

TAKE ACTION!

Everything you need to know
to mobilize workers to win
positive change



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada



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TAKE ACTION!

Everything you need to know to mobilize members and win positive change

Are you ready to take action in your workplace and community? You've come to the right place!

This handbook is a compilation of tools and tips developed by PSAC or by other union and community partners. It's designed to give you some "nuts and bolts" tips to get started. But our inspiration comes from people like you who are brave enough to take a risk and work hard to make change.

This is by no means the last word on mobilizing. Rather, it is meant to serve as a handy compilation of ideas, strategies and tips to help inform your activism and get you thinking about what will help your members build successful campaigns and actions.

We invite you to share this tool with the other unions and community partners you work with. Add your strategies to the ones outlined here. There is space at the end of this booklet to write down your own ideas. And don't be afraid to get creative.

Good luck and have fun!

Mobilizing checklist

This checklist is a short reminder of the things you will need to consider when you want to mobilize members for a cause.

- Make sure you have support from your members.**
 - Find out how they are affected and what they want to do to change the situation.
 - Work with them to come up with ideas and strategies for action.
 - Choose the best strategies and actions together.

- Keep members in the loop.**
 - Let them know what's happening.
 - Keep members involved in decision-making and update them on developments.

- Make sure your message is clear and to the point.**
 - Use plain language so that your messages and actions are easy to understand and act upon.
 - Respect the diversity of your membership. Make sure your publications reflect people from different cultural backgrounds, age groups and with different abilities.
 - Use different kinds of media to attract as many people as possible.

- Design actions that are easy to carry out and achieve a concrete goal.**
 - Plan your actions in high traffic areas or in conjunction with major events, to help attract a bigger audience.
 - Decide in advance what constitutes a "win," and make sure to celebrate your victories.
 - Design your actions to reflect the changes you want to make, and remain flexible, so your actions can adapt to changing circumstances.

- Get political.**
 - Take your message directly to decision-makers by encouraging your members to write letters and sign petitions.
 - Escalate your tactics if you don't get a response. This could include phone calls, in-person visits or demonstrations.
 - Get allies on board to support your actions.

- Have fun.**
 - Engage the public through creative, collective action.
 - Include food, song, theatre and art in your activities.
 - Create an atmosphere of solidarity with the actions you undertake in the workplace, in public venues, on the streets and in your communities.

STRATEGY

The 12 principles of strategic campaigns



When we take a look at some of the most successful campaigns in the labour and social justice movement, we can see similar strategic principles at play, no matter how different the issues involved. The tactics change depending on the employer and the situation, but the underlying principles remain constant.

1. Seize the initiative. If you're entering into a tough conflict or strike, it's critical to think ahead and make calculations like: "If we take action, what could we do to exert enough pressure to win?"

Although some campaigns may require hundreds of hours of research, more often the key information about an organization is published in an annual report, reports to a security exchange, business press reports, reports to Parliament or to a government minister and other such easily accessible material. At the very least, these sources may point you in the right strategic direction.

2. Map the big picture. Draw a map of all the relationships your employer has. Begin with your own and honestly evaluate your position, assessing how well you are organized and how hard it will be for the employer to secure replacement labour or to legislate you back to work. But don't stop there!

3. Look at who runs the organization. Note who is on the board of directors, how senior management is appointed and by whom, who the suppliers and customers are, what regulations the employer must comply with, what financial commitments the employer has and what individuals or institutions capitalize the organization. That map will help you choose an effective strategy.

4. Think like "them." By thinking like them, we can get beyond the conventional response they're expecting from us and make a real impact.

5. Go for the higher vulnerability. Most organizations are vulnerable somewhere and all employers or large organizations are more vulnerable in some places than in others. Withholding labour or picketing only addresses one vulnerability, not the only one – and these days this is not necessarily the most effective one.

Evaluate where to focus your efforts based on the organization's vulnerability. Adopt a multifaceted approach to your campaign that reaches the organization at all levels; its clientele or service users and the other organizations it deals with.

