



Campus Action Handbook



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1. INTRODUCTION

With all the activist resources already floating around, you may be wondering why we felt the need to put together *another* guide for progressive organizers? Sure, there's tons of information and trainings available for grassroots organizers, but woefully little of it is geared toward the unique community of student activists. University communities constitute an unusual environment to organize within, having their own distinct structures and hierarchies, a constant organizational turnover as students graduate, an entirely voluntary activist community, a disproportionately educated and politicized population and a special status within society at large. It is critical that we strive to understand and perfect our ability to organize in this environment since student activism is an integral part of just about every progressive movement. Not only do students have the energy, time and idealism needed to drive a movement forward, but they also have the power to influence powerful people through pressuring their university administrations.

This guide was written *by* student activists (Rainforest Action Network interns) *for* student activists and is focused on helping students strengthen their organizations, build their profile in their campus community, and run more effective, successful campaigns. All the examples in this guide come from real, on-the-ground experiences of student organizers working on campaigns with Rainforest Action Network. If you have any similar experiences that you think would help us in writing future editions of this guide, if you think there's anything that needs revision, or if you think we left out something important, let us know. Like student organizing itself, we want this guide to be organic, flexible and progressive. So send us (grassroots@ran.org) your advice, your experiences and your pearls of wisdom!

2. INTERNAL GROUP DYNAMICS

Before you and your fellow student activists can hope to start having an impact on your campus, it's crucial that you take the time to cultivate strong and well-organized campus groups. This chapter will guide you through some of the ways to build and maintain effective campus organizations.

I. RECRUITMENT

So, first things first: you can't have an organization without members. This section will guide you through some of the things you need to know to get and keep new members. Many groups don't focus as much energy as they should on recruitment, which is a shame since it's especially important for campus groups. Every year student groups lose all their members from the graduating class, so it's crucial that new members (especially first-years who will be around the longest) join each year.

Getting People to Meetings

The best times to get people to start coming to your meetings are at the beginning of the semester and after breaks, when people aren't too bogged down with work. Here are some tips for getting new people out to your meetings:

Make sure to advertise your first meeting heavily, flyering and posting notices on any relevant listservs at your school.

Set up tables at major events and club fairs- that's where you'll find students who are actively looking for organizations to join. Make sure that you represent your group well at these fairs and that the people tabling for your group are aware of all current campaigns and past successes of your group.

Keep a visible presence on campus at all times so as to make sure that students who might be interested in joining know that you exist. You can achieve this by having frequent teach-ins or other events and flyering around your campus before each one. If you use listservs as your only advertising for events, you miss out on recruiting students who aren't yet part of your school's activist community.

Send around sign-up lists for your group's listserv at every event where your group has a presence. Be sure to follow up and contact all newly interested students to remind them of your meeting times. Make note of

those students who seem especially interested and contact them by phone to invite them to your next meeting.

Remember: personal contact is a crucial part of recruiting new members. Phone and email potential recruits personally whenever possible.

Keeping New Members

Getting people to come out to a meeting is just the beginning; in order to build a successful group, you need to keep people involved by plugging them into meaningful roles and making them feel connected to the group. Below are some pointers on how you can retain new members:

Prepare 'New Member Information' sheets for newcomers to fill out. Oddly, people tend to take commitments more seriously when they have to fill out paper work, and official-looking forms can make your group look super-organized (just be sure not to overdo it!) These forms will also help you gather valuable information about the campaign interests and special skills of your new members. Call people to remind them of meetings and events.

Talk with new members. When new people come to meetings make sure to introduce yourself and explain what the group is working on before the meeting starts. Talk to them after the meeting, offering to answer any questions and encouraging them to come to the next meeting or event.

Make sure that new members aren't scared off by activist jargon or the closeness of an 'activist clique.' For more information on how to avoid this problem, check out our section on activist cliques (p. 6).

Give people official titles. If you get the impression that some of your new members (especially the first-years) are resume-padders, don't shy away. If they do good work, who cares if they're just doing it to improve their application to grad school? Make sure that every role in the group has a special title; for example, get someone to commit to photocopying all your group's flyers and call them the 'Media Director.'

Make sure everyone is involved in decision-making. No matter how much you strive to look effective, if people aren't doing meaningful work, they won't stick around. Using consensus-based organizing (see p. 9) is one way of ensuring that all members play a role in decision-making for your group. Make sure to explain the process so that everyone feels comfortable enough to participate, as consensus process can often be a new concept to people.

Incorporate action into your meetings. If you spend the last 15 minutes of

your meeting painting a banner for an upcoming action, new recruits who helped paint the banner are more likely to come to the action. Group posterings after meetings are a great way to get people involved and spread the word about your campaigns.

Befriend new people. Yes, this sounds kind of creepy, but one of the best ways to keep people involved is to make friends with them. This doesn't mean you need to spend all your time watching Star Wars movies with the socially awkward freshman who came to your first meeting; just be friendly and open with new people and make sure to include some pseudo-social activities (like banner-making) early in the year.

Teach people skills. Often new activists want to get involved but don't know where to start. Have pairs, a newer member and a more experienced member, take on tasks together.

Keep it fun! Try to make your meetings relaxed and friendly (while making sure to stay on schedule.) Good food (including something for members who are vegan or have other dietary restrictions) is a surprisingly effective way to keep people in a good mood.

