

Chapter 36: Mobilizing Support For Your Strategy

Unless you have identified a win-win solution the applicant is sure to go for or you are wealthy, you will likely need more volunteer hours, dollars, and political clout than you can provide on your own. Since most development projects impact a number of people, these resources are usually available if you know how to ask for them, which is what this chapter is all about.

FUND RAISING

Usually funds are the form of support most urgently needed. A project is chugging along the development review process, a hearing is coming up in a few weeks and you need a lawyer and an expert witness or two so you have a shot at winning a favorable decision at the hearing. For the vast majority of citizen campaigns the funds come from those who are directly impacted by a project; not foundations or other organizations. The exception would be campaigns where land preservation is a realistic option. Still the funds used to wage the political and legal battle to win through land preservation will come mostly from those directly impacted.

Who Are Your Supporters

From whom can you draw support? From anyone potentially impacted by the project. The impact or effect can be negative or positive. For example, let's say you wish to save a large tract of forest. Your potential supporters would include:

- those who live next to the forest;
- others who live along the roads which would receive the increased traffic if the forest were developed;
- the parents whose children attend the school which may become overcrowded if the forest were converted to housing;
- the people who presently hike, hunt, birdwatch, or ride horses in the forest;
- the residents of the town downstream who rely upon the forest to provide clean drinking water;
- if you live in a hilly or mountainous area then those living more distant may value the forest because they see it from their homes;
- the folks who value the historic aspects of the forest;
- people concerned about the general decline of forest throughout a region;
- those who work farms adjoining the forest and fear complaints from new neighbors about livestock odors, machinery noise, or dust; and
- on and on the list might go.

Your Message

To win the support of others you need to craft a concise message. An effective message has three parts:

1. **The Impact:** How will the project affect your potential supporters? The more direct the impact the better. And the more the impact affects strongly-held values the better. If an

applicant proposes an adult book store in a residential area, then the whole neighborhood will come out in force. If the project entails development similar to the existing neighborhood then the level of support will likely be low.

2. **The Solution:** What is your solution to prevent the impact? The more credible the solution, the more support you will generate. If it is obvious how your solution will work and why there's a good chance it will produce victory, then you need say no more. But if its not so obvious then offer an example or two of how a similar solution worked in a similar campaign waged by folks just like you and your supporters. There's lots of examples to choose from. Give CEDS a call and we can offer several examples.
3. **The Request:** What is it you want your supporters to do? Contribute dollars, poll their friends and neighbors for professional services, call or write decision-makers, or attend a hearing? The more specific, the better. And its generally best to ask for just one thing at a time and to make the request face-to-face or at least by phone. The more personal the method of contact, the better the response rate.

Your message also needs to be distilled down to a clear, concise statement. The standard goal in organizing is to get the message down to ten words or less. For instance, the message of this book could be stated in eight words...

To win development campaigns, aggressively pursue win-win solutions.

Okay the statement is nine words if you quibble and say win-win is two.

Continuing with the forest example, the message could read...

Mayor Smith save our forest to save our schools.

You could also substitute any other strongly-held value for schools.

Following the short statement would be something conveying more detail on the three parts given above for an effective message, perhaps something along the lines of...

We must save our forest to save our neighborhoods, nearby working farms, to prevent overcrowding of our schools and roads, and to protect our water supply. Our goal is to convince Mayor Smith that there's overwhelming support among city residents to purchase the forest. We'll also initiate legal action to prevent the forest from being developed before Mayor Smith can act. Citizens used this same strategy to save the 200-acre Bucklodge Forest in Montgomery County, MD, the 2,000-acre Chapman Forest in Prince George's County, MD, and the 16,000-acre Sterling Forest in New York. We can do the same. But first we need to establish a Forest Defense Fund of \$10,000, which will go mostly for legal expenses. To do this we need

100 people who will contribute \$100 each. Will you join with me in making a \$100 contribution?