6. Plan to win. Your plan must be realistic and manageable. To mobilize the membership, your approach needs to be reasonable, logical and plausible. People should be able to participate without having to make a superhuman sacrifice. If the perfect tactic is beyond your human or economic resources, scale it back to a level that you can implement. Your plan must hold the prospect of success. People want badly to win and want to do what is reasonable to achieve a victory

7. Stay flexible – clear your mind of assumptions. Successful campaigns are built on dozens of readjustments. Evaluate what you are doing on an ongoing basis and be prepared to change the plan accordingly.

8. Struggle for social justice and human rights. As César Chávez once said, "The fight is never about grapes and lettuce. It's always about people."

Let people know what the real problem is and why the employer, the government or the organization's behaviour is wrong. Do it in a way that will be understood and have an impact, even on those people who don't know or care about unions. If we use that as a standard, we are likely to be successful. And, in the process, people may end up knowing more and caring more.

9. The more you involve the members, the longer they last. If you involve people in a struggle where they feel they have a chance, then their desire to win is usually enough to make them want to participate. And if you find a way that's fun, then it energizes people instead of draining them.

10. Go where you are most visible. In the old days, work places were situated in communities where, if you put up a picket line, you had a chance of influencing people not to cross. Not anymore. Today communities are more fragmented and many work sites have moved to industrial parks where there's no one to see you, no matter how many pickets you turn out.

So, go to where you can deliver your message to the largest proportion of your target audience. Take advantage of everyday events like rush hour on the subways, metros or sky trains. Use a community event like a county fair or public spaces like city hall as a backdrop. Consider putting your employer in the spotlight by staging a demonstration at a trade show. There are opportunities everywhere!

11. Make your struggle a community concern.

Coalition-building and community partnerships are ways for the broader community to join you in your cause.

When the public perceives a campaign as a labour-management dispute, they won't likely want to interfere. In that case, your struggle will likely be seen as a conflict between two giants, probably equally bad; or as a dispute too complex to understand.

Positive, ongoing working relationships with community groups, social justice organizations and coalition partners can ensure that all parties affected by a government, an organization or an employer's actions (or lack of), can more easily come together to work for change.

12. Escalate – and be consistent. Mount an ongoing campaign that consistently raises the stakes and keeps the opposition wondering what might come next.

Remember that a series of well thought-out actions implemented in a consistent and persistent manner can be more effective than one big action that stands on its own. Make your actions accessible and fun so that members and allies maintain their interest and commitment.

When an organization comes to understand that you are committed and your actions are proving disruptive, it will eventually act in its best interests and do what is necessary to induce you to stop your campaign. The trick is to keep heart. You only have to last one day longer than they do!

Nothing beats success – but you can never lose by acting. Strategic campaigns are becoming popular because they work. However, you never know how long they will take and there are no guarantees. Getting members involved, working with allies on important issues, raising awareness and letting the employer know that you will fight for justice and dignity – this is the winning formula!



Key questions: identifying your goals

Short-term:

- What do we want to accomplish right now?
- What is achievable?
- What is the minimum we can accept in the short-term?

Mid-term:

- Are we trying to gain new ground or protect what we already have?
- What can we anticipate in the mid-term that will help us meet our long-term objectives?

Long-term:

- What period of time are we looking at?
- What specifically are our long-term objectives?
- What is the minimum we can accept in the long-term?

Forming allies and anticipating the opposition:

- Who is on our side and why?
- Who is not on our side and why not?
- Who is a fence-sitter and why?

The message:

- Who are we trying to communicate with?
- How will we frame our message to gain support and be successful?
- Is positive media coverage critical to our success? If so, how do we achieve it?
- How should we respond to anticipated opposition?
- What is our message to our supporters? To the fence-sitters?

Assessing the situation

Openings

What opening or opportunity exists now that makes this a good time to take action?

How long is this window of opportunity open to us?

If we don't take advantage of this opening now, when will we get another chance?

Are we (or our group) the leader on this issue, or are we joining a larger struggle?

Are we reaching out to groups who could be standing with us?



Possibilities

Are we trying to defend what we have or gain new ground?

Can we turn the tables and put our opposition on the defensive?

Can we afford to defend an indefensible position?

Is our issue ambitious enough?

How will we measure our success?

Who amongst those with power and influence over our issue(s) might be convinced to help us influence others?

Do we need total support to achieve our goal?