Avoiding Burnout

Once you recruit new members and have them invested in your group and its campaigns, you're still not out of the woods. There's still a danger that people will burn out and either slow down or drop out over the course of the semester or year. Here are some tips for avoiding activist burnout:

Set realistic goals and timelines. This way people don't feel too stressed out about deadlines, and experience feelings of achievement each time a goal is reached. Besides, if you set unrealistic goals and deadlines that all get missed, it will be impossible to convey to people when a deadline actually needs to be met.

Focus on leadership development. Folks often stop coming to meetings because of a lack of responsibility or opportunity for growth. The responsibility of more experienced activists is to teach others to do things, not to do everything themselves. Encourage newer members and build their confidence.

Don't let all the work fall on the same people all the time. Don't let valuable members (including yourself!) get overworked to the point of fleeing the group- this happens more than you'd think. This goes hand in hand with our last pointer- don't be afraid to give work to new or less involved members if they're willing to take it on.

Nip it in the bud. If you notice your group slowing down and people seem to be slacking off, bring the problem up at a meeting. By discussing the issue as a group and thinking of solutions together, your members will feel more invested in making the solutions work.

II. INCLUSIVENESS & ANTI-OPPRESSION

A lot of students don't get involved in campus activism because they feel like they are not a part of the student activist community. This happens for a lot of reasons including the existence of activist 'cliques' or social groups and behavior that marginalizes women, queer folks and people of color. For a lot of these same reasons, campus activist communities (and the wider activist community as well) are often segregated, with 'white' or 'straight' activists working separately and on different issues from queer activists and activists of color. Below we've outlined some of the ways you can address these issues, making your organization bigger, stronger and more inclusive.

Activist Cliques

It's only natural that a bunch of badass activist kids working together to save the world will end up making friends with each other. This isn't necessarily a bad thing- it makes activism more fun, which means people are more likely to stay involved, and it helps foster good group dynamics. It can be a problem, though, when 'activist cliques' emerge. Decisions that should be made through formal process start being made by clique members chilling in a bar or smoking a joint; meetings can become too social, making it hard to get anything done; and worst of all, potential new members can be made to feel out of the loop when there are too many inside jokes and assumed background knowledge. Here are some tips for keeping your organization functional and open to new people:

Make decisions in meetings with an established process. Check out the 'Consensus Based Organizing' section of this guide (p. 14) for ways you can ensure that everyone has a voice in your meetings. This way, even newcomers and people outside of the 'clique' are included and feel ownership of the group and its projects. Explain the process before you start.

Make sure social events are inclusive. Not all activists smoke weed and drink, so if every time you and your activist buddies hang out there are substances involved, you are automatically alienating any straightedge kids in your midst. That's not to say that you can't drink and smoke with your friends, but rather that once in a while you should have dinner, go see a movie, or do some other activity that everyone feels comfortable taking part in.

Go easy on the activist-speak! Make sure that all acronyms, activist jargon and references to past campaigns or group members are explained so that nobody feels stupid or left out.

Avoid inside jokes. This is especially important at the beginning of the year when you are recruiting new members. As hilarious as they may seem to you, nobody likes an inside joke when they're on the outside. The last thing you want to do is scare off potential new members by giving them the impression that your group is some kind of exclusive social club that they're not a part of.

Gender Issues for Men

STOP. READ THIS SECTION EVEN IF YOU THINK THERE ARE NO GENDER ISSUES THAT YOUR GROUP NEEDS TO RESOLVE.

Just because the guys in your group aren't smacking the girls on the tush and asking them to make coffee during strategy sessions doesn't mean that there aren't problems with the gender dynamics in your group. We have all (unfortunately) been raised in a sexist culture and even when we try to rise above them, we find ourselves playing into gender roles and reinforcing stereotypes. In our society men are taught to be more aggressive and to take on leadership roles and women are taught to be more passive; just because we're fighting for social justice doesn't mean we're free of all of this cultural baggage. In order to make the most of all that your members have to offer, you need to foster an environment where **everyone** feels comfortable speaking up and taking on leadership roles. Below, we've included a short list of some of the common gender issues facing activist groups and ways you can address them:

Division of Labor. In many groups, work gets divided in a gendered way, with women doing a lot of the grunt work (photocopying, flyering, etc.) and men taking on leadership roles, making decisions and being the ones who represent the organization in meetings and negotiations. A good way to avoid this problem is to make sure that all tasks (the fun ones *and* the boring ones) are assigned through a process agreed upon by the group. Don't leave anything to be done without knowing exactly who is responsible for the task. This way it will be easier to notice if the not-so-glamorous jobs are being disproportionately dumped on the women in your group. Also, in order to prevent women from being shut out of leadership roles, a system of rotating facilitation (see page 8) will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to become comfortable taking on positions of authority in the group.

Airtime. Another major problem is the fact that male members of many groups end up doing most of the talking in meetings. Female members

may find themselves either remaining silent, or simply agreeing with one side of a debate between two men. This can be really destructive since these women may have really important information or insights that they don't think are interesting or useful enough to share. A good way to ensure that everyone's voice is heard is to do frequent 'go-rounds' (see page 10) where everyone has to say what they are thinking, even if they don't have a fully formulated opinion on the matter. Make it a habit to keep track of how often men and women are speaking during conversations, especially in arguments where overly aggressive tones often shut people out of the discussion.

Decision-making. If your group lacks a formal process for decision-making, choices may be made by 'the group' without the input of your female members. If your group just assumes a decision has been reached when most people seem to agree, it is more likely that women (in general- not all women) will be hesitant to voice objections. A formal process (like those discussed in pages 13-16) will ensure that decisions are truly made by the group and not just by its most vocal (often male) members.

