

Fight To **Win** A Leader's **Manual**



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Fight to Win

A Leader's Manual

Center for Health, Environment & Justice

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Mentoring a Movement

Empowering People

Preventing Harm

About the Center for Health, Environment & Justice

CHEJ mentors the movement to build healthier communities by empowering people to prevent the harm caused by chemical and toxic threats. We accomplish our work by connecting local community groups to national initiatives and corporate campaigns. CHEJ works with communities to empower groups by providing the tools, strategic vision, and encouragement they need to advocate for human health and the prevention of harm.

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.

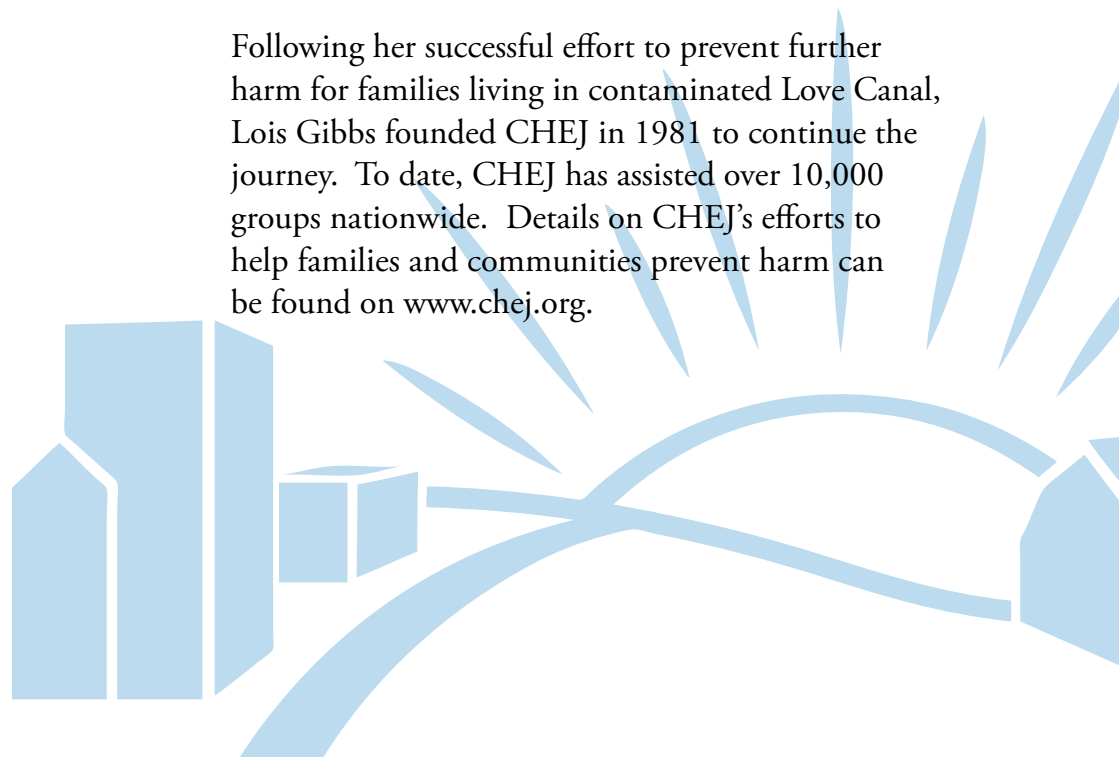


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Chapter 1

Introduction

This handbook is for leaders who want to start or strengthen organizations addressing environmental and/or health issues. The first section describes organizing methods applied to environmental issues. We rely heavily on the long history of community organizing in this country and have added our own experiences. Other sections in this handbook will cover other aspects of environmental contamination,

including health, scientific and legal topics you will need to think about.

This book is not a “Bible”, not infallible and we don’t expect for you to “follow a script” when you deal with your community’s problems. Instead, we hope we raise the right questions and offer some useful ideas. Ultimately, through your own work, you will be writing your own book.



Chapter 2

Gathering Information

Why Organize?

History shows us that the only effective way to resolve environmental problems is for people to join together. By doing this, they create enough pressure on the government and corporations to insure that the needs and concerns of people are addressed. Organized groups are the most effective way to solve problems.

The experiences of those involved with Love Canal and other communities demonstrate how vital it is to organize to address environmental problems. Effective community action at Love Canal resulted in over 1000 families being given the option to evacuate their neighborhood, with the government buying their homes at fair market value. In Enfield, Connecticut, citizens prevented Browning and Farris Industries (BFI) from locating an unsuitable waste disposal facility in their area. In Riverside, California, citizens successfully forced the government to clean up an illegal dump site. If these communities had not organized, the outcomes would have been very different.

Corporations are so strong and public officials are so unwilling to act that you can't fight them alone. One person can collect amazing, shocking facts, write

wonderful letters and give articulate testimony, but nothing will change. When you unite your neighbors and the community into an organization, you have the best chance to make change. That's what this handbook is about: A systematic and planned approach to organizing.

How Do I Know If I Have a Problem?

Organizing starts when one or two people become convinced that something is wrong and they decide to do something about it. Do you think you have a problem? Are your kids sick? Have your neighbors told you they've seen barrels or dumping in your neighborhood? Did you hear that a company is eyeing your neighborhood as the perfect location for a new hazardous waste facility? Observing what's going on around you and talking to your neighbors is the first step in forming an organization.

Before you do anything else, you need to investigate your suspicions. Evaluate whether your concerns are valid and whether you can pull together enough detailed information so that you can talk to people without them thinking you're a crackpot. Some leaders feel more comfortable researching the whole

problem before they begin organizing people. Other leaders will simply do enough research to confirm the problem and then recruit people. They use research later as a group project that gets people involved. We favor the latter approach, since an organization is only as strong as its members and research helps develop strong members. No matter how you handle research, you will want to know as much as you can about the dump or the proposed site, such as:

- Who are the past and present owners of the property?
- What was dumped there in the past?
- Have any complaints been filed?
- What government body has the authority to issue permits?
- Does the owner of the old or proposed site have a permit?

There are many ways to get this information. First check the planning board, City Hall, county health department, your local newspaper and public library. The local planning board may have the original design plans, or the future plans. At City Hall or your county building, you can look at the deeds to determine the history of ownership, tax records and rulings on zoning applications. Your local health department can tell you if any health or environmental complaints have been filed, if any tests have been conducted and their results and if any future testing or clean up activities are planned. State and federal agencies should have information on permits, permit applications and environmental testing that might have been done on the site before or after waste has been dumped. Your local newspaper may have relevant news articles in its clippings file that you may have missed or that were printed before you moved into the area.

Next, cover the bases with your elected city, state and federal representatives. By contacting them, you put them to work doing what you elected them to do. They can get information for you faster than you can by going through normal bureaucratic channels. You

Potential Sources of Information

City Hall/county building
 County health department
 State environmental agency
 Federal E. P. A.
 Elected officials
 Newspapers
 Library

Note: You will need to decide who will be responsible for collecting information and formulate a time frame for collecting it.

also alert them to the fact that there may be a problem that you are concerned with and that they had better get concerned too.

Tell each official that you want an answer within a specified, reasonable time, say two weeks. Follow up each conversation with a letter repeating your questions and saying, “As per our telephone conversation on (date), I will expect your response to the questions by (date).” By doing this, you have a record of the conversation, a reminder to the official of the agreement s/he’s made with you and you’ve expressed your seriousness and determination.

Handwritten letters are fine. Be sure that you hold up your end of the bargain. If you say you’ll follow up in two weeks or provide the legislator with certain information, be sure you do it.

As in the sample on next page, create a note card with a list of local legislators’ names, phone numbers and email addresses. Keep this information handy by putting the card on the refrigerator or otherwise posting it. Contact information for your legislators can usually be found online

Note of Caution: Some bad things can happen if you get elected officials involved at the beginning of your

Names and Contact Info to Remember

Mayor: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

County Commissioner: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

State Senator: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

State Representative: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

U.S. Senators: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

U.S. Representative(s): _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

organizing. For example, they could turn your issue into a political football to make themselves look good for the next election. They are probably inclined to take a very conservative approach and this could cause splits in a new group over tactics. An official may act genuinely interested in your cause and offer to take it on, but never follow through. Remember that the “system” probably had a lot to do with causing the problem. The same legislator who wants to be helpful might have voted for the dump you want to stop.

So what do you do? If your group is very new, unsure of itself or divided about tactics, disregard our advice about contacting legislators until later when you are ready to handle them. Before contacting them, be sure you understand that legislators work for you and not the reverse and be sure your group is strong enough to prevent the legislators from taking it over.

What Do I Do When No One Will Give Me Any Information?

You can always get the information you want – sometimes it’s just a little harder and takes a little longer. As

long as you can identify which agency might have the information you need, you can use the law to get it. For example, there’s the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Write a letter to the appropriate agency (using information you can get from your elected officials) saying, “Dear Mr./Ms. _____: I am requesting, under the Freedom of Information Act, all correspondence, memoranda, reports and tests (soil, air and water) and results with analysis on...” See sample letter on the next page.