Sample strategy template

Date	Action	Objective	Resources needed	Cost	Who's responsible

Total cost = _____

TACTICS

How to take action – together

Collective actions are the fun and creative part of mobilizing members. They can include anything from wearing red clothes, to phone “call-ins” or rallies at MPs’ offices.

Collective actions build on one-on-one communication. They give people a chance to do something about the issue they’ve just learned about. When you’ve completed the one-on-one communication and your membership is fired up, the actions give them an outlet to express their support.



Why collective actions?

1. They allow members to participate directly and collectively in an activity, thereby increasing their feelings of solidarity and camaraderie.
2. They send a visible message to management and/or politicians that workers are united and serious about the issue.
3. Often they provide the union with media coverage that allows us to explain our position to the community and help increase community support.
4. They have an impact on the employer and can result in positive change in the workplace.

How to plan actions that work

Collective actions should be planned so as to gradually escalate pressure on the employer. The longer the issue remains unresolved, the more confrontational the collective actions may become. In most cases, you will want to begin with a less confrontational action and then increase it if there is no positive response from management.

In developing your ideas for escalating the campaign, think in terms of “levels of action.” The union intensifies the actions and raises the stakes at each level. We bring the membership along by ensuring that they are part of the planning, organizing and implementation of all actions.

Accessibility is key

Keep in mind that not all activities will be appropriate in every circumstance. Get a sense of what your members are willing to do. Don’t try to push people too far, too fast.

- Use personal contact to let members know the “when,” “where,” “how” and “why” of the collective action.
- Make sure your action is accessible to people with disabilities and is reflective of the diverse cultural backgrounds within your membership.
- Provide translation and/or child care, when needed.
- When serving food, be aware of dietary restrictions and potential allergies.
- Ask participants to avoid wearing perfume and using heavily scented products, in order to account for chemical sensitivities.

Here are some ideas that have worked in other workplaces and communities. Some of them are more confrontational than others. They are designed to give you a sense of the range of actions available to members – from the more timid to the more dramatic.

1. **Wear the same colour to work.** Encourage members to wear the same colour on specific days – such as red every Thursday – until the issue is resolved.
2. **Distribute balloons and flags.** Hand a helium balloon (be careful of allergies to latex), or flag to every worker on the way in to work in the morning. Ask them to display them at their desks or in the lunch room. To add to the effect, arrange for people to pop the balloons or wave their flags at a particular time.
3. **Enter the workplace en masse.** Arrange for everyone to wait outside the workplace door and walk in together at the beginning of a shift or work day. You may want to serve refreshments and sing union songs while the group gathers.
4. **Use colour-coordinated ink.** Arrange to have everyone who is responsible for filling out reports use green ink one week, then red the next, etc. This is a great way to get hesitant members involved and get the employer’s attention.
5. **Synchronize your actions.** At a specific time, arrange to have all members at a workplace do something in unison like tapping their pencils on their desks, singing a solidarity song, clapping their hands or waving their hands in the air.
6. **Return trinkets.** Organize members to collect and return together any promotional items such as mugs and t-shirts they’ve been given by the employer.

7. **Hold a “theme day.”** Choose a theme, like “my employer’s making me ill.” Encourage people to dress up and participate in lunchtime activities. An example might be something like “a race to the bottom” at the annual work picnic that features our favourite corporations competing for the lowest paid workers.
8. **Host a “lunch with a bunch.”** The Machinists’ Union coined this phrase during their mobilization at Eastern Airlines. Invite other organizations and make it a rally or an educational event. Hold song writing or sign making workshops. Have some sidewalk chalk on hand and encourage people to leave messages for the employer.
9. **Stage a mock funeral.** Gather at dusk with candles in front of an MP’s office, federal building or other place of employment. This creates dramatic pictures for the evening television news. Bring a coffin to your employer: “R.I.P. federal public service jobs,” or whatever other slogan may be appropriate.
10. **Organize a children’s march.** Bring out your members’ kids and grandkids. Give them union hats, balloons and small picket signs (cut your usual signs in half). This tactic generates good media coverage and builds solidarity within families and in the community.