Check out our 'General Strategies for Combating Oppression' (p. 10).

Anti-Racist Organizing for White Folks

The vast majority of university communities are dominated by 'white' faculty, administrators, trustees, and students. As with all aspects of our interactions in society, oppression arising from the prevalence of white supremacist ideology is the context in which we must operate as activists. If you look around at your student environmentalist group and notice a disproportionate number of 'white' faces in the crowd, you're not alone. In addressing this issue, there is a tendency on the part of 'white' activists to ask themselves "how can we get people of color to join our groups and movement?" Anti-Racist organizer Chris Crass warns us that this kind of question is barking up the wrong tree. It assumes that white activists "have the answers and now it just needs to be delivered to people of color- as opposed to, people of color have been organizing for a long time (500+ years) and we (white activists) have a lot to learn so maybe we should find ways to form alliances, relationships, and coalitions to work with folks of color and be prepared to learn as well as share."¹ Here are some ways your group can work towards challenging white supremacy in environmental activism:

Avoid tokenism. When you observe racial rifts in your campus activist community, don't assume that the solution is to bring more people of color into predominantly white groups- the fact that your group may be mostly 'white' is merely a symptom and not the problem itself. Instead of trying to

¹ Chris Crass. *Movement Building and Anti-Racist Organizing*.

'recruit' people of color to your causes, try to find ways to be allies with groups dominated by people of color.

Be careful with your definitions of 'radicalism.' Often 'white' activists assume that the only way to be a powerful activist is to be at the barricades shouting at the cops. Be respectful of the fact that people have different relationships with police authority and stay conscious of the different challenges that people of color have in arrest situations.

Think carefully about the issues that you are working on and how this relates to who is attracted to the group. What issues are people of color already organizing around on campus and in the community? Do you ever work on those issues and accept the leadership of groups lead by people of color?

Check out our 'General Strategies for Combating Oppression' below.

Queer Inclusiveness for Straight Folks

As much as our generation might see itself as totally accepting of everyone's sexuality, queers are marginalized both on campus and within activism. The marginalization of queers can often be invisible to straight folks since campuses are not safe enough spaces for everyone to feel safe sharing their sexual identity. Here are some tips for making your group a safer space for queer activists:

Don't be a jackass. Bewildering as this may be, there are still people out there (even people who consider themselves to be progressive) who will complain about a movie, or even an activist strategy, by blurting out 'that's so gay.' DO NOT let this kind of behavior slide. Make sure to have structures in place (like a caucus system, discussed below in 'General Strategies for Combating Oppression') for dealing with these issues and a strict anti-discrimination policy (also discussed below in 'General Strategies...').

Don't out people! If you know or suspect that someone in your group is queer, don't take it upon yourself to make sure that everyone else knows too. Both being in the closet and being out entail risks for queer folks so don't presume that you know what is best for someone.

Don't make assumptions about people's sexuality. A key component of queer oppression is the assumption that everyone is straight until proven otherwise. And if it's really that amazingly crucial to the survival of the world that you know someone's sexuality they'll let you know.

Understand that you have certain privileges (having your relationships valued by society, being able to kiss your partner in public without fear etc) that queer folks are denied.

Check out our 'General Strategies for Combating Oppression' below.

General Strategies for Combating Oppression

Here are some things to keep in mind to keep your group a safe and inclusive space for all students, including women, LGBTQ students and people of color:

Don't expect anyone to be a spokesperson for their community. This just singles people out and makes them feel isolated, not included. If you think there are members of your group who have ideas to contribute that they are not comfortable raising their hand to share, do a go-round to give everyone the opportunity to speak (or not) as they see fit.

Make formal organizational commitments to non-discrimination. Put it in your charter, your by-laws, anywhere you can. Make it clear in every way possible that your group does not tolerate discrimination in any form and that no actions or speech that will alienate people because of their gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, or social or ethnic origin will be considered acceptable in your group (this is pretty much the standard list for most anti-discrimination policies.)

Create a caucus system for your group. People first meet separately (people of color caucus/white folks alternative group, gender oppressed caucus/gender privileged alternative group, queer caucus/heterosexual alternative group) according to how they self identify. Each group discusses group dynamics separately (often the caucus will give the alternative group a specific action or issue to discuss) and then meet together with the alternative group telling the caucus what they discussed and what concrete steps they will take to combat racism/sexism/etc. Caucuses don't have to reveal what they discussed unless they decide to. Special note on queer caucuses: so that people are not forcibly outed, queer caucuses often meet at a time that not everyone is told about.

Seek out and support campaigns being led by oppressed people. Take leadership from them asking, "What can I do to help you?" not telling them how to fight for their own self-determination.

Use inclusive language. Besides the obvious examples (like saying 'spokesperson' or 'spoke' instead of 'spokesman' and saying 'chair' instead of 'chairman'), members of your group should also be careful not to use 'us'/'them' language.

Find effective ways to confront oppressive behavior. This means not ostracizing members who are actively working on their issues with racism/sexism/heterosexism but talking with them honestly about it. One on one conversations, group discussions and caucuses are all effective methods.

Don't place the responsibility for fighting oppression on the oppressed. People in positions of privilege need to recognize destructive group dynamics and work to address them.

Use "I" statements when you speak. People of privileged groups often universalize their experience, not realizing that other people don't share their feelings about situations.

Interrupt oppressive behavior while it's happening. If a few white males are dominating an argument point that out to the group and suggest a go-around to get more people talking.

Think about how much you talk, how easily you take on leadership roles and how much space you take up. Consider what role privilege or oppression related to your gender, sexual orientation, race and class might play in your tendency to take/avoid leadership.