Under law, they must give you the information, the reasons why they won’t, or some other reasonable explanation within ten working days. Since most of the agencies you will be contacting are likely to be backlogged, expect some delay, but use this as a reason to be even more insistent. Be sure to “c.c.” (carbon copy) your senator or representative.

Under FOIA, agencies can charge you for collection, copying and mailing information. They can also waive costs if the request for information is “in the public interest.” It used to be easy to get such a waiver, but

the feds are a lot stricter now. The best way to improve your chances for a waiver is to have the FOIA request filed by a legitimate community group. So, you may want to wait until your group is formed before you file your request.

Most states have laws similar to the FOIA, usually called “open word” or “sunshine” laws that apply to state agencies. FOIA covers federal agencies and

these state laws cover state and sometime local agencies. Check your state law to see how it works.

If you can’t get what you want from the state, think about reports they have to file with the federal government. Often the same information you want from the state is on file with a federal agency and you can file an FOIA request with that agency to get it.

Sample Freedom of Information Act Request

Joe Victim
27 Dioxin Drive
Sludgeville, XX 00000

August 21, 2006

Mr. I. Knownothing
EPA Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Knownothing:

I am requesting under the Freedom of Information Act the following information on the Chemikill Landfill located on Benzene Boulevard and Dioxin Drive in Sludgetown, XX:

- All reports, summary reports and statements, analytical results and interpretations to and from EPA, other parties and agencies
- All correspondence and memoranda to and from EPA and other parties or agencies regarding this land fill

I would appreciate your quick response to this request, as required by law.

Sincerely,

Joe Victim

CC: Senator Blowhard

Wow! Look What I Found! I Don't Know What It Means, But Give Me More!

Once you have received the information, you may need help interpreting it or feel you need to collect more.

For help in interpreting data, try contacting your local colleges and universities. Keep an eye out for individuals named in the local newspaper and the people reporters go to for information. Call reporters who wrote the article and ask for their sources' names and phone numbers. Be careful that the person you are asking to interpret information is objective and not under industry or government influence. There are also many organizations like CHEJ, which can help you. Call us and we will be happy to help you find one.

When you get expert help in interpreting technical information, try to have the experts teach you how to do it. This way, you'll be sure of the information for your own needs and, for the next batch of technical data, you'll be less dependent on the experts.

On the urge to collect more and more information, beware! We know that once you've had some success in amassing data, it's hard to stop. Stop and think, "How much information do we need before we're sure that chemical 'X' is harmful?" "How much more information on the law and regulations do we need to be sure that 'Y' Agency is responsible for dealing with this problem?" and "How much more proof do we need to be sure that 'Z' Corporation is responsible?"

At some point, you have to stop collecting data and get ready to DO SOMETHING! Gather just enough information to be able to back up your


suspicions and, hopefully, mobilize your community organization. Remember, once you've formed your community organization, you'll have a lot more people available to do further research and make contacts. It's a lot easier when you don't have to do it alone.

Isn't Gathering Information Really a Waste of Time?

Instead of wanting to gather more and more information, and write more and more letters, you might get discouraged and begin thinking it's all a waste of time. It's not—it's priceless!

Love Canal is a good example. Since the dump there looked like a harmless open field, most people were unaware that there was a hazardous dumpsite in their neighborhood. After contacting local and state government offices, residents discovered that Hooker Chemical Corporation at one time owned the property and had dumped about 20,000 tons of chemical waste. They also found out that there were numerous complaints on file at City Hall from residents, that an environmental assessment was conducted in 1976 by local health officials and the U.S. EPA, and that the local paper had run stories on Love Canal and its problems. They also learned that the local school board had maintained minutes of their meetings when the land changed hands from Hooker to the school district. These records described the difficulties the local board had in building the school due to the buried wastes.

These facts settled suspicions local families had about why their kids were so sick, neutralized the doubters, and gave the residents the ammunition they needed to start an organization and win.



Chapter 3

Starting a Group

How Can They Do This to Us?

Now that you have gathered the information, you're outraged at what you found out and want to do something about it. Your family's health, lives and future are at stake. Your biggest investment, your home, is devalued. You're angry and you're ready to go.

Stop! Think about what one local leader told us, "I went to the authorities alone to ask for help and I was told to go home, to stop causing trouble. I was quickly dismissed as a hysterical housewife." When she came back later as part of a group with hundreds of members, the response was, "Let's sit down and talk."

How do you get hundreds of people involved in an organized effort? Organizing a community around a toxic waste issue is not as hard as you might think. Everyone is affected, whether they believe it or not. The water they drink, the air they breathe, and ground they walk on could be contaminated. Once you can show them how they are or will be affected, they will have a self interest and be much more willing to become involved.

The beginning steps are to inform the public at large about the problem and talk to people, one by one, door-to-door. Some groups start by doing these two steps simultaneously. Some go public in the media first and others start by recruiting an initial, core group of dedicated people. The right answer is the one that works in your community. You have to decide, first, what you are able to do (given your job and other commitments on your time) and what will be the most effective way to get your neighbors involved. The bottom line is getting people involved. There aren't many communities that will accept any crusader as a "messiah" and obey his or her will. Organizing is a systematic process.

Next, gather your facts. Distill them down into understandable form. Whether you decide to go to the media first, or go door-to-door, you will have to be able to state the facts clear and simply, usually in the form of a one-page "fact sheet." A reporter may want to look at your data; so might a concerned resident you meet at the doorstep. But getting that person interested in the first place means being short and sweet.

Fact sheets are, as the name implies, a recital of

Sample Fact Sheet

(Hint: Use colored paper; people think colored paper means a party or sale, thus they'll read the flyer)

Dear Fellow Neighbor, did you know that:

Fact: Chemikill Industries has a chemical landfill in our neighborhood at Benzene Blvd and Dioxin Dr.

Fact: Chemikill's landfill contains 10,000 tons of chemical poisons, mostly deposited in barrels.

Fact: Metal barrels (drums) rust, leaking raw chemicals into the ground.

Fact: The local county health department has tested the soil outside the landfill and found the same chemicals that Chemikill buried in our soil, our air and our water!

Fact: Our lives may be in danger from exposure to these chemical poisons (many cause cancer, birth defects and death) in our neighborhood.

For more information, contact:
Mr. Joe Victim at (123) 773-0021
101 Your street, East Sludgeville

facts. Be sure to list your name and how you can be contacted. Include the location of the site, what is or might happen at that site and how it will affect people. Think about other information that will spark interest. You may want to include who owns the site, who put waste there, what has happened already and what needs to happen. Keep it Short and Simple (the K.I.S.S. rule). The rule-of thumb is that no one will read something that either puts him/her to sleep or gives him/her a headache. No one will act on something they don't understand.

Many community organizers will not distribute a fact sheet unless it contains a "hook" of some sort.

A "hook" is a recommended action you are asking people to take. People show their concern and start to get committed to the work by doing. So, your fact sheet should ask people to do something (come to a meeting, write a letter, something).

Once the fact sheets are done, get as many out as possible. Sometimes, all you want to do is get the facts out fast as possible to as many people as possible. If this is the case, you, your friends, your children and their friends can simply cover the neighborhood and shove flyers under doormats or doorjamb. Other times, however, you will be using the flyer as a tool to do serious recruitment of new members. Here, you will be going door-to-door and talking to people. Your fact sheet/flyer serves as a prop to explain your position, gives people something to look at later, and serves to remind them of an action your group is taking. More on recruitment later.

Who Are You? What's Your Name?

At some point early on in your group's development, your group's going to need a name. It's a big decision because your name obviously says a lot about you. One of the most important things to consider is, "Who do you want to reach?"

If you want to reach everybody and offend no one, then you'll probably want a very neutral name (example: People for Niceness). If you want to focus on a particular area, but want to involve everyone who lives there, try something like the "East Sludgeville Improvement Association." If you want to get a little more specific about the issue, try "East Sludgevillians Against Toxics." A more positive version might be "East Sludgevillians for a Safe Environment."

These kinds of decisions are tactical ones. Exactly whom do you want to reach? Some groups will fail because they try too hard to involve everyone, water down their positions, and take wishy-washy, least-common-denominator approaches that are doomed to fail from the start.

Other groups define themselves so narrowly through their name and their tactics that they can never gather

enough membership support to win.


Who decides on the name? There's no one right answer, since this too is a strategical question. Sometimes, it is best for the initial core group of leaders to do it as a way to get started. Other times, it makes more sense to hold off on that decision and let a larger group get involved. Some groups do it both ways by having a temporary name to start (e.g. East Sludgeville Toxics Organizing Committee) and then adopting a new name once the organization gets off the ground (e.g. East Sludgevillians for a Safe Environment).