Other ideas:

- Distribute handbills or information flyers in the workplace.
- Canvass members one-on-one to spread the word and gauge their opinions.
- Set up display tables in the lobby at work.
- Display posters, buttons and other union symbols in the office.
- Send postcards to the employer.
- Picket managers’ and/or MPs’ offices.
- Attend employer meetings or events en masse.

Chants, slogans and songs

A rally without music and chants is like a cake without icing!

Take some time before your action to sit down with others and create a few slogans, chants or songs that will grab people’s attention and get your point across.

Some tips for creating chants, slogans, raps and/or songs:

- Rhyming is catchy. It is also an easy way to get others to remember and join in.
- Use well known tunes or rhymes and put your words to them.
- Funny and witty is okay. It’s also okay to target an individual or group of individuals. But ensure your language and your message is appropriate, understandable to all and not offensive.
- Always have copies of your chants, slogans, raps and songs to hand out at your events.
- Bring instruments, drums, music and noise-makers (a handful of pennies in an empty pop can taped shut makes a cheap and effective noise-maker). If you use a music player, be sure to have an amplifier and a power source.
- Have a variety of chants, slogans, raps and/or songs to choose from.
- Your chants, slogans, raps and songs should respect the diversity of your members and their communities in terms of language, culture, age and gender.

Union power on the rise ...
Now it’s time to organize!

What do we want?
Justice!

No more bosses’ tricks and lies ...
Now it’s time to organize!

When do we want it?
Now!

Give our children better lives ...
Now it’s time to organize!





Don't take yourself – or your employer – too seriously

In one workplace, management was promoting “team building.” In reaction, the members hung a banner from one side of the office to the other that said “Go team go! Rah, rah, rah!” One worker came to the office wearing a mask of the Prime Minister and played the team leader. Other workers came dressed as a construction team. That was the last they heard of team building.

Some PSAC members have applied non-traditional methods to the grievance procedure. When one office was facing layoffs, members started filing grievances on sheets of drywall, old pieces of carpet and other weird and wonderful things. When management realized that people were preparing to visit the local junk yard for even more innovative possibilities, they decided it was time to address the members' concerns.

On another occasion, workers decided to have a grievance lunch and used the time to fold photocopied grievances into different shapes to make paper hats, birds, fans and airplanes. Everyone had a great laugh later when they saw the boss at the photocopier trying to unfold and flatten them to make the necessary copies. The employer finally conceded on the issue that had provoked the grievances.

Remember: Whatever you do and however you do it, involve your members and have fun!

Out on the heat,
out in the street
Union power can't be beat!

There's one thing that's clear to me
The people here have unity!