Accept that you (yes, even you) might have issues that need to be addressed. If you are being confronted about them don't become overly defensive. Recognize that we all have issues that we need to work on.

Learn the histories of resistance of people against their own oppression. People of color, queer folks and women have been fighting for a long time and it's important to recognize that.

III. GROUP STRUCTURE

Often, because university administrators make us select a "president," a "vice president," and/or a "treasurer," student groups often end up adopting these traditional, hierarchical structures by default. These structures (which are often coupled with '50% + 1' democracy) are usually not the best way of organizing student groups which rely entirely on volunteer involvement; people are not likely to stick around if they feel like they're taking orders from above rather than feeling ownership of the group and its decisions. Moreover, centralizing power and organizational memory in a single person or 'ruling clique' is particularly disastrous for student groups since they, by nature, have a high member turnover rate as students graduate. This section will outline a cooperative, consensus-based model for student groups. If you choose to organize your group with a model like this one, your group can select nominal leaders to submit

to your school's administration as your 'leadership.'

Rotating Facilitation. Rather than having one leader or 'president' chairing all meetings, it is often helpful to have rotating facilitators. Not only does this decentralize power in the group, it also provides a way for new or less active members to take on a leadership role, making them feel more invested in the group. In addition it gives quieter members experience taking control and speaking at meetings.

Minutes and Agendas. At the beginning of each meeting, select (through whatever process your group decides upon) a facilitator for your next meeting. That person should take minutes on the current meeting and prepare the agenda for the next meeting (the one they will be facilitating.) This way the facilitator of each meeting will always be up-to-date on the issues discussed at the last meeting *and* will understand the agenda of the meeting they are facilitating.

Archived Information. All minutes and agendas should be stored in a commonly accessible area. This allows for 'organizational memory' even as members leave over time. It also (since knowledge often translates into power) prevents power from collecting in the hands of a few members. Office space and websites are both great places to store this information.

Consensus Based Decision Making. This is one of the most effective ways to keep power diffuse. See p. 14 for details on how to run meetings under a consensus-based model.

Empowered Representatives. When dealing with administrators, coalition members or other parties outside of the group, it is rarely practical for the entire group to take part in negotiations. Since only one or two members will be representing the entire group, it is important to establish beforehand, in a meeting with the entire group, exactly what decisions those representatives are empowered to make and exactly what the group's 'official stance' is on any issues that may arise in the discussion. It is also important that you make time in your meetings to allow these representatives to report back to the group on what happened at the meeting, especially if any decisions reached or commitments made on behalf of the group.

IV. MEETINGS

The primary function of meetings should be decision-making and each meeting should have specific goals. Your group's meetings should not be a place where a ruling activist clique sells its goals and strategies to members. It should, rather, be a space where members feel empowered in the group's decision-making process. Members should be made to feel (and should actually have) ownership of the group and its choices since they will be the ones carrying out the tactics and strategies decided upon at these meetings.

Organization

Make sure that **before** each meeting you decide who will be responsible for the following necessary functions. Your group may decide that the same person will be responsible for some functions each week, while other tasks (especially facilitation) should rotate among members.

Agenda. An agenda should be prepared and distributed before each meeting, allowing for enough time for members to read it over and propose changes. It is often a good idea to have the agenda for each meeting set by whoever will be facilitating it. This way the facilitator will be more confident in their understanding of the meeting and its goals. The agenda should include time limits for each item and the names of all presenters.

Facilitator. See the sections on tips for facilitators and consensus based organizing (below) for a detailed description of this role.

Secretary/Notetaker. Someone should be responsible for recording all decisions made and the conversations that led up to them. It is especially important to record specific tasks that have been decided on and the people who volunteered to do them. These minutes should then be stored in an archive that is accessible to all members.

Time Keeper. This may be the same person as the facilitator. Regardless, someone should be responsible for ensuring that the meeting runs on time and that the items on the agenda do not go over their designated times unless the group decides to change the agenda through established process.

Scribe. If the group is discussing an issue, brainstorming or making announcements, it's often helpful to have someone writing on a board so that everyone can remember what was said.

Vibes Watcher. Sometimes meetings get long. Really long. Sometimes you just need to get everyone standing up and jumping around for a minute




so you can sit down and be more productive. Vibes watchers capture the mood of the room and insert quick breaks or games so that people don't get bogged down too much.

Presenters. Make sure that anyone who will be reporting back to the group, proposing a new campaign, strategy, or tactic, or making any kind of presentation should know they will be presenting before the meeting. Their presentations should be included in the agenda so that they know when they will be speaking and how much time they have.

Food. Someone should be designated to bring food to each meeting. You'd be surprised how a pint of soy ice cream can turn a stressful battle over strategy into a friendly and cooperative exercise in consensus.

Consensus Based Decision Making

As was discussed in the 'Group Structure' section of this chapter (p. 11), hierarchical structures and oligarchic or '50% + 1' decision-making are rarely effective in student groups (besides being counter-productive in terms of creating progressive social change). Consensus based decision-making is a far more productive approach. *Building United Judgment: A Handbook for Consensus Decision-Making* explains that consensus decision making works best in groups whose members share unity of purpose, equal access to power, willingness to change attitudes, and eagerness to learn skills- all of which are characteristics commonly found in student groups. Below is a sample guide to formal consensus process. Feel free to modify the process outlined in this guide to come up with something that makes sense for you and your group.