One general tip that holds true no matter how you handle the name question is that your name's initial ought to spell out an interesting word that will grab public and media attention. At CHEJ, we work with groups with initials like: END, CATCH, SAFE, SUFFER, COPE, CURE, RESTORE, HEAL, LIFE, STOP IT, CARE, CONCERN, SCALD, CLEAN, HOPE, STOP, CAP, HELP, VOICE, RESCUE, RAG, GASP, HALT, OUCH, SCREAM, TEACH, and MAD.

Think it through. At Love Canal, the group called itself the "Love Canal Homeowners Association" and, throughout its history, had to live with the fact that the name turned off people who rented, even though the group never intended to cause offense and really wanted everyone in the neighborhood to join.

Where Do You Distribute Your Fact Sheets?

Analyze your community. Go where the people are. Identify the neighborhoods that are directly affected, since this is where the most people are who will have a self interest and be most likely to get involved. Where do people hang out? Where are the friendly churches or other allies? Where do people go (laundromats, stores, community centers, bowling allies, bars, etc.)? You'll need to do your "community analysis" in more detail later when your organizing campaign grows and you are ready to expand your group (this is described in detail later on in this handbook). For now, you do need to address these basic questions to get started.



Chapter 4

Sharing What You Have Learned

Three young organizers made the long drive through rural California to meet famed farm-worker 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 another person, then you talk to another person...” “But, how do you organize?!” they insisted. Caesar repeated, “First you talk to one person, then to another...”

Can I Organize Without Going Door to Door?

There’s no substitute for face-to-face contact when including people and building membership. You can call people on the phone, send flyers in the mail, distribute leaflets and get lots of media exposure. However, to build the relationships that will hold an organization together, you must meet and talk to people, one by one.

First, you have to go and knock on someone’s door. When you knock on a new person’s door, there’s that awkward moment when the person is trying to decide whether to slam the door in your face. Your opening lines have to be clear, open and appealing. The person is wondering, “Who is this?”, “What’s s/he selling?”, “What does s/he want?”, “How do I get out of this?” 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 the door?

People will ask, “Who sent you? Who are you connected with that I know?” These are credibility questions you need to 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 “Rev. Smith is working with us. He’s letting us use the church basement for our meeting next week,” you have borrowed credibility and have bought yourself a few more seconds to interest this new person.

The person you’re talking to isn’t stupid. S/he knows you want something, so what is it? Are you passing around a petition? A petition is an excellent door opener. Many organizations use petitions for the purpose of collecting names and addresses of concerned residents. The petition usually won’t solve the problem (in case you have any illusions about their effectiveness), but they’re great organizing tools.

The petition should be worded somewhat generally, but also to the point. For example, “We, the citizens of Sludgetown, want the Chemikill Landfill investigated to determine if it is leaking and if so, to determine the extent of the contamination. If contamination exists, we want to clean up the site to protect public health and our environment.”

How To Set Up a Petition

We, the citizens of East Sludgetown, want the Chemikill Landfill investigated to determine if it's leaking and if so, to determine the extent of contamination...

Name _____ **Address** _____ **Phone/Email** _____

If you circulate a petition making more specific or drastic demands, you may alienate people who do not yet understand the circumstances well enough to support you. For example, if you ask to have everyone evacuated from the area, you may find that at this stage of the fight, people are not convinced that a serious enough problem exists. Later, when the issue does heat up, these families may not sign your petition or even talk to you. If you demand that Chemikill immediately clean up the site without enough commonly understood information, people whose jobs depend on that industry will not only refuse to sign, but will likely become your opponents.

Along with your petition, bring a bound notebook (one where you won't tear out the pages) and copies of your fact sheet or flyer. Use the notebook to collect information from the people you meet, such as things they know about the site. Also make notes about the people, such as what they have agreed to do and what you've promised to do for them. Keep all promises you make! If you say you'll get back to them tomorrow, do it!

Now that you've got all your equipment together, you're ready to start knocking. Rehearse your lines. What do you want to say? Here are four sure-fire questions you should be able to answer in those first 30 seconds when the door opens:

- I am... (your name).
- We are... (your group and what it's about in 25 words or less).

- This is... (your petition to deal with the Chemikill Landfill problem).
- We want... (your support, your name on the petition, your body at the next meeting, your money to help our cause, or whatever)."

You can practice this "rap" in front of the mirror or with your spouse or children. Even better, if several of you are going door-to-door, role-play your presentations with each other until you all feel comfortable doing it.

Try to deal with your self-doubts. Will they slam the door in my face? Will they think I'm crazy or some wild-eyed radical? Will they think I'm looking for publicity or running for office? Will they think I'm trying to close down the local industry and steal their jobs? Don't worry! Knocking on strange doors is always a bit scary at first, but once you have done it a few times it gets much easier.

So now you're at the first door. Knock on the door, smile, introduce yourself, say where you're from (or who sent you) and give your presentation. Use your props. Hold out the petition and hand the person your flyer. If you get through the first 30 seconds without having the door slammed in your face, proceed onward to try to get a commitment from the person.

Try to get invited in. Make personal connections. Do you know this person? Who do you know in common? What do you share in common? If s/he is willing to sign the petition, go for more. Listen to

his/her story, their reaction to your group's issue, and how s/he ties it in to their own experience and future plans. The more people talk to you and the more they realize that you are genuinely listening, the stronger the bond between you. Ask if there are any questions you might ask the authorities the next time you speak to them and then encourage your new contact to ask the question him/herself. Write the questions down along with each person's name and be sure to get back to them.

Want to Buy a Clean Up?

Whether you're selling brushes, vacuum cleaners or toxic waste solutions, the time comes when you have to close in for the sale. In organizing, the "sale" is the person's commitment to do something. Signing a petition is fine for most people, but you will meet new people who can and will do more, but only if you ask them.

Use your judgment to gauge what each person might be willing to do. Everyone can do something unless they're either in a coma or a coffin. Request concrete things and ask, "Can you give me the names of some other people who might be interested?" "Will you contact them?" "Can you bring two other people to the next meeting?" "Can you give a ride to one other person?" "Could you pass out flyers on this block?" "Would you be willing to be host for a block meeting?"

While you're making concrete requests, ask for concrete commitments. Ask your new friend for a specific time when s/he will have done what was promised, or when you can check back. If you leave things like this vague, then you really don't have a "deal." Organizations get stronger when the members trust each other and count on each other to honor their pledges.

So what if the person you meet says no, or worse, is obnoxious, hostile or unfriendly? There's little to be gained by getting into an argument on the doorstep. Remember to kill them with kindness. Our experience is that in many cases, people who wouldn't support the organization at first later

become some of the hardest workers. An easy way to end an ugly conversation is to say, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion and you certainly expressed yours. Thank you."

By always being nice, or at least polite, no one can say, "Joe Victim called me a narrow-minded jerk," or, "When I called his/her office for information, he was rude to me and I'm a resident too." Remember the old saying, "If brother teases sister and sister screams, it's fun, but if she doesn't react, then brother finds something else to do."

Wow! A Petition with 1,000 Names! What's Next?

Set up a meeting. It's there that people will get together and start the real campaign going. If you don't meet, then you are not giving people the chance to make decisions and if you deny them control or ownership, don't be surprised if they refuse to do the work.

Holding good meetings is a challenging task for most community organizations. We've all been to meetings that were only slightly more pleasant than an impacted wisdom tooth. When people are forced to endure a bad meeting, they don't feel good about the organization and tend to complain more about how bad meetings are than how awful the issue you're working on is. Careful planning can prevent this.

Before every major meeting, leaders should get together and have a planning meeting. Figure out who needs to come to the planning meeting. Who are the key leaders and decision-makers in your group? Invite those you can count on for their good ideas and invite others so that they'll feel involved and have a sense of ownership. Decide what to do if people cause trouble. If they're not involved from the beginning in the planning meeting, let them spout, even if it's disruptive so that they will then have to take responsibility.

At your planning meeting, you should accomplish the following:

- Decide why the meeting is being held and what you would like the outcome of that meeting to be.
- Set an agenda and assign tasks among the leaders.
- Decide who will be invited and make a plan to get those people out.

In order to have a meeting, you need to find a place to hold it. Many groups use church halls, not just because they are cheap and accessible, but also because that is one way to enlist the support of the churches. Church support also gives your campaign a lot of credibility. Think about walking distances, bus routes, parking, car-pooling for the elderly and handicapped and the comfort offered by your meeting place.

Once you've identified a place, pick an evening (since most people are busy during the day) when there are few conflicting events going on. You should check TV schedules to make sure you don't have to compete with a popular show or special (think what would happen if you held a meeting on the night of the last game of the World Series, or on the night of an important PTA meeting or school event).

Your agenda should include introductions, a short background on your organization and its goals, and an open discussion that leads to a discussion about

action. The action discussion is the heart of the meeting: What do you want to do? Why do you want to do it? What will it accomplish? What must be done in order to accomplish it? Who will take responsibility for the steps and tasks? Use newsprint or a chalkboard to list these things and help people to arrive at a decision. This should all be prepared in advance at the planning meeting.