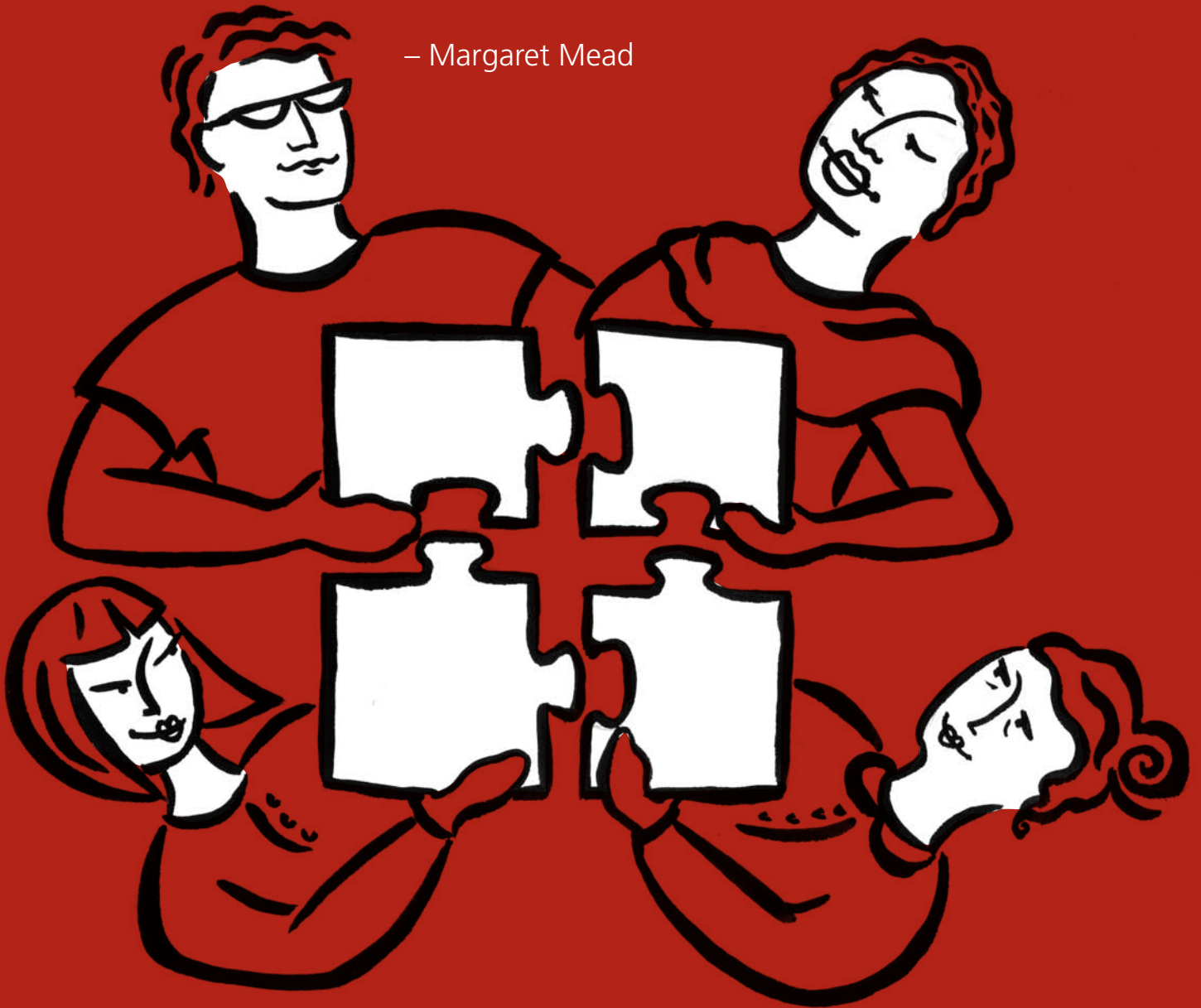
Fi, fi, fo fum
Look out bosses, here we come!

We're working families under attack
What do we do?
Stand up, fight back!

How to work in coalition

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

– Margaret Mead



What is a coalition?

A coalition is a grouping of organizations and/or individuals that come together to work on a common goal. A coalition presents a unified community voice that shows that many groups and individuals are concerned about a particular issue and are working together to develop solutions.

Coalitions offer an effective way to share work where many in the community are concerned about the same issue or issues. Coalitions also provide a forum for people affected by an issue to give voice to their concerns and become involved in the process of change.

Coalitions combine a number of different strengths, including strength in numbers, diverse skills, knowledge, insights and ideas along with the power of pooled money and resources.

Consider this:

- Coalition-building can form an important part of any union or social justice campaign. However, it is important to fully understand the kind of commitment you are making before entering into or forming a coalition.
- Working within an existing coalition, or forming one yourself, is a huge commitment of time and resources.
- Coalitions take on a life of their own and cannot and should not be controlled by any one agency or individual. They provide an opportunity to work together in new ways and establish new partnerships.
- While coalitions can take on large tasks and provide a powerful united voice, they do not always move quickly or smoothly. It takes time to discuss issues and reach agreement on initiatives. Groups of individuals need to learn to work together. Organizations need to support each others' agendas and respect each others' cultures. All voices at the table must be respected and integrated.

Joining a coalition

Before starting a coalition, determine whether or not there are similar organizations already in existence in your community. Ask yourself these questions before you proceed:

- Should your group become part of an existing coalition?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of becoming part of an existing group?
- Does it espouse similar principles and ideologies as your group?
- Is this coalition looking for new participants?
- Are you prepared to participate over the long haul – not just to support your own agenda, but to support the interests of the other groups involved as well?

If you answer yes to most or all of these questions, you may want to approach an existing coalition to see if your group can join. If not, you should consider whether or not you can form your own coalition.