		
Blocking Objection When a group member objects to a proposal and thinks that it should not go forward, they make a "blocking objection" by giving a "thumbs down."	Stand Aside When a group member doesn't fully support a proposal, but doesn't feel strongly enough to block it from moving forward, they "stand aside" by giving a "thumbs sideways."	Consent When a group member supports the proposal in question and thinks it should go forward, they give a "thumbs up."

1. The facilitator introduces the agenda item.
2. The floor is opened for questions and discussion. Throughout the discussion, the facilitator should hold occasional 'go-rounds' (where everyone comments even if they don't have a well-formulated opinion) so that everyone's voice is heard.
3. When a proposal for action emerges from the discussion, the facilitator should check for consensus, having the group members use hand signals to indicate whether or not they support the proposal (see the diagrams).
4. If a consensus is reached in favor of the proposal (i.e. if more than half vote in favor and there are no blocking objections- again, see the diagrams) the decision can be recorded and the group can move on to the next item. If there are blocking objections or more than half the group stands-aside (see the diagrams below), the item can be reopened for discussion until it seems as though the objectors' problems have been assuaged or a new/modified proposal emerges that passes the consensus test.

Tips for Facilitators

When facilitating a meeting, your goal should be to make the meeting as quick and efficient as possible while ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak and that all decisions are reached by consensus. Here are some tips for achieving these goals:

At the beginning of each meeting, review the agenda and make any changes that the group agrees upon through consensus.

Make sure that everyone is involved in the decision-making processes. Hold frequent 'go-rounds' and test all proposals for consensus.

Start and end on time, following the time limits set out on the agenda unless the group (by consensus) decides to make changes to the agenda.

The facilitator should steer the group away from making detailed decisions in meetings where the entire group is present. The group can empower a single person, committee, or action team to figure out logistics like what toppings to have on the pizza at your teach-in or what colors to put on your banner for the club fair.

Introduce any new people and make sure to ask for their opinions on any proposals or ideas suggested.

Facilitators facilitate meetings they don't run them. Their job is to make sure

that everyone's voice is heard and to help the group come to a decision so they should generally leave their personal opinions behind.

Keep meetings focused. Know what needs to get accomplished at meetings; when people start going off on tangents, refocus them on the goals.

Before the end of the meeting, the facilitator should review all commitments made by members in the course of the meeting so that people remember what they are responsible for.

2. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE YOUR GROUP

They say that “no man is an island” and the same is true of student groups. In order to be effective, your group will have to interact with many different groups and individuals and will have to be sensitive to the specific nature of each of these actors. Always be aware of the goals, priorities and strategies of everyone you are working with or against and remember that even allies can be slightly different from you in these respects. Below is an outline of some of the different people and groups that you will likely have to deal with and things to keep in mind when dealing with them.

I. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

Since the work of many student activist groups focuses on pressuring their schools to change their policies, the university administration is one of the most important outside actors that your group will have to deal with. It is crucial that you understand (as well as possible) the internal dynamics of your school's administration. Here are some tips for dealing with your administration:

Isolate decision-makers. There is an unfortunate tendency among student activists to view ‘the administration’ as a monolith rather than as a collection of individual decision-makers. This is why so many campaigns begin with demands to meet with the university president even when a much lower administrator could easily have met your needs. For every campaign you run, make sure you know who has the power to concede to your demands and focus your efforts on convincing that individual.

Always start off friendly. Remember: ‘please’ is still the magic word. You should never assume that the university will be hostile to your proposal. Start by presenting your proposal to the decision-making administrator and ask nicely. You might be surprised; some administrators are very willing to work with student groups and will go out of their way to accommodate student requests. If this doesn't work, escalate your campaign according to the guidelines in chapter 3.

Use their interests as leverage. Your administration values having a large endowment, happy students, a good reputation in the surrounding community, high rankings in US News & World Report, positive press coverage, prestige among their peer institutions and parents that are

content with their children's education. Your tactics should focus on using these values to convince the administration to concede to your demands. Student power comes not from convincing administrators to become tree-huggers, but from the ability to create rewards and punishments for those in power, to create a situation where it is harmful to their self-interest to remain opposed to you.

Build inside allies. If and when you find progressive administrators, hold onto them for dear life! Don't just use them to help you in one particular campaign; a sympathetic administrator can be an invaluable resource, not only as a decision-maker, but also as someone with a deeper understanding of how your school's bureaucracy works and how to best influence other administrators as well as someone who can give you information about what the administration is doing.

Be wary. Remember, just as you have tons of tactics to help you work for progressive change, administrators have some tricks up their sleeves for slowing you down. Stalling tactics are a university administrator's best friend since they know that you have a limited time frame to work within (until the end of the semester, school year, or at the very most until you graduate.) They also like to send you on wild goose chases through the school bureaucracy, even if they know exactly who you need to talk to (especially if it's them.) Another tactic is to create committees that endlessly discuss issues but have no real power. Recognize when you're being hoodwinked and don't be afraid to get aggressive if they're trying to stall you. Call every day, send emails, publicly demand meetings and generally get on their asses until they start responding positively.

Be a force to be reckoned with. The bigger and more organized your group appears to the administration, the more likely they are to take you seriously. Always be on time for meetings with administrators, have clear proposals and get things done when you say you will; this makes you look organized and committed, making administrators scared of what might happen if you're forced to escalate your campaign. In this same vein, try to make your group seem bigger and powerful than it is.