Once the logistics, agenda and leadership assignments are set, you need to make a plan for getting people to come. These meetings are the place where people will really decide to become members and get involved. It's the next logical step after you've talked to them, got them to sign a petition and gave them a flyer. The flyer is the basic tool for turning people out. While you can put notices in the local newspaper and on radio and TV, you will get a higher percentage of turn out when you hand out flyers and talk to people.

Flyer should include:

- **Who's** holding the meeting
- **What** it's about
- **Where** it's being held
- **When** it takes place
- **Why** people should come

Chapter 5

Mapping (Analyzing) Your Community

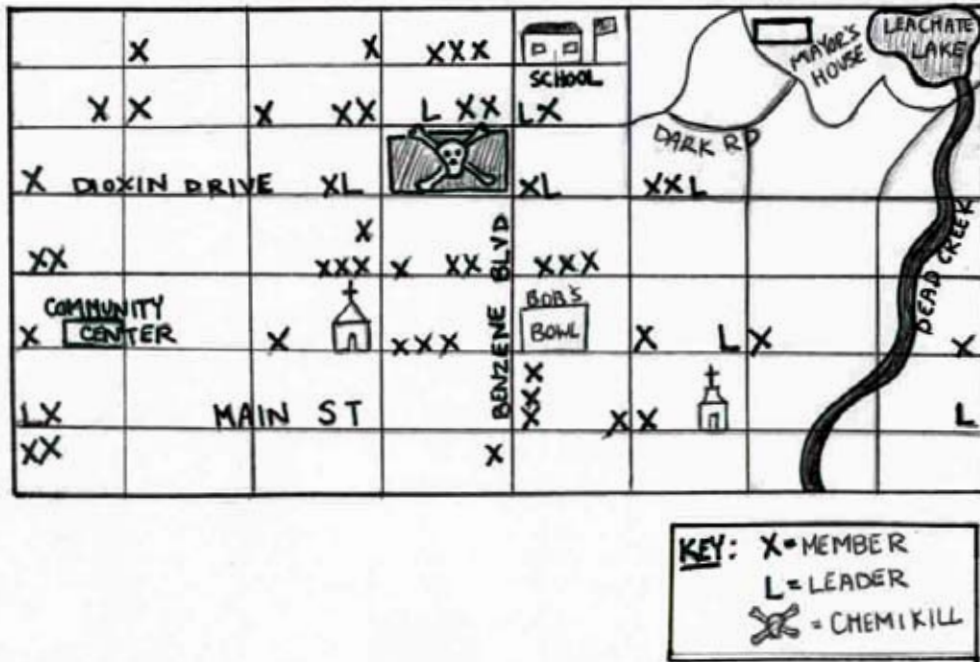
Community Analysis

Now you may be wondering, where you should hand out your flyers? Here's where the leaders at the planning meeting need to do community analysis. Since meetings are where people make their real commitment to join, think about how you will recruit people to come. We suggest you make a map of your community. Draw the area around the waste site and begin filling in the streets around it. Where do the leaders and others you can count on live? They can be "block captains" and take responsibility for door knocking on their streets. Where do you have members already? Are there any holes in the map where you don't have members? Where are the churches, social clubs and other places where you can put up posters or have announcements made?

Mapping Your Community

- Get a large piece of paper and borrow your kids' colored markers or crayons.
- Draw a rough outline of your neighborhood with the disposal site included. Mark it with a skull and crossbones.
- Draw in streets, roads, rivers, and rails lines.
- Mark where the leaders live and where members are concentrated.
- Mark friendly institutions, such as churches, social clubs, businesses, agencies, and every other place that will support your efforts.
- Add anything else that is important in thinking about your neighborhood like an organizer.

Community Map Example




Stop! What does this map tell you about the organizing effort so far? You can see that most of the leaders and members are clustered around the dump. Very few members live in the wealthy neighborhood (you can often tell by the water, park land, and winding roads). There are very few members east of the dump where leachate could be running into the creek. There are a good number of members on the west side near the community center. Why is this information important? What do you do about it? You decide!

As time goes on, you should formalize this map and use it at every meeting. You can get a large map of your neighborhood from various offices at City Hall (planner's office, Registrar of Deeds, Board of Canvassers). At Love Canal, a map analysis such as this was used to prove how toxic waste had seeped

from the original site into the entire neighborhood. This was done by plotting out patterns of illness and matching this up with the paths of old streambeds. (This is described in more detail in *Love Canal: My Story*, available from CHEJ).

Doing a community analysis is an on-going process that starts the first time you think about organizing your neighborhood and never ends. Start making a list of additional things you need to know. Plug in statistics about your neighborhood. Get information about land ownership from the Registrar of Deeds. As time goes on, the "political geography" of your neighborhood will take on different meanings and you may need several different maps, including one for recruitment, another for plotting health effects, another for voter registration and so on.



Chapter 6

Holding Your First Meeting

Do I Have to Talk to All These People?

It's meeting time! How many people are there? If it's a large crowd, it's normal for you to be nervous. But remember, they all came because they were asked to come and because they are interested in the issue. If it's only a small turnout, don't be disappointed. This is often the case with a first meeting. If this meeting brings results, more people will come. Just be sure that after the meeting, the leaders get together to discuss what happened and make plans and adjustments for the next one.

To begin your meeting, opening introductions are very important. Say who are you, what the group is about, and why you are there. These should be crisp, but complete. While you don't want to bore people to tears with long speeches, it's also bad to have people sitting there wondering why they came. Be sure to review and celebrate everything's that's been accomplished already.

Be clear about who or what you are up against – big business, the government – and why it is so important that people stand together. “United we stand, divided we fall!” You can't say this too often!

A College Degree Is Not Necessary to Run a Good Meeting – Common Sense and Good Instincts Are All That Are Needed!

Let your common sense and instincts help you achieve a good sense of balance so you can 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 repetitious speeches
- Making sure decisions get made without jamming them down people's throats
- Ending the meeting on time while covering all key items on the agenda

Be sure you have a sign-up sheet to record the names, addresses and phone numbers of everyone who came. It's a good idea to have a greeting table at the door to do this and to welcome everyone as they enter. Later, you will need this record.

When an organization is first getting started, there

a lot of important decisions that need to be made. Among them are:

- Should we formally establish an organization? The answer is usually “yes,” though decisions about incorporating and getting a tax-exemption are somewhat separate questions. You can formally create a group without incorporating. What you need is a group decision to do so and a name. Naming your group can be a lot of fun. It should clearly describe what your group is about and be attention-getting.
- How do we conduct our business? Do you need by-laws? Do you have to run meetings according to Robert’s Rules of Order? Do you have to have elected officers? It depends. Only the leaders and members can decide how formally you need to structure the organization. You need enough structure to get the work done, but not too much or else you may stifle people.
- Should we hire a lawyer? This is one of the first and most sensitive questions new community groups deal with. Ask why. Why do you need a lawyer? Environmental contamination decisions are political ones. Lawsuits are expensive, take a long time and offer no guarantee of success. So, “why?” is an important question to answer.

The Group Must Have Goals!

What do you want to do? Figuring out the answer to this question is why all these people came to the meeting. What do you, as a community, want to accomplish? The group should pick realistic goals, ones you can win. One or two are enough; three or four are usually the maximum. Other goals can be added to a wish list for the group to work on later after its main objectives are met.

Goals should be stated in clear language, starting with the words, “We want...” Some groups are tough and call these goals “demands.” Others feel that this is too strong a way to put it and call their goals “the needs of the community.” You shouldn’t be wishy-washy (for example, calling your goals “requests” is pretty weak), but you should be careful about turning people off

with language that is too strong. Public officials tend to go crazy when they are confronted with “demands.” Depending on how tough your group is, you may say, “So what?” However, you may want to use “needs of the community” instead. Who can argue with “needs?”

What Do You, the Community, Want? Can Everyone Agree on Goals?

Be sure your goals do not contradict each other. For example, one group was fighting a proposed landfill. Their first goal was to not have a landfill. However, their second goal was if there were a landfill, they wanted it to have a clay liner. The government officials interpreted this as a sign that the community was willing to compromise. This wasn’t true, though. The group was divided and it adopted the two contradictory goals to win consensus. Instead, they lost it all when the public officials exploited the split. They now have a brand-new, leaking landfill with no clay liner.

In other communities, such as Enfield, CT, Henderson, TN and Anson County, NC, the local groups worked through internal hassles over goals and adopted the single goal of “no landfill.” In each instance, the company who wanted to build the landfill and the government were faced with a clear position and a united community and eventually, they gave up. In each of these examples, there were some people who left the group because they felt the goal was too strong. This didn’t hurt the groups, however, because the people who left were not fully behind the group anyway and they wouldn’t have been much help even if they stayed. Their departure made the groups stronger by not having to re-visit the same conversation about their goals at every meeting.

We Need Your Help, Please Give an Hour or Two a Week!

Once you’ve set goals, the group must decide what work needs to be done to achieve them. If you break the work down into small tasks, it’s easier to get volunteers to do them. For example, it’s easier to get a member to accept responsibility to make five phone

calls a week than have one person as “Communications Committee Chairperson-for-Life.” This is called “task” versus “title.”