Your message should focus on the benefits of supporting the effort, not the negative aspects. For example, state the goal as to save the forest; not to stop a development project. Or the goal is to keep the neighborhood a good place to raise a family; not to stop an adult bookstore. By the same token the name of the effort should focus on the positive, not the negative: Citizens to Preserve the Forest or Save Our Children (from the adult bookstore).

After picking a name, set up a bank account to receive contributions. Many folks believe they need to establish a nonprofit organization to begin fund-raising. This is not the case. In fact, there are good reasons *not* to apply for nonprofit status. The federal limits on nonprofit electioneering and even lobbying may unduly restrict a campaign. Also, most of the folks who support your campaign will do so whether their contribution is tax-deductible or not. So just go to a local bank and set up the same type of account as a small business. But you should check with a good accountant to see if any permits are required to raise funds in your state. Also, the accountant can help you with tax filings and related matters.

Where To Begin

The best place to start enlisting supporters is among your own neighbors or the other folks most directly impacted by a project. Invite a dozen or so people over to your house for an evening meeting to discuss the project. Present your message then the supporting details. If the message is clear and compelling then most folks will become active supporters by the end of the evening. At this first organizing meeting its okay to ignore the *ask for one thing* rule given above. In addition to dollars ask folks to volunteer to oversee the numerous tasks presented in this book for winning a land development campaign.

Please feel free to suggest that you and several others participate in a strategy session by phone with Richard Klein, the author of this book. The sessions are usually held on an evening or weekend. Folks gather around a speaker phone on a kitchen table and spend half-hour to hour describing what they learned through the *Easy Solution* presented in Chapter 1 of this book. We then brainstorm strategy options in hopes of finding at least one which sounds like a winner. The strategy sessions by phone are free. Just pick three dates-times that are good for you and chances are I'll be available for at least one date-time.

After this first neighborhood meeting and strategy session you could hold small, informal meetings in other affected neighborhoods or you could convene a large public meeting.

Citizen Public Meeting

As the name implies, this is a public meeting called by citizens - you and your allies. You control the agenda, not some government agency or the applicant. The purpose of the meeting is to alert a large number of people to the opportunity to save something they value and to offer them the chance to join with you in supporting the effort.

Frequently a community meeting will draw the attendance of 200 to 500 people and raise the \$3,000 to \$30,000 needed to win most campaigns. Thus a community meeting can help make your campaign a success by providing you with the volunteers and dollars essential to victory. Also, nothing shows the depth of citizen support like financial contributions. All elected decision-makers know how hard it is to raise money. They must do it every two to six years to get reelected. So if a large number of people donate at your meeting, decision-makers will take notice. In fact, it is not uncommon for citizens to win substantial concessions from decision-makers just by holding a successful community meeting.

Again, the purpose of the community meeting is to alert people to project impacts and to enlist their support for your strategy to prevent these impacts. The agenda must focus on the three elements of an effective message: the impact, the solution, and the request. You must get through these three topics in no more than 45 minutes otherwise people will begin leaving before you get to the request.

Select a meeting location which has capacity for 200 to 500 people. Prepare a flyer for use in inviting your potential supporters to the meeting. On the [CEDS website](#) you will find a sample flyer on the Download Publications page labeled *Community Meeting Samples: Flyer, Factsheet, Pledge Form, Volunteer Survey Form, and Meeting Outline*.

Distribute the flyer door-to-door, at signalized intersections during morning rush-hour, through the mail, and (*with permission*) at shopping centers, churches, concerts, carnivals, and any other location where potential supporters might be present.

Draft a press release for distribution to newspapers, television and radio stations as well as other media outlets. See the next section of this book on *Publicity* for advice on drafting a press release.

Invite one or two citizens to speak who have won similar campaigns. These folks will be crucial to convincing those who attend your meeting that you can win also. If you have trouble locating these folks then give CEDS a call. We may know of folks who won similar campaigns in your area.