II. OTHER STUDENT GROUPS

Your relationships with other student groups are extremely important, especially since you may need their support when you are planning large actions or when you need other groups to join you in a coalition. Below are some tips for keeping good relationships with other groups:

Help out whenever possible. When other groups ask you to turn people out to actions, speak at their events, or help out financially, do so whenever you can. Your generosity will likely be remembered and reciprocated.

Keep track of connections between your members and the members of other groups. Having members of other groups (or even friends of members of other groups) in your organization can be a really good way to strengthen alliances between groups. You can get them to pitch your campaigns at their meetings; their groups will likely be more receptive than if a total stranger came in and presented them.

Play an active role in your campus' progressive community. If there is an activist listserv or umbrella group, consider becoming involved with them as a way of making contacts with other groups and activists.

DO NOT try to take over or order around other groups. Some groups employ a strategy of having their members join another group en masse and then use their new majority to redefine the goals and direction of the group. This kind of parasitic activism has destroyed a lot of potentially strong groups and alienated a lot of potential activists. Moreover, a lot of groups have become pariahs in their campus activist communities by engaging in this kind of strategy. Respect the integrity and independence of all other groups that you are working with and you will end up with more enthusiastic and meaningful participation from them.

III. THE STUDENT BODY AT LARGE

Always be aware of how your group/movement is perceived in the campus community beyond its activist circles. Before any major actions or events, make a conscious decision about how you want to be perceived and base that decision on how well it will help you achieve your goals. Keep this 'image' in mind whenever you stage actions, deal with administrators, and attempt to recruit new members. If you have a politically diverse group, don't be afraid to embrace that as part of your 'image'. There is no more effective way of creating a broad base of student support than creating the impression that your group is an alliance of people from many different political backgrounds. This way other students feel like they can get involved or support your issues even if they don't identify with a specific political ideology.

IV. OFF-CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS

NGOs and off-campus community groups can be a valuable resource to student groups (and vice versa) if the relationship is handled correctly. Keep the following things in mind when dealing with off-campus organizations:

Don't sacrifice your independence. Don't confuse the goals of the outside group with your own. You may have a different political, ideological, or practical approach from the group you are working with; if your group has to make substantial concessions in any of these areas, your members will no longer feel ownership of the group and its decisions and will likely decrease their involvement. Decisions should be made by consensus in your group, not handed down to you by a bigger, stronger outside group.

Don't be too proud to accept help. When an outside group offers money, resources or materials to your group, don't be afraid to take it! Remember, your group always has the power to do what it wants, so don't feel like accepting help will make you beholden to the outside group.

Be sensitive to the nature of the dynamic between your group and the outside group. If you go to an expensive private university and you are working with community organizers from low-income or otherwise disadvantaged communities, you may actually have more resources at your disposal than they do. Have the same respect for the goals and independence of their organization as you would expect from an outside NGO that out-resourced you. Ask for direction as to how you can help them rather than telling them how to run their campaign.

Make youth empowerment a central goal. Make sure that working with larger organizations builds the skills and power of the group and its members.

V. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL STUDENT NETWORKS

You're not alone! All over the world, students like you and groups like yours are fighting the same fights. National and regional student activist networks can be a great way to help you get in touch with student organizers at other schools. These organizations can hook you up with campaign ideas, trainings, information on actions in your community and the wisdom and experience of fellow student activists. Make sure that you are aware of all the resources at your disposal so that you can fully take advantage of your membership.

Membership is free for many of these groups and even those that do charge a fee will usually waive it if your group can't afford it- so if cost is prohibiting you from joining a national or regional student organization, contact them and see if you can work something out. You can also usually pick your own level of involvement, so you don't have to worry about your group losing its independence and having to take orders from the national or regional body.

3. RUNNING A CAMPAIGN

So, now you've got a strong campus group with good connections and the ability to deal with the administration. Time to start campaigning!

I. CHOOSING A CAMPAIGN

Whether or not your campaign will be a success is as much a result of how good a choice of campaign it was as it is a result of your hard work and commitment. The following are good qualities in a campaign:

Clear Goals. Make sure you know exactly what you want. A goal like 'make the university use less paper' is not as good as 'decrease paper consumption by 10%' or 'switch the university entirely to recycled paper.'

Accessible Target. It's really important that you be able to communicate with your target (the person who has the power to concede to your demands.) This sometimes requires some work in itself (especially if your target is someone like the university president or the chair of the board of trustees) so consider how difficult this will be before beginning your campaign.

Politically Viable. Are you likely to get a lot of student support for your campaign? Your power comes from being able to mobilize students so if you can't get them into it you may as well save your breath to cool your porridge.

Winnable. Think seriously about how likely you are to be successful. This isn't to say that you shouldn't stretch yourselves, but don't waste time and resources on a campaign that's destined to fail. As a group, brainstorm the potential obstacles to your success. If you think there's even a chance you'll win, go for it!

Enthusiasm within the group. There's no way your campaign will work if your own members aren't excited about it. Pick campaigns that everyone in your group can get jazzed about so they stick with it and are able to convey their enthusiasm to others.

II. BEFORE YOUR CAMPAIGN

Sometimes it can be tempting to jump right in to your campaign, but you need to do some important background work before you begin. These are the things you should do before you start campaigning:

Agreement on goals. Make sure that you have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the changes you are proposing. Everyone should agree as to the specifics of your goals and what constitutes a victory. All your strategic and tactical decisions should somehow move you closer to these goals.

Research and prepare materials. Make sure that you are prepared to defend your proposal. If you come off as being unknowledgeable or disorganized early in the campaign, administrators are unlikely to take you seriously; make sure that you have a good grasp of the issues involved *before* presenting your proposal so that administrators see you as being committed and informed.