Starting a new coalition

You may want to start by asking three or four individuals from respected organizations you work with to participate in a brainstorming session. You may want to identify names of individuals to contact within those organizations. Other considerations include:

- Who are the community's key leaders?
- Who are the obvious stakeholders in the issue?
- Whose participation will be critical to the success of the effort?
- Are diverse populations of the community represented?

Sometimes coalitions can attain visibility and recruit members more quickly if they have a powerful "champion." The champion may be a labour leader, a high profile social justice activist, a political leader, a civic official or member of the faith community. Whatever their niche, the champion must be a person who is well respected and capable of generating support for the coalition and its issues.

Invite members

Draft a letter of invitation asking potential members to attend an organizing meeting. Your letter should be signed by key representatives of the organization(s) already involved. A personal invitation may be more beneficial for some, rather than a letter. Assess what's in it for them and use this in your recruitment message.

Coalition coordinators should be able to assess how the potential members' priorities and tasks intersect with those of the coalition. Associated groups must see "what's in it for them" and how they can contribute to the coalition. To avoid confusion follow these simple rules:

- Don't assume everyone is familiar with your organization or with the same details related to the issues you are addressing.
- Avoid using jargon, acronyms or "inside" language that may exclude others from participating.
- Be sure that language differences and cultural differences are reflected in your coalition's messages, processes and practices.

The first meeting

Spend the first meeting getting to know one another. Ask each member of the coalition to talk about their organization, how they hope to contribute to the coalition, and what skills/resources they can contribute.



Participants should also:

- develop a list of roles and responsibilities for coalition members;
- include the number of times the group can expect to meet, the time of the meetings, what is expected of the group and what individuals may be expected to contribute; and,
- establish membership criteria.

Understand power relationships and work toward sharing power in the group. Power relationships in coalitions can be located in and accentuated by such things as cultural and language differences, access to resources, who we know, community status, literacy and so forth. A coalition's members should be prepared to explore and acknowledge their power relationships and to work toward sharing power equally amongst group members.

Keeping the group together

Success is the best way to keep people involved in a coalition. Every coalition achievement may not be big or flashy, but each one should be noted and celebrated. In fact small victories, in which members of the coalition actively participate, keep people motivated and willing to carry on and sustain a campaign that will ultimately win. Remember to celebrate those victories and to support each other.

How to lobby an elected official

Want to know the best way to make sure that elected officials understand your position? Meet with them directly, and tell it to their face. But make sure you follow these tips to make sure that your meeting goes smoothly and that you make a real impact.



1. Define your issue and choose your target

Your issue must be one that can be addressed by the level of government you are lobbying. You should be able to articulate your issue in a few clear concise sentences. Some questions to consider:

- What specifically do you want done about the issue?
- How does your issue affect the people that this politician represents?
- How many other people and organizations support your lobbying efforts?

2. Set up a meeting

Contact the elected official's office in the riding to set up a meeting date and time. When calling, identify yourself and who you represent and briefly state the reason for meeting with the elected official. Make sure you leave your telephone number with the elected official's office in the event of any change in the meeting time or date. In addition, get the name of the person you arranged the meeting with for the purpose of future contact with that office.

Once the meeting time and date have been set by telephone, confirm it by letter. The letter should contain the reason for the meeting, the time, the date and the location. You may also include the names of the other members who'll be attending the meeting with you.

If the meeting isn't taking place for some time, call a few days before the meeting to reconfirm.

3. Prepare for the meeting

Decide who will be going to the meeting. The elected official's office may ask how many and who will be at the meeting.

Hold a pre-meeting briefing session for all of those who will be meeting with the elected official. The purpose of this session is to:

- Review the purpose of the meeting.
- Review the materials you will be using and the document(s) you will be leaving with the elected official.
- Decide who the main spokesperson will be.
- Make sure everyone knows where and when the meeting will take place and confirm they will be able to attend.

Get everyone together a few minutes before the actual meeting time at or near the meeting location. Briefly review the agenda, and set out the order in which you want to proceed, who is to be responsible for which section and how different issues are to be brought up.