Draft a factsheet for distribution to meeting attendees. The factsheet should summarize the three agenda items: how the project will harm attendees, your proven strategy for winning the campaign, and what you need to win - \$5,000 to \$15,000 in contributions (50 to 150 donations of \$100 each). The CEDS download referenced above contains a sample factsheet. The factsheet should be the *only* piece of literature handed to people as they walk into the meeting room. You want to make certain they read the factsheet early, before the meeting starts, so skeptics realize you've got a good strategy and begin thinking about how much of a contribution to make.

Draft a pledge form that can be used by those who do not bring a checkbook. Again, a sample pledge form can be found in the CEDS website download.

Get several of your active supporters to agree to stand up and announce they will donate \$100 at the public meeting.

Plan the meeting so you get through the three parts of the agenda in about 45 minutes. When the third item is completed and you've told folks what support you need, then announce that you're going to take 15 minutes of questions and afterwards you are going to ask for donations. Then as the first question is taken begin circulating pledge forms throughout the audience.

After 15 minutes of questions remind folks what their donations will accomplish and how much you need, then ask people to stand who can pledge \$100. Of course a few of your folks will immediately stand and hold up their \$100 checks. This should get the momentum going and prompt others to stand and announce a substantial contribution.

Tell everyone that donation baskets will now circulate throughout the audience so pledges and checks can be collected. Take additional questions as the collection baskets circulate and until folks start leaving.

Immediately after the meeting send a thank you letter or e-mail out to all the folks who contributed. For those who pledged remind them of the amount they offered to donate and enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope so they can promptly mail their check. In each envelope include a survey form querying folks about their concerns and describing the expertise you need such as attorneys, traffic engineers, environmental scientists, community organizers, fund-raising experts, political strategists, etc. The survey form should allow folks to check off those expertise they are willing to provide on a no-cost/low-cost basis. A sample survey form can be found in the [CEDS website](#) download *Community Meeting Samples: Flyer, Factsheet, Pledge Form, Volunteer Survey Form, and Meeting Outline*.

Consider circulating a request for contributions among potential supporters who did not attend the meeting.

Three weeks after the meeting mail a friendly, but firm reminder out to those folks who have not fulfilled their pledge.

If you cannot generate sufficient support to win the campaign through the folks impacted by the project of concern to you, then consider linking it to all similar projects proposed for your area. Frequently a common solution can be found for multiple project impacts. If your campaign provides an opportunity to set a precedent for implementing a common solution, then those affected by the other projects may provide active support for your efforts.

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE OUT

The purpose of getting your message out is to expand your base of public support and political clout. Each of the following options provides an opportunity to allow new volunteers to take an role in making your campaign a success.

Press Releases

The purpose of a press release is to get your “news” out to newsletter editors, newspapers, television and radio stations, and online information services. Following is some advice for drafting a press release. This advice was derived from guidelines published by several organizations, such as the Sierra Club, plus from the author’s experience. Even with this advice there’s no guarantee that a media outlet will run your release. But these suggestions do increase the likelihood.

1. If you have it, put the press release on your letterhead. Otherwise plain paper is OK.
2. Type "News Release" using a large point size at the top of the first page.
3. In the upper lefthand corner type "For Immediate Release" if you want it to be run right away. Otherwise, type the first date on which you’d want the release to appear.
4. In the upper right type the name, phone number, and email address of the person(s) to contact for more information.
5. Try to keep the release to one page.
6. If you need to go to two pages, then type "more" at the bottom of the first page.
7. To mark the end of the release type “#####” (centered) below the last line of the release. This symbol tells an editor that the release is finished.
8. The press release headline should grab attention. In other words, it should focus on that portion of the release content which would be of greatest interest to readers-listeners-viewers.
9. Your news release should read like a news story. Say the most important things first, and use a catchy lead sentence to engage your reader. A limited amount of background information and supporting quotes should be put in the following paragraphs. In general, paragraphs should be limited to one or two sentences. The first time you use an acronym, make sure it appears in parentheses after the full name of whatever it represents.
10. Your press release should include 2 or 3 pithy soundbite quotes. Quotes should be front-loaded, in other words, the conclusion should come first followed by the argument (this contradicts how we usually make arguments). Quotes are like pictures, they need to be framed. Make sure the quotes connect to the contextual text around them. Finally, be sure to only quote one person per organization and read their quotes aloud to make sure they don’t sound stilted.
11. Limit the release to one page, two only if absolutely necessary. Keep it simple, clear and direct. Do feel free to include visual aids, such as photos from the campaign, to increase interest when possible.