Isolate your target. This can often be one of the hardest parts of student campaigns, especially if you go to a school with a big bureaucracy. Before you start campaigning, you need to wade through the red tape and figure out who actually has the power to put your proposal into action. Your strategies and tactics should focus on convincing pressuring this individual or 'target.'

Meet with relevant administrators. Send some empowered representatives (see p. 8) from your group to meet with your target. Present your proposal in a friendly, 'we're-with-you-not-against-you' way and just see what they say. If they shoot you down, ask what specific obstacles they see to implementing your proposal. Listen carefully to these concerns and keep them in mind when developing your strategy and tactics (for example, if they say that most students wouldn't support your plan, you can use petitions to prove them wrong.).

Develop a strategy and timeline. After meeting with administrators, you will have an idea of how resistant they are and what you need to do to achieve your goals. As a group, work together to put together a preliminary strategy and timeline (which can be changed over time) to guide you through the beginning of your campaign.

III. LOW-LEVEL TACTICS

This is where your campaign really gets started. These tactics are low-risk, lower visibility, and require fewer specialized skills and experience than the tactics in

phases 2 and 3. It's best to start a campaign with tactics like this since they might be all you need. Also, it's important to build support among the students before moving on to higher level tactics so that they see disruption and rule/law breaking as justified by the administration's immoral intransigence.

Petitioning. This is a good way to prove that you have the support of the student body and is an excellent mechanism for getting the word out about your campaign. It also gives you a great opportunity to talk to people one-on-one about your campaign. This can also be a good way to recruit new members; when someone seems really interested in what you're working on, get their contact information and be sure to invite them to your meetings. Keep the wording of your petition short (a couple of sentences and a few bullet points if necessary) so people who are unfamiliar with the issues don't get bogged down in the details of your demands.

Sign-on letters. Write a letter explaining the issues and your demands and get faculty, community groups or student organizations to sign on in support. This is a good way to demonstrate that a diversity of interest groups support what you are doing and often has more weight than a petition; The administration often sees these actors as more likely to become active in your campaign and as being more 'competent' (especially faculty) than random students signing a petition. This is also a good way to identify allies that you might need later on in your campaign.

Websites. If your group has a website (which it should), be sure to have information about your campaign available there. This way, interested students have somewhere to go for more information. If possible, start up a website devoted entirely to the specific campaign; it makes you look more organized and shows administrators that you are serious about the campaign.

Teach-ins. Teach-ins are a good way of drawing attention to your demands and draws in people who might be interested in working on your campaign. Make sure to send around a sign-up list at your teach in and invite everyone who signs it to your next meeting. Also, make sure that your message is clear in the fliers (which you should have a lot of) advertising your teach-in so that even people who don't come are made aware of the issue.

Tabling. Set up an information table in a busy part of your campus where you can hand out literature, talk to people one-on-one and get people to sign your petition. Since pretty much anyone can work your table, it's a good task to give new members to get them more involved- although you should have at least one person with a good working knowledge of the issues at the table at all times. This also creates visibility for your campaign and is a good way to recruit new members.

The school paper. Get in there any way you can! Invite them to write a story on your campaign (many student papers are desperate for this kind of easy story), write letters to the editor (again many school papers will print almost anything that gets sent in) or even buy ad space if necessary and inexpensive. This creates awareness on campus of your campaign and gives you something concrete to show the administration to prove that there is a buzz on campus about your issue.

Coalition-building. If you think that it will be useful to have other groups working with you on this issue, the early phase of your campaign is the time to make connections with them. Before approaching groups, have a clear idea of what exactly their role will be and how the coalition will be structured. Remember, nobody wants to join a coalition that consists of taking orders from your group, so only form or join a coalition if you are genuinely willing to work with other groups and compromise with them about strategy and tactics.

Continued meetings with administrators. While all this is going on, you should be in constant contact with the administrator you are working with. Make sure to present them with your petitions, tell them about how you're building a coalition, and about how successful your teach-ins have been. Exaggerate your success whenever possible. This might be enough to convince them to meet your demands. If not, warn them that you will have to escalate your campaign unless they are willing to do what you want them to. Give them a deadline and be ready to move on to mid-level tactics as soon as the deadline passes.

Create a buzz. Make your campaign an exciting issue on campus that everyone is talking about. All around campus students should be seeing your campaign—through posters, literature, campus newspapers, and events. If you make your campaign exciting and appealing people will be asking for info about the issue and how they can support the campaign.

IV. MID-LEVEL TACTICS

These tactics are a little more confrontational and should supplement- not replace- lower-level tactics. You can pull most of them off without breaking school rules, but make sure beforehand that you are aware of any potential disciplinary consequences. These tactics are a good way to raise the profile of the campaign and highlight the immediacy of your demands:

Banner hangs. Carefully pick a time and place where as many people will see your banner as possible. Stake out the location beforehand to make sure that you have access to the rooftop, balcony, or wherever you're hanging the banner from. Your banner's message should be clear and

easy to understand, even for people who aren't yet familiar with your campaign. You should also have people below handing out literature and talking to people about the campaign after the banner is dropped. Make sure to take pictures and get them put in the school paper.

Rallies/Marches/Speak-outs. Don't do this unless you're sure you've got enough support to turn out a lot of people. Just as there's nothing more effective in proving the popular support for your cause than a huge mass of screaming protestors, there's nothing that makes you look more pathetic than three kids with sandwich board signs milling around outside the dean's office blowing whistles. Also, make sure to plan these well: prepare chants before-hand and assign people to lead the crowd; have posters and banners ready for people when they show up; advertise heavily; and, most importantly, pick a time and place that will make you most visible and that will be most convenient for students to attend.