4. Stick to the point

- **Present your position clearly and request follow-up.** If the elected official is sincerely interested in discussing the issue and time is not a problem, take the time you need. On the other hand, don't be sidetracked onto other issues. The elected official may be trying to avoid the real reason for your meeting.
- **Listen well.** Much of lobbying is listening, looking for indications of the elected official's views, and finding opportunities to provide good information.
- **Keep your cool.** Be forceful in stating your position, but don't allow yourself to be trapped into a heated exchange that will gain nothing. Remember you are representing your fellow members and part of the message that you are trying to convey is that the members you represent are credible and responsible.
- **Answer questions.** Reply to the elected official's questions if you have the answers. If you don't have the information, tell the elected official you'll get back to him or her with the answer. Don't try to bluff or give answers that you're not sure of. It will only weaken your case and decrease your credibility. Make sure you follow-up with the information requested.
- **Don't make idle threats.** For example, if the elected official is not supportive, don't threaten to throw him or her out at the next election. A better tactic is to remind the elected official that you represent union members who are voters in his or her riding who are concerned about the elected official's position on this issue. The best tactic is to have others show their support too through telephone calls, letters and visits.

5. Demand action

If the elected official signals support for the union's position, ask him/her to:

- Discuss your position with other members of his or her caucus.
- Raise questions with members of government on the issue.
- Put a motion forward for discussion in the legislature.
- Agree to submit signed petitions you have gathered on your issue.
- Generate support from elected officials in the other parties to put pressure on the government to act on your behalf.
- Write to the elected official responsible outlining his or her concern about the issue.
- Make a public statement on the issue supporting your position.
- Consult with you on any further developments around the issue.

6. Follow-up

Send a follow-up letter to the elected official thanking him or her for meeting with you. You can also use this opportunity to restate your position on the issue as well as to confirm what action the elected official has agreed to take. If the elected official did not indicate support at the meeting, request his or her support again or that he/she reconsider his or her position.

Monitor the elected official's performance on the issue. When the elected official carries out the actions promised, thank the elected official for his or her support. If the elected official hasn't followed through, a polite reminder by telephone or by letter will let the elected official know you're watching what he/she is doing (or not doing).

Remember: Keep the rest of the activists and union members involved in your campaign informed about your lobbying efforts by putting together a short report outlining your activities.

How to organize a demonstration

Marching in the streets is one of the most effective ways of showing support for a cause, drawing new people to that cause and attracting the attention of people in power.

Organizing a demonstration may sound like hard work, but it doesn't have to be. Gather together a few dozen friends, make some signs, come up with some chants and you're ready to coordinate a protest against the misdeeds of a local corporate executive, a government you are unhappy with or an employer with questionable practices.



Types of demonstrations:

- **Vigils.** Candlelight vigils are a well-known way to remember lost lives or commemorate other kinds of victims. They are generally solemn and reflective and intended as a way to honour a person or a group of persons. A good example is the “Take Back the Night” vigils or peace vigils.
- **Picket lines.** This type of demonstration consists largely of a group of people holding signs and chanting and marching outside a building or office. Pickets are also a popular tactic with the anti-sweatshop movement and other groups who have used protests in front of corporate retail chains as a way to hold corporations accountable for their actions.
- **Marches.** A march is much like a picket line – people hold signs and shout chants – except that the crowd walks from one designated point to an agreed upon destination. Marches are usually a good idea when you are expecting a particularly large crowd or when you want to convey a message in the selection of your route or your destination.

Steps for organizing a demonstration:

1. **Identify and reach out to supporters.** As with organizing any event – whether a house party, teach-in or protest – it is essential to bring together a key group of people who are committed to the project. It is also useful to reach out to other groups to see if they would want to contribute to the demonstration.

Campaigns work best when they are anchored by a coalition of groups and individuals. Who else might be interested in helping to plan the demonstration? What natural allies do you have in the community? Try to find coalition partners sooner rather than later. Coalitions work best when everyone is involved in the process from the beginning. (See p. 12 for more information on building coalitions.)