Committees are usually the best way to share the workload. Try to avoid having individuals take jobs and run away with them. Though the committee process is sometimes more complicated than letting a “live wire” take on a job, committees build leaders and generally inhibit people who might turn into “tinhorn dictators.” At your general meeting, you may set up committees for key work like research, action (such as demonstrations), fund-raising, publicity, legal/technical and so on. Have people sign up for these committees at the meeting and, time permitting, set the date and location for the committees’ first meetings. You don’t need to have chair-people for those committees yet. It takes a lot of time out of the general meeting and it’s usually best for the committee to work out its own structure.

It’s important to decide who speaks for the group. While you don’t necessarily have to elect officers at this meeting, you do need to reach a group decision on how the group will represent itself to the public. If you choose one or two spokespersons, you can prevent individuals from presenting their own views as the views of the group without authority. Try to reach an understanding that if anyone else talks to the media that they are clear that they are presenting their individual opinion and not the group’s.

Getting and Keeping People Involved

In addition to setting up committees, another way to harness people’s energy is to assign the job of “street representative” or “block captain” to the liveliest people. Go back to your community analysis map. You need to cover the territory and the best way to do that is to recruit group members who live there. Each street rep or block captain has an assigned area and is responsible for petitions, flyers, phone calls and even fund-raising for that area. Recruit and prepare these leaders well. For example, one street rep may be a real go-getter who does it all herself. That’s great for covering the territory, but it misses the opportunity

to get other people involved. Another block captain may be shy or busy and may look at the title as such a burden that s/he does nothing. Your other street leaders may fall in between these two extremes. Pull them all together to discuss and plan how to delegate the work so the job gets done and more people get involved. You need to remember and remind the street reps that it’s their responsibility to see that the work get done, but they should not do it all on their own.

To summarize, the purpose of holding a general meeting is to get things done and to build both members and leaders. Good planning and shared responsibility are the best ways to hold good meetings. Use a style that is comfortable to everyone. Think about good meetings you’ve attended. What made them good? And for the bad ones, what made them bad? You want people to come back.

People will come back if:

- They enjoyed the meeting.
- The meeting started and ended on time and wasn’t a drag.
- It produced concrete results.
- It was lively and exciting.
- It delivered what was promised.
- They know when the next one is scheduled.

Trouble Shooting Tips

If your meetings are running on and on and people are talking away off the topic for the meeting: Be sure that you’ve started the meeting by clearly stating its purpose. Get consensus right way! Whenever the meeting goes off track, you can jump in and say, “Now let’s remember, the purpose of this meeting is to...” Most people, including the loudmouths, will think, “Oh, yeah, that’s right,” and get back on the track.

If you just can’t reach a consensus and the arguments are going nowhere: You have several options:

- Point out to the group what's happening. Ask them, "What should we do about this deadlock? Should we table this discussion?" Make them take responsibility for the problem.
- Present the option of either tabling the question or putting it to a vote.
- Let the discussion continue until it works itself out. Nobody said democracy was easy.
- You could play dictator, but DON'T.

Consensus is a fragile thing. Remember the example of the group that set contradictory goals in order to gain consensus. Ultimately, the best way to settle a controversial question is to go with the decision that is supported by most of the people.

If a splinter group emerges: In every organization, a few people believe that everything the group does is wrong. You just can't please them. Sometimes they may even take their gripes to the media, or to anyone else who will listen. You can usually spot these people at the first meeting. Watch for them. They're usually very outspoken and don't treat others with respect. One way to defuse them is to build them into the core group from the start. If they are part of the planning, they have no legitimate reason to complain, even if they are outvoted. If you don't spot them until later, try to get them involved. Respect their opinions, even if they don't respect yours. Give them a job and some responsibility and do your best to reach out to them. Unless they are totally irresponsible, sooner or later they will mellow. Let them have their say. Trust your members: If their ideas are bad, the people will not go along with them.



Chapter 7

Strategy and Tactics

Who Can Give Us What We Want?

You must act if you are going to achieve your goals. After deciding what you want, you must identify who can give it to you. This is called “power structure analysis.” You are now doing tactical research to pick your “targets,” measuring how much power they have and deciding on the best ways to approach them.

Some of the key questions are:

- Who’s responsible for our problem? Is it industry, a government agency, a body of elected officials or the banks that provided the financing? Who?
- Who has the power to provide a solution? Are they the same people as the ones who are responsible? For example, the responsible party may be a company that dumped toxics thirty years ago and is long gone and out of business. The solution may lie with the local government or the federal EPA who can be held responsible for cleanup.
- Who answers to whom? What is the chain of command? It’s usually a wise strategy to start at the bottom. That is, pick as your first target the

lowest level person who can give you what you want. Why? For one thing, this low-level person will be easier to reach and is more likely to come to a meeting. And, if you went right to the top, and the answer was no, then what? If this low-level person says no, you need to know who represents the next step.

- Who stands to gain from this? The issue of money leads to a fourth important question: Who profits? Somebody has either profited in the past or profits now (maybe both) from your environmental problem. Otherwise, why would you have this problem? The people who stand to gain or have gained in the past are your most likely source of opposition and likely targets for your group’s actions.

In the movie *Cabaret*, there’s a great song that goes, “money makes the world go ’round.” Money is the key link. In Henderson, TN, a local community group forced BFI to withdraw its plans for a new landfill by threatening economic boycotts against the customers who would use the landfill. In other communities, groups have targeted the banks that provide the loans for development.

There's an old saying, "When you've got them by the @#%!&, their hearts and minds will follow." When you identify the flow of money and bring pressure to bear, you can be almost certain of victory.

These four questions that make up your framework for strategic research: "Who is responsible?", "Who has the power?", "Who answers to whom?" and, "Who profits?" This is research you need to do in order to make a plan of action. You can't fight "City Hall" or the "system." City Hall is a building and the system is an abstract concept. But you can fight the policy-makers – the Mayor, Governor, or Health Commissioner – and the other people who can be identified and reached, who bear the responsibility and have the means to resolve the problem.

One key piece of research involves establishing property ownership. Find out who owns the deed to the land or who will own it. You can find this out by looking at the public records in your local Recorder

of Deeds office at your City Hall or county building. Find out about the companies involved by checking with the office at your state capitol that records businesses (try your Secretary of State's office, or call the governor's office and ask where business registrations are filed).

If the business or company involved in your environmental problem is a corporation, find out whether they are incorporated and, if so, whether they sell stock to the public. Corporations that sell stock are required by law to make detailed reports to the public through the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which are open to the public. They contain invaluable information about the company's operations, including profit and loss, major holdings and the connections they have to other companies, either through financial dealings or their board of directors and executives. In the Love Canal fight, it was vital to be able to trace

Exercise in Power Structure Analysis

Try this at your next planning or leadership meeting:

The key questions to ask are, "What do we want?", "Who's responsible?" and "Who's got the power to give us what we want?"

Step # 1 – The tricky part is solidifying what you want. Deciding this is called "cutting the issue." Start by defining, in 25 words or less, exactly what it is that you want.

Remember, when you write a flyer or talk to a new person at her doorstep, you've got to be clear, brief and right to the point.

Step # 2 – Once you've defined the issue, the next step is to determine who's responsible for creating the problem behind that issue. Who put that dump there? Who wants to build a dump there? Who gave them permission? Write these names down on a piece of paper and put them aside.

Step # 3 – Now, the next step is determining who has the power to give you what want.

What is the name of the lowest-level person whom you think has this power?

The reason for naming the lowest level person is that she/he is usually easier to reach and easier to pressure than the higher-ups. Besides, if you take it "straight to the top" and Mr. Top Dog says "no" (as he usually will do to group), where do you go next?

the main dumper, Hooker Chemical, back to its corporate "parent", Occidental Petroleum. An important strategy then became an effort to hold this large, multi-national corporation accountable for the harm suffered by the innocent residents.

Now make a chain-of-command chart, starting with the lowest level person. Who's next in line? To whom is that person responsible? Start figuring in power relationships that are more informal, for instance, who holds the purse strings? Who controls behind the scenes? Who owes whom favors? Start making some educated guesses about how strong the ties are between various people you've named in your chain of command. For any space you've left blank, make a list of names you need to find out.

This kind of research is discussed in more detail in CHEJ's guide entitled "Piercing the Corporate Veil." See our publications list for ordering details.

Researching the problem and discussing it with people will help you refine the issue. When the group is finally ready to move, you should have an issue that you can define in clear terms.

This issue should have the following six qualities:

- It's immediate. Since people generally don't get excited about things that will or might happen in the remote future, a good issue is timely. The best issues, from an organizing standpoint, are good

and ripe, happening now and have a kind of "crisis" flavor to them.