Call-in days. Set up a table with information about the campaign and a phone. Get everyone who stops at the table to call your target and say that they support the campaign.

Be a thorn in your target's side. Any time your target makes a public appearance (on campus or off), be there with leaflets and posters letting people know about your demands and your target's stubborn refusal to meet them.

Meet with your target again. Before escalating your tactics again, review the actions you have orchestrated, repeat your demands and set a new deadline after which you will be 'forced to resort to more extreme measures.'

V. HIGH-LEVEL TACTICS

These tactics are more extreme and require more know-how and risk than the lower level tactics. Make sure that everyone in the group is aware of the disciplinary consequences of these actions and that anybody who is not prepared to accept them does not participate. Also, have plans for how people intend to react if security threatens disciplinary measures or threatens to call the cops. Be sure that you have fairly broad support for your campaign on campus before doing anything too high profile or you'll just come off as being a bunch of nutty extremists. Before engaging in these kinds of actions, think about how they will likely be perceived by the campus community and, most importantly, by your target. You should try to appear to the campus community as committed, passionate and justified, not like crazy shit-disturbers. As for your target, if they haven't conceded so far, they likely need a little fire under their asses to get them

moving, so you should try to appear as a threat to their reputation and to business-as-usual.

Disrupting major events (i.e. graduation, inauguration, etc.) A sure way to attract attention is to start a ruckus at some 'important' event like graduation. Some people don't like to do this since they think it's disrespectful; others think it's a badass way to create a buzz around your issue. Make sure you have the consent of all group members before doing something like this. It's crucial that you keep your plans secret, or security will be all over you before you even get started. Make sure to stake the place out, assign roles, and organize as much as you can before the event.

Disrupting trustee meetings. If your target is a trustee, this is a really good way to get under their skin. A lot of trustees keep their meeting locations secret, but if you get your hands on information about a trustee meeting, crashing it will definitely piss them off. You might want to take pictures or even videotape this so you can get it into the school press. The imagery of a bunch of stodgy old trustees making decisions about the school behind closed doors and shutting out students is a powerful one. **WARNING:** Don't do this without first having a request to come to a meeting denied. The last thing you want is to storm a meeting and demand your voice be heard only to have the trustees tell the school paper the next day that all you had to do was ask politely and they would have gladly invited you.

Take over an office or other campus location. Have a clear plan about how long you plan to stay there (while it's ok to tell the administration you won't leave until your demands are met, you should have a secret give-up time so that you don't have to negotiate it with each other while you're occupying the building, and so that everyone involved knows exactly what kind of commitment they are making by participating. As always, do your homework: stake the place out, pick a good time and place, assign everyone roles, and make sure you get in the school press.

Walkouts. Publicly set a time for students to walk out of class. It's usually a good idea to have a rally or march at this time for students to join; that's a lot more engaging than walking out and having nothing to do but go home and watch Shipmates. This tactic only really works if you have very broad student and faculty support, for obvious reasons. Make sure that you publicize your walkout well so that when people get up and walk out of class, people don't just think it's because the prof is boring. One good way to do this is to plant people in large lectures and have them raise their hand and announce to the class that they are walking out and encourage others to join. Make sure you also have a few planted joiners, or the person will just look like a jackass.

Hactivism. If you have tech-savvy types in your group who aren't afraid to get in a lot of trouble, 'hactivism' may be the thing for you. If someone can figure out how to mess with the school's website (which is usually extremely hard to do- but has been done before), that can be a really great way to get attention and piss off administrators. Again, the consequences for this kind of thing are usually severe if you're caught so don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

VI. VICTORY!

Congratulations- your demands have been won! Now it's just time to tie up a few loose ends:

Be a gracious winner. Publicly thank the administration for its forward-thinking ways and social responsibility (even if you know they only conceded to get you off their backs.) This will make them more likely to accommodate you in the future.

Get good press. Contact the school paper to let them know. Send out press releases to local papers, wire services and national papers. Email other student and adult groups that work on similar issues and let them know about the success.

Follow up. Make sure that the administration does everything they promised they would. Don't be afraid to threaten to restart the campaign if they start dragging their feet.

Thank people. Make sure that you notify any helpful or sympathetic faculty, student groups and administrators of your success and thank them for their help. Not only is this a good way to build alliances, but also it's just polite!

Celebrate! Just make sure that there's some component of your celebration that is substance-free if you have any straightedge kids in your group.

Use the momentum. In winning the campaign the group has probably made a name for itself on campus. The administration also will know that when the group makes demands it can rally the support of the campus behind it. Find new issues to mobilize students around.

Spread the campaign. If you can win this victory at your school, then other students around the country can too! Find ways to spread your successful campaign to other campus like calling activist groups on other campuses, doing workshops at conferences and working with regional and national student networks to get in contact with other groups.

5. CONCLUSION

So get out there and get organizing! The advice in this guide is just a starting point. Be sure to visit RAN's online **Activist Toolbox** at www.ran.org/action for more detailed organizing and action tips and trainings. Of course, there is no replacement for hands on experience, so take risks, push yourself and your group, and always be open to learning from your mistakes and from your victories. Remember: all the organizing guides and activist trainings in the world are useless without your passion and commitment, so as you work to perfect your craft as an activist, never lose sight of how important the work you are doing really is.

Finally, to end with an apt, if overused, quote by the illustrious Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."