12. Contact each newspaper, television and radio station, and online information service serving your area. Also find out which of the organizations supporting your campaign publishes a newsletter. Find out which reporter or other person handles issues resembling yours. Also find out the deadline for each media outlet. For example, weekly newspapers may go to press the Wednesday before each Monday when a new issue hits the stands. If the press release is intended to help with turn-out at a community meeting, a hearing, or some other event then make certain you get the release out well in advance of the deadline.
13. Follow-up on the press release with a phone call to each recipient. After introducing yourself say you are following up on the press release to answer any questions they may have. This should allow an opening sufficient for you to gauge their interest in covering your campaign.
14. Offer to take the contact on a tour of the site so you can show them first-hand why you are concerned. But do not actually enter the site unless you have permission.
15. If the contact seems to have little interest in your campaign, then give the editor, publisher, or station manager a call. Ask for an opportunity to meet with them to discuss an issue which may be perceived as insignificant but is actually of vital importance to the community.

Letters To The Editor

Ask for several volunteers to write a *Letter To The Editor*. It is surprising how many people read this section of the newspaper. Equally surprising is how often a paper runs a letter to the edit. The American Civil Liberties Union offers the following advice on writing a letter to the editor.

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

Make it legible. Your letter doesn't have to be fancy, but you should use a typewriter or computer word processor if your handwriting is difficult to read.

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

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

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

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

Yard Signs

Yard signs are relatively inexpensive (\$2 - \$5 each) and can be a very effective way of demonstrating widespread support for a campaign. I recall one campaign in my home county where residents were opposed to an inappropriate project proposed for a very rural area. Over a period of a couple of weeks yard signs began appearing seemingly in front of every homes for miles in all directions. The tasteful signs advocated rural preservation by keeping the inappropriate use out of the area. The signs and other skillfully executed tactics prompted the applicant to find another location for the project. Imagine the impact though of local elected officials driving through an area and seeing that hundreds of voters, perhaps some of them the official's acquaintances, advocating action on the official's part? Again, done right yard signs can be extremely effective.

Since yard signs are viewed mostly by passing motorists, the message must be simple, the type large and legible, and the color scheme eye-catching. One rule-of-thumb has it that yard signs should be at least 14" x 28" when placed along neighborhood streets (where the speed limit is 30 mph or less). On other roads yard signs should be 2' x 4' or larger.

Before investing a lot of money and time in yard signs make certain that a significant number of households are willing to have a sign placed in their yard. What's a "significant number?" Well, candidates running for elective office try to get at least one sign for every 30 households. But for a campaign involving a poorly conceived land use project *significant* is more like one for every ten households. Anything less and it looks like most people do not support your campaign.

The first folks to ask to place signs in their yard should be your current supporters; those who have given hours or funds to your campaign. Ask them to ask their neighbors to allow a sign to be placed in their yard. Also ask that your supporters contact relatives or acquaintances living elsewhere in the area to place a sign in their yard. This may send a signal to decision-makers that support for your campaign is spreading throughout the area, making it more difficult to ignore the issue.

Paid Advertising

Consider running newspaper, TV, and radio ads. Most campaigns will have a very limited budget for buying ad space. Generally ads are used to produce a large showing of support just before a decision-maker must act. For newspapers consider full-page ads as well as mini-ads signed by your prominent supporters along with a brief statement describing why they support your efforts.