- It's specific. People don't respond well to issues that are described in vague or abstract terms.
- It's winnable. Not many people want to spend time working on a loser.
- It's "targeted." This means that you have identified who's responsible and can thus put a human face - a "target," opponent or enemy - on the issue.
- It's "actionable." This means that the steps or actions that can be taken are obvious and logical. There's no point in having an issue when you can't figure out what to do about it.
- It's unifying. You can express the issue in such a way that it rallies together all of the people who need to be rallied in order to win. An issue that divides the community and pits neighbor against neighbor is hardly ideal (though sometimes this is unavoidable, especially if your opposition tries to paint the issue as one of "jobs versus the environment").

When you know who is responsible and who has the power to give you what you want, you will have to make a plan for how you will take action to win. The overall plan is your strategy and the steps you take as part of that strategy are your tactics.



Chapter 8

Holding an Action Meeting

After you've thought through what you want and who can give it to you, most likely your next step is to set up a meeting with that person. Organizers call this an "action meeting." If you're thinking that one or two of you will just go over and talk to that policy-maker, think again!

First, is he or she likely to give in? Probably not. Given that, will the one or two of you going over to see him strengthen the group? No; so where does that leave you?

An action meeting should involve all those who want to attend. Everyone's angry; everyone's got a stake in the issue, so it's only fair that everyone be able to participate. Let's face it: Your strength is in your numbers.

Where should the meeting be held? Generally, it should be on your territory. In sports, they call this going for the "home field advantage." When you go to your opponent's turf, he or she gets to control things like where people sit, how long the meeting runs, who gets to attend from his or her side and what the agenda will be.

Our advice is that your first action meeting with the

policy-maker you have targeted be in your own neighborhood. How do you get that policy-maker to come? Invite him or her.

Pick a location that is convenient and that meets your needs. You and your fellow leaders must do careful advance planning. Think about how you want to put the invitation together. Give timely notice. Tell your guest where the meeting will be, when you want them to arrive and what the purpose of the meeting will be.

Part of the planning for location involves your best guess about how many people will come. Let's say you decide to use a church basement auditorium that holds 500 people but only 100 people show up. One hundred people are a good turnout, but in such a large place, it looks terrible. Sometimes it's smart to pick a place that you know will be smaller than what you need.

Another vital part of pre-planning is the agenda. Think through how you want the meeting to go. Who will chair the meeting? What will be the sequence of events? Are people prepared to ask the right question? Think through all of the possibilities. What will you

do if...? Once done, send off your invitation.

What If He/She Doesn't Come??

Make sure that you have handled the invitation properly. Don't give the guest 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 set out a chair labeled with the guest's name and then use this empty chair when the official doesn't show up. Some members might even be encouraged to pose questions to the empty chair. Most people get or should get angry when their guest doesn't show up. It is a sign of disrespect when a policy-maker doesn't show you the courtesy of attending. It's okay to be angry. That anger can be channeled into future action.

Example: When residents in Lowell, Mass were trying to get the Silresim waste site cleaned up, they invited officials who failed to attend their meeting. In response, the residents decided to take their concerns directly to the officials at their homes. And when some officials still refused to talk to them, they set up a picket line outside their home. Their message was, "If you won't accept our invitation, then we'll come see you."

"Can We Take That as a 'NO,' Sir?"

What do you do if the policy-maker does show up? Be well prepared. Have the list of things you want

posted on a chalkboard or a large piece of paper in the front of the room. Give people a chance to talk about how they feel about your issue, but be ready with people who will ask the pointed questions to your guest. Will you or won't you do "X"? The leaders at the front of the room should keep score.

Your guest will try his or her best not to give you a straight answer. For every yes or no question, your "guest" will try to say "maybe." Don't fall for that! Any answer that isn't a "yes" should be scored as a "no."

An effective tactic to close the meeting is to insist that your guest sign the scoreboard at the end of the meeting. The "yeses" and "no's" have been tallied based on how the guest responded. By signing, the guest is simply certifying that those are indeed the answers. Is this a rude thing to ask? We don't think so. All you're asking is that your guest stand by what he or she said.

Invited guests may try to take over your meeting. This is especially likely if your guest is an elected official. There are a lot of ways that they can try to take over a meeting.

They may do so by:

- Giving long, drawn-out speeches that often have nothing to do with what you're all there to talk about. To prevent this, keep him or her on point. One easy way to do that is to be sure that you

Example of the "Scoreboard"					
Congressman Smith			Senator industry		
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Question 1			Question 1		
Question 2			Question 2		
Question 3			Question 3		
Question 4			Question 4		

have a clear statement of purpose, such as, “The purpose of this meeting is to get commitments for the clean up of the Chemikill Landfill.” If this statement of purpose is clear, use it to get your rambling “guest” back on track.

- **Standing up, moving around and using body movement and physical space to control.** You have seen this happen. A polished public speaker can command a group just by the way he or she positions his/herself. To combat this, have a specific location staked out for your “guest.” Put the chair behind a table to “nail” them down. If he or she still moves around, ask you “guest” to be seated (say: Gee, it’s very distracting when you keep moving around.”).

Here are some other general ways that your guest might react and try to take over:

- **Raise side issues:** You want to talk about ground contamination. They respond by complaining about government regulations. The best thing for them is to talk about things that neither you nor they have any control over. Stay on the point.
- **Agree to something easy:** Typically, they will promise that they’ll take your issues into consideration, set up an advisory committee, or give you some information, rather than taking action or giving a conditional promise (such as, “Okay, we’ll do that, if you get so and so to do “X”).
- **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 a terrorist, communist, or whatever. They know that this causes splits in groups. Other “divide and conquer” tactics include offering one faction a concession to entice them to sell out. Pitting one neighborhood against another, they’ll say, “The people in Your-town want us to build the facility in neighborhood X and the people in neighborhood X have told us to build in Your-town. You people had better decide who is going to get this

facility!” Other tactics include pitting black against white, rich against poor and homeowners against renters. The best way to avoid damage from “divide and conquer” tactics is to be very open in discussing these issues in advance and to be united, while being aware of differences.

- **Inspire symbolic action:** 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 then leave thinking that they’ve accomplished something until later when they discuss how it went and realize they got nothing. Get agreements in writing, on the spot, so that everyone knows exactly what has been accomplished.
- **Express sympathy:** “Gee, that’s a terrible situation! Why, my elder mother is faced with the same situation. Boy, it sure is hard.” Before you know it, you’re out the door and a lot of folks are feeling bad about the tragedies in your opponent’s life.
- **Claim “No money”:** How many times have you heard, “Sorry, we don’t have the money to deal with your issue, even though we recognize how important it is.” As Cesar Chavez said, “Don’t tell us what you can’t do; tell us what you can do.” Be prepared in advance through budget analysis and the preparation of viable alternatives.
- **Buy off leaders:** All of a sudden the strongest leaders of your group are appointed to 75 boards, committees and commissions and made to feel like big shots while, for all practical purposes, they are being made to work for the opposition. Sometimes, the “buy-off” takes the form of job offers, putting the organization in the bad spot of now having to fight against their old friends and leaders. Other times, they offer individuals attractive solutions to their problems, such as a very nice offer for their property.

Additionally, they may make one of the following comments:

- **“If we do this for you, we’ll have to do it for everybody.”** Maybe so, but so what? Ask who else has asked for it or needs it.
- **“I’m only one vote, or “I can’t make the decision alone.”** This maybe true but, so what? Ask, “So what will you do?” Ask, “Who is your superior?”
- **“We need more information/further testing.”** Sometimes this is a simple stall. Your opponent is most successful with this excuse when s/he not only gets you to believe it but also gets you to go running around collecting more information.
- **“We tried before but it didn’t work.”** Your opponent may cite some obscure history known only to him/her about some event in the distant past where what you want didn’t work. Whether this is true or not, the intent is to divide the group and to get members looking at the leaders and wondering, “Why didn’t you know that?” Only believe what can be proven.
- **“There’s something wrong with you.”** In this category, there are a hundred little put-downs and insults that they will try to use to shake your confidence, split the group and justify turning you down. Remember that when they can’t attack what you’re saying because you are correct, they’ll try to attack you. 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, that means you don’t understand it.”

“You’re unreasonable.” 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 feelings for the issue that brought you here?” Targets don’t like to talk to people who have a genuine stake in the issue.

“Who does your organization really

represent?” Implied in this is the old, “You’re nothing but a bunch of radical crazies.”

Here is the list of things that you can do to deal with “reactions:”

- Carefully plan each encounter (meeting, action, etc.) with officials from the other side. If it’s a general meeting, don’t invite the guest until one hour after the meeting starts so that everyone 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 correct time.
- Role-play 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 things you want on large paper so everyone can see. Have a “yes and “no” checkbox after each point (we advise against having a “maybe” column; score “maybes” as a “no” answer) and mark it off during the meeting.
- Summarize what was accomplished at the end of the meeting. If you can pull it off, try to have your “guest” sign your check-off list. If s/he won’t sign, ask whether or not the agreements reached were sincere.
- Discuss action/reaction at the very least among leaders, if not with the membership as a whole.

Besides being forewarned and thus forearmed about the bad things your “guest” might try to pull at your “action meeting,” think about some positive approaches as well. Try to put forth the reasons why your “guest” will benefit from supporting you.

