A Health Registry Versus a Health Study

There are several types of health studies that you could do. One is the traditional health survey, which is a very expensive process that measures health outcomes in a defined population and compares the results to another population (the "control") that is as much like the study population as possible except it is not exposed to the identified pollution source. Another is a health registry. A health registry differs from the traditional health survey in that it does not compare your community's health results to another unexposed community. A registry simply creates a health profile of the community instead of looking for a deviation from " the normal." A registry is conducted much like a survey, by developing a questionnaire and asking people in the community about their health. The data is then reviewed to see if any patterns in health problems exist, and to define what percentage of people have different health problems. For example, you might find that 63% of people have liver problems, 37% have asthma, etc. Changes in people's health can then be tracked over time.

The biggest advantage of a registry is in the interpretation of results. By looking at the rate of health problems in the community, you might find enough information to justify making demands for a clinic, a full scientific study, evacuation, or whatever your group's goals are. At the same time, if you don't find much, you don't stand to loose much. This is in contrast to a full health study that compares your community to expected levels of disease. In that case, if nothing is found, you have "proven" that there is no problem in the community.

There are other ways to document health problems in your community including using mapping techniques to identify where people with health problems live in relation to pollution sources; measuring body burden levels, or chemical levels in people's bodies; measuring pollution levels in your community and identifying the toxicity of the chemicals identified; and measuring ecological impacts in your community (damage to plants and wildlife).

No matter what type of health study is used, it is simply a tool to help you understand what is going on in your community. Before you decide if a health study is right for your community, you need to evaluate whether it can help you achieve your community's goals and objectives. It should never be done without knowing how it fits into your group's overall organizing strategies and goals. Remember, statistics don't win organizing struggles—organizing does. A health study can't give you the magic facts that will convince regulators to take action or an industry to stop polluting. But

a well-designed health study that is strategically part of a larger organizing effort could be a useful tool.

Positive Outcomes From Doing a Health Study:

- Documents health problems in your community
- Educates your group about the health problems in the community
- Creates an opportunity for lots of members to get involved
- Incorporates community values
- Helps you speak more powerfully
- Builds the credibility of your group
- May connect disease to pollution sources
- May provide evidence that will motivate community involvement, generate media coverage, or fulfill other strategic goals.

Negative Outcomes From Doing a Health Study:

- Overwhelms your organizing efforts
- Documents no "significant" relationship between disease and exposure
- Appears to show there is "no" health problems in your community
- Identifies health problems that you were unaware of and may be unprepared to deal with
- Generates statistics that undermine your organizing efforts
- Leads to legal complications over confidentiality or lawsuits
- Forces you to constantly defend the credibility of your study
- Gives polluters "permission" to continue polluting

Remember, statistics don't win organizing struggles — organized people do!

Remember, statistics don't win organizing struggles – organized people do!

"CHEJ is the strongest environmental organization today – the one that is making the greatest impact on changing the way our society does business."

Ralph Nader

"CHEJ has been a pioneer nationally in alerting parents to the environmental hazards that can affect the health of their children."

New York, New York

"Again, thank you for all that you do for us out here. I would have given up a long time ago if I had not connected with CHEJ!"

Claremont, New Hampshire

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