This is fairly easy with an elected official. Put your questions in terms of “Will you support your constituency?” For example, ask, “Mr./Ms. Representative, do you support your constituency in Sludgetown in cleaning up the Chemikill Landfill?”

If the official answers, “Yes, but we must conduct further tests”, first, say, “We don’t want further tests. We have enough information already to show contamination. Do you support us in getting the site cleaned up?” If s/he repeats the same answer, explain again that this isn’t what the voters want and once more if s/he supports his/her constituency. Be insistent until the official can no longer avoid your point.

Follow up on this confrontation by having members of your group attend this official’s every public appearance to ask the same question. Sooner or later, they will get tired of having you bug them and will do something to get you off their backs. Always remember that even though industry may have more money than you to put into that elected official’s campaign, elected officials need votes and that’s where you have power through your people.

General Point: The men and women who represent government or industry have thought through how they will deal with you at least as well as you’ve thought through how you will deal with them. In fact, some of them have even been given formal training in how to handle “public participation.” Generally, this training deals extensively with how to defuse an angry community.

If you are dealing with, for example, a company’s community relations representative, you can bet that

s/he has received extensive training in your reactions and has the responsibility to try to get the most for the company while giving in as little as possible to you. Basically, they think they’ve seen it all before. After all, they’ve probably done similar things in other communities and they really do believe that you all are just a bunch of hysterical amateurs. Keep reminding yourself of this fundamental fact and you can turn their smugness to your advantage.

Caution: Electoral politics are very tricky. Though your organizing fight is political and you will probably be dealing with politicians either as friends or enemies, you should be careful about how you get involved in elections.

For example, if you are a non-profit group or plan to seek approval from the IRS as a tax-exempt organization, you may not endorse candidates and there are strict limits on the amount of legislative lobbying you may do.

However, some groups in the past few years have found it useful to get directly involved in electoral work. Usually this means that they must set up a separate organization to do this, similar to the new “political action committees” or PACs. Other groups have, for years, only supported positions or platforms and have then made it known to their members and to the public which politicians support that platform and which ones don’t without ever saying specifically that they support or oppose a candidate.



Chapter 9

Taking Direct Action

Your first action meeting is over and you still haven't won. Should you be disappointed? No! This is very common. After all, you are dealing with an important issue and it isn't likely that industry or government officials are going to roll over and play dead after one meeting. Most groups must take the next step, which is direct action.

Direct action is another form of protest, a time-honored constitutional right that is an important part of American history.

Pick your action tactics for timing and effect. It's important that your tactics produce some tangible results, since success breeds success.

You should avoid violent protests or actions. A peaceful demonstration can be just as effective and will not alienate your outside support. For example, a Mother's Day rally can be a good opportunity to express your fears and gain publicity and support without making you look like a troublemaker.

The media is a very important part of any action. Alert the media a few days in advance. They will only cover you if your action is "media worthy."

To be media worthy, your action needs to be new, interesting, lively and, for television, something visual.

When you do protest, be careful to keep your message short, clear, visual and dramatic. Use large signs and simple, short and punchy mottos and slogans. Use plain language, not the double-talk the government officials and scientists use to obscure the issue. For example, it's better to say, "We have a high rate of birth defects" or, "They're killing our babies!" than, "Our birth defect rate has been found to be statistically significant, with a three-fold increase when compared to another neighborhood."

When you talk to the media, you should be prepared in advance to direct reporters to a designated spokesperson. That spokesperson should be ready to give a short, clear statement of no more than three sentences or so, since the amount of airtime you will get is always very short. If you make a long statement, you will then give up control of how your message is delivered to the public. The editors at the station will decide what will be presented, not you.

Media tip: When you get a good reporter, stick with her or him for other stories about your efforts. Be sure that you get the names of every reporter and where they are from. Cultivate good media contacts. After a while, you can reach the point where you can guarantee yourself good coverage by feeding that reporter. Call the station and ask for your contact and get what you need.

Some of the actions that groups around the country have used are described below. Use the ones that you think will work for you, but remember, use your imagination!

- **Picketing:** Almost every organization uses this form of protest. Pick your locations and times for maximum impact. Many groups have decided to picket the homes of officials who refuse to meet with them. Generally, picketing is well protected as a constitutional right under the First Amendment. If you are concerned about the legality of your picket plans, you can first check with police officials, though they will often try to scare or discourage you from doing it. A better way to check is to consult a lawyer who has had experience in representing community groups. As a general rule, your right to picket is protected so long as you don't block traffic, physically impede people from going in or out of the building or act violently. Be sure you have your signs ready and have leaflets to hand out to passers-by.
- **Rallying:** This is a good way to bring people together, especially if you can arrange entertainment and have a celebrity or a "name" that will draw a crowd. Rallies are good places for your supporters, including elected officials, to give a statement, which adds credibility to your group.
- **Motorcades, Mock Funerals:** Many community groups have built coffins and held symbolic funeral marches where they either delivered or presented the coffins to their targets. One Massachusetts group carried a coffin five miles in a procession that ended with a 21-gun salute at a cemetery right next to a proposed hazardous waste site. At Love Canal, residents organized a motorcade that drove around with lights on and signs plastered all over the cars.
- **Sit-Ins, Sleep-Ins, Occupations:** Take your sleeping bags and lunches to City Hall or another public building, explaining, "Since our homes aren't safe, we'll sleep here where it is safe." Spend the night. Children love this kind of protest. Sit-ins are similar, only they begin during the daytime.

The following actions are a form of civil disobedience when your group decides that it will not leave. Be prepared! Have your lawyers and bail money ready and be sure that your members have talked this one through and they are prepared to deal with the consequences.

- **Candy Bar Protests:** When you can't get action, this protest will guarantee that your target remembers you came to visit! Set up the meeting with the official in her or his office. Bring the kids and give each one a chocolate bar after you arrive. Encourage them to enjoy themselves and play in the office while the adults talk with the officials. Kids being kids, it's likely that the chocolate will leave its mark and your target will remember you every time s/he sees a candy bar. Keep in mind that this action will not make your target very happy and it may be the last time you are "invited" to come to visit.
- **Burning Effigies:** This action is always a lot of fun since you generally let people take out their anger on the people they dislike the most. At Love Canal, residents burnt effigies of New York state officials, President Carter and other unresponsive public officials. While effigy burning is a very strong protest, the fact is that as the fight gets more and more intense, people get very angry and frustrated. In some ways, this is an escape-valve that lets people get out that anger in a way that is less violent than what might happen if you just let the tension build up until people just can't take it anymore.

- **Die-In:** This tactic is very effective against corporate polluters. For example, Hooker Chemical, the major dumper at Love Canal, held an open house. About 200 residents went, each wearing a T-shirt that said “Love Canal – Another Product of Hooker Chemical.” On signal, everyone dropped to the ground or draped themselves over a table and played dead. This spoiled Hooker’s party.
- **Prayer Vigil, Candlelight Protest:** A prayer vigil or candlelight protest is an event often held at night with a group of people who are meeting to address an issue at a highly public/visible place. These actions allow people who might be uncomfortable with other, more militant forms of protest to participate. There needs to be a way for everybody in your group to express their feelings about the issue in some form of outward protest and you need to mix up your tactics to be sensitive to people’s different feelings.
- **Talking Outhouse:** Groups in Minnesota, Illinois and elsewhere set up mock outhouses outside of public places (in Minnesota, it was the state capitol) to dramatize their issue. Rig up a loud speaker, or put one of your members inside to talk to passers-by about your issue. It’s fun to watch visitors to legislators and other state representatives standing there in their three-piece suits talking to an outhouse. Try this one: Hold your news conference with the main spokesperson being the outhouse!
- **Economic Protests/Boycotts:** These are very effective actions. When you can identify banks

or businesses that are either financing or profiting from your environmental problem, you can take action against them. In Wisconsin, rural residents launched a mass savings withdrawal from the local bank that planned to make a loan to build a landfill. In Lowell, Massachusetts, the local group asked major bank depositors to pull out their money. It’s easy to set up pickets and other protests at the banks. You can also ask all the banks and financial institutions to sign pledges that they will not put up the money to bring poisons into your community.

Actions should always be fun, lively and dramatic. They should clearly express the facts of your issues and tell the world how you feel about them. Actions should usually be a surprise to your targets. A couple of rules about actions generally hold true:

- They should be things that your people want to do, like to do, are ready to do and know how to do. The best ones draw from people’s experiences.
- Actions should be something outside of your target’s experience. It’s just common sense that if your target is used to dealing with protests, s/he will know how to deal with you if you do the same old thing.

Actions should be well planned and thought through. Have a spokesperson or two ready to deal with the media. Have your leaflets, fact sheets and news releases ready. And if your action borders on being an act of civil disobedience, pay attention to the legal side, with a lawyer either ready to respond or on the scene as a legal observer.

Chapter 10

Raising Money

All of the things we've talked about will take money, at least some money. After a while, you and the other leaders will get tired of paying for phone calls, printing, gasoline and other costs. Maybe you and your neighbors have already reached into your bank accounts to hire a lawyer or experts. You're probably looking at a long-term fight and expenses will start to mount up. It's generally unfair for one, two or just a few leaders to bear the cost of mounting a campaign, so sooner or later, you're going to have to pay serious attention to raising money.

The most straightforward and ultimately most reliable way to raise money is through grassroots fundraising. This means doing a variety of events and projects that draw in money directly from people and businesses in your community.

The first step is to make a plan, and the first part of that plan is to estimate how much money you need to raise. Set a goal. The goal should be based on your best guess of what you plan to do over the next several months and how much that will cost.

Grassroots fundraising is a lot like selling and, to sell, you have to have an effective sales pitch that gives the customer (the potential donor) some very good reasons for buying (giving).

These are your four all-purpose statements. No matter what you want or who you are asking, your presentation must be clear, brief and to-the-point. Think about how you feel and what you are thinking when someone comes up to you to ask you for something. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and tailor your approach accordingly.

When you have a plan, which includes a clear

The Best Sales Pitch for Your Issue

"I am ... Joe Victim, a member of the East Sludgeville Improvement Association."

"We are ... a group of concerned residents working to find a better way to deal with waste than to dump them in the landfill that Chemikill Industries wants to put over on Dioxin Boulevard."

"This is ... a fact sheet that shows the harm that the Chemikill landfill will do to our children when the wastes it will contain eventually leak into our water supply. This is a petition we will be presenting to the City Council asking them to vote against Chemikill's permit application until all other, more appropriate alternatives are explored."

"We want ... your support. We would appreciate it if you would support this petition effort by signing the petition, helping us get your friends and neighbors signed on, and helping us financially. We'd like you to join the association and make a donation to help us get more of these flyers and petitions printed up and distributed."

understanding of purpose and you have thought through these points and can make a clear presentation, make a list of likely donors and ways to raise money.

Some possible fund-raising activities include:

- **Membership Dues:** You're probably already putting a lot of your own money to meet the group's immediate needs. Other people should also pay their fair share. Think about dues as people's fair share. They aren't doing you a favor by buying in as due-paying members - they're doing themselves a favor by strengthening an organization that's going to address their needs. Set dues high enough so that it really is a fair share, but not so high that you exclude people. Many groups set dues according to ability to pay or create several different classes of membership to be flexible to people's financial situations.

Note: The best person to ask for money, such as membership dues, is someone who has already given. Before people go out to recruit, they should be sure that their dues are paid up.

- **Direct Appeals:** These are similar to membership dues, in that you are asking people directly to make a contribution to the organization. When you do this door-to-door, it's called "canvassing." There are several large, national organizations that raise most of their budgets by conducting very professional canvases; the March of Dimes and Heart Fund are examples. In some communities, you must be licensed, registered or in some way sanctioned by local officials if you are going to conduct a major, door-to-door effort. Check with your local police if you are concerned that this might be the case.

Two other important forms of direct appeals are direct mail and telephone solicitation. Generally, a small, local organization will end up spending more money than it can raise by trying direct mail. Professional direct mail fundraisers say the secret is developing a good, reliable "door list" of people who have been past supporters and

it generally takes at least a year and quite a bit of money to reach that point. However, if you keep it small and simple, you might give it a try.

Telephone solicitation is a very inexpensive way to make direct appeals and can be done with a pool of volunteers. One way to increase the amount of money you can raise in this way is to work out an arrangement with your bank so that you can accept credit card payment. That way, you can make the "sale" right on the spot, rather than hope that the person will respond to your follow-up mailing.

- **Selling Goods and Services:** This is one fund-raiser that we've all seen. This includes auctions; flea markets; bake sales; selling t-shirts, buttons, etc.; car washes and other items. Avoid buying into professional fund-raising gimmicks, such as the candy bars, calendars, pens, etc. One rule is to try to get what you sell donated (whether it is goods or volunteer labor). The more money you have to "front-end", the higher your risk. Further, you want to make the money, and you don't want to make yourselves work to benefit some fund-raising merchandise company. The Girl Scouts sell a lot of cookies and make a lot of money, but (a) they have an established market, (b) they have the money to invest and (c) the cookie company is still the biggest winner.
- **Special Events:** These should be things people like to do and that you have the capability to pull off. There are several categories of special events to consider, all of them framed around things people enjoy doing: entertainment (dances, outings, fairs, concerts, etc.), eating, gambling, sports, socializing (includes testimonials, rallies, coffee hours, conferences, etc.)
- **Ad Books:** Sell ads in a program book for a special event, such as an annual meeting, conference, testimonial, rally etc. Or, create a booklet that will be distributed to the public, with space available for advertising. You might write a booklet called "Facts about Waste in East Sludgeville" and sell ads to companies and

businesspeople that support you. Think about businesses that benefit from your issue.

For instance, when contaminated water becomes an issue in a community, the stores almost immediately sell out of bottled water. Plumbers and suppliers sell out of water filter equipment. All of these businesses are natural for advertising in such a book.

- **Non-Cash Gifts:** When people donate things to your group that you'd otherwise have to buy, these donations are as good as cash. Some gifts might be things you can use to start your first office. Others are things you can use in other fund-raising (e.g. donated food for events, donated items for flea markets, auctions, etc.).

Non-cash goods donated to non-profit groups are tax-deductible at their fair market value. This is attractive to both individuals and businesses. The best time to ask businesses for donations of equipment and furniture is at the end of the year when they are trying to get their last tax deduction.

If your group is not incorporated or has not filed for a tax-exempt ruling from the IRS (called a "501 (c) (3) exemption"), you can't honestly offer donors a tax deduction. Further, in some states and for some activities, you can't get a license unless you are incorporated and tax-exempt for certain activities (bingo, canvassing are common examples.)

This does not have to be a big problem if you have a non-profit sponsor. That is, instead of filing all of the papers yourselves, ask a church, other organization or a community agency to sponsor you or be your "umbrella" so that donations can be channeled through them. The main danger in such an arrangement arises when you have some kind of dispute or problem with your sponsor. However, hundreds of unincorporated groups use this arrangement quite successfully

Ten Qualities of Perfect Fundraiser

- You have to invest little or no up-front cash.
- You get a high rate of return from your investment.
- There is little or no risk.
- Your people have fun doing it.
- It's easy to do.
- It allows a chance for lots of people to get involved in a positive way and thus builds new leaders and keeps your members involved in the organization.
- Your donors feel good and thus you can always come back and ask them again.
- The activity you're turning into a fund-raiser is something your group would have wanted to do anyway.
- You have an overall fund-raising plan and this activity fits right in.
- Your fund-raiser has high visibility and improves your group's image, as well as fitting into your group's mission and purpose.



Chapter 11

Should Your Group Incorporate?

Whenever you think about any strategy to build your group, you should ask, “why.” The same goes for incorporating. Why do you want to incorporate? If you think you need to incorporate in order to raise money, think about whether this is absolutely true and whether you have looked at and exhausted other alternatives.

If you think you need to incorporate to protect your leaders, think again. If it’s a libel or slander suit by your target that you’re afraid of, consider that you can still be sued, both as an organization and as individuals. While your target will probably lose, you are still unshielded from being harassed by such a suit. Further, the leaders of an incorporated group are never protected from acting irresponsibly. If you became an officer or board member of an incorporated group, the law places on you what it calls “fiduciary responsibility.” That means that as a leader, you have a responsibility to see to it that the organization is run properly.

Example: East Sludgeville Community Improvement Association is incorporated. It gets a grant to operate and hires a director and one staff person. The director “forgets” to pay federal withholding tax. The organiza-

tion runs out of money and the IRS comes knocking to ask for its money. Who’s responsible?


Answer: The board is, as a group and as individuals because they had the fiduciary responsibility to oversee the organization and see to it that taxes are paid.

There are lots of good reasons to incorporate:

- To solicit money directly and offer tax deductions
- To write proposals and receive grants
- To build credibility and legitimacy

You don’t need to be incorporated in order to become a “party” to a lawsuit. The fact is that the courts can and will let you in as an unincorporated association. The problem is that you have an extra burden to prove that you are legitimate.

When you are involved in a very tough fight against very determined opponents, keep in mind the thoughts of one cynic on incorporation: “Being incorporated means that you’re easier to find.”



Chapter 12

Conclusion

There are four things that build an organization:

- **People:** Lots of them, especially people who have a direct stake in the work of the organization.
- **Structure:** This means having some established process for making decisions. You need to develop a structure that works and is based on your circumstances. While you don't have to use "Robert's Rules of Order" or have a formal constitution modeled on anyone else's, you must be able to function and, if you're an

organization fighting for justice, you must operate democratically.

- **Resources:** Whether this is cash, donations or volunteer labor, you must have the means to be able to carry out your goals.
- **Action:** An organization that does not do anything is probably going to die and probably deserves to die.

Organizing is NOT complicated. First you talk to one person, then you talk to another person, then you talk to another person ...

“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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