2. **Assign tasks and determine roles.** Make sure everyone knows their assigned tasks. When organizing a demonstration, you should probably assign one person to be responsible for emceeding the protest itself; assign one person to be in charge of getting the required permits, and if necessary, being in contact with the police; one person responsible for working with the media; and one person responsible for signs, art and chants. Everyone should be responsible for spreading the word to the general public.
3. **Know your rights.** It is important that you know your rights regarding the use of space, whether you are organizing a demonstration on a university campus or along a public street. Many municipalities require permits for demonstrations, especially if you will be using amplified sound such as bullhorns. Permits are almost always required for marches since they may disrupt traffic. Talk to the community liaison on the police force about your demonstration and determine what permits you will need.
4. **Get the word out.** Turnout is crucial. Both the media and the decision-makers you are trying to influence will be looking closely at the number of people at your protest to see if you have real community backing. Develop a specific strategy for outreach and publicity and set a goal for the number of people you want at the demonstration. Then create a plan for reaching out to 10 to 100 times as many people as you hope will be there. Assume that only a fraction of the people you contact will actually show up. (See p. 22 for more tips on getting the word out.)
5. **Use puppets and other props.** Life-size puppets offer a fantastic way to dramatize your issue, and they make a great visual for television cameras. Other kinds of props like giant banners will also enliven your demonstration. Making art a central part of your protest will help you attract more attention.
6. **Invite the media and prepare press packets.** A well-organized demonstration on a busy street corner can communicate with hundreds of people. But if the media covers your demonstration, you can reach 1,000 times as many people. Make sure you designate someone to be responsible for doing outreach to the media. (see p. 26 for tips on working with the media.)

– With information from the Rainforest Action Network

How to take direct action

Direct action is based on the principle that instead of having someone else act for you, you will (individually or as a group) act yourself. It is about people making change through their own actions.

Direct action has been employed to create significant social change. Examples include the civil rights movement during the 1960s and the anti-Vietnam and anti-Gulf War protests. The 1993 blockade at Clayquot Sound – one of the largest civil disobedience campaigns in Canadian history – relied on direct action. More recently, First Nations protesters in Caledonia, Ontario also used the tactic.

Direct actions are most often non-violent, confrontational, public, disruptive and potentially illegal. They can be done with large or small groups of people. They are most effective when carefully planned, when they focus public attention on injustice in a compelling way and when other avenues for change have been exhausted.



Before you engage in direct action, carefully consider:

- Will an action advance or set back your cause?
- Will you have broad support?
- Can you persuade others that it is necessary?
- Are you ready to handle the difficulties of any backlash?
- Have all those involved been able to share their ideas, fears and past experiences?

If you decide that you want to engage in direct action, here are some things to think about:

Focus

- What aspect of your issue do you want to highlight? Where and on whom do you wish to focus public attention?
- Remember that organizing on an issue the public knows little about can backfire. On the other hand, organizing around a long-standing community problem can increase your numbers, improve your media coverage and community support and your chances for success.

Prepare and plan

- Talk about your goal, how long you plan to stay and whether or not you should disperse or risk arrest once authorities arrive.
- Pick a date, time and location for your action.
- Keep in mind that many effective actions are perfectly legal. If you plan to occupy streets or want to use public facilities, try applying for a permit with the appropriate police department.
- Make sure that any building you plan to visit will be open, that any people you want to address will be available and that you have mapped out where all doors, exits and offices are.
- Have an exit strategy. Figure out in advance how and when you want your action to end.



Refrain from unproductive actions

- Research your opposition and your issue and factor in enough time for this, particularly if requests under the *Access to Information Act* will be required.
- Have education and publicity materials ready to make your case.
- Do not meet at the action site, but at an alternative site nearby where you can wait until your numbers are sufficient to move to the action location.
- Be sure you have all of the tools you need to carry out your action, including:
 - song and/or chant sheets;
 - bullhorn;
 - refreshments; and
 - blankets (if it is cold) and other supplies.

What will you do at the action?

- Know exactly how many people you need to make your action a success. Some actions need no more than three or four people whereas some require crowds.
- Be sure you have enough people committed for the amount of time necessary to carry out your action. Some actions (sit-ins for example) may take days, while others (blocking traffic in rush hour), may only take hours.
- Have your core people in place and be sure everyone knows exactly what they are doing.

Timing

- Plan actions so they are timed for maximum effectiveness.
- Consider investing your time in building a strong enough base to undertake a successful action later.
- Note that if you are in negotiations, this is probably not the time for direct action, unless negotiations are at an impasse and your negotiating team is asking for that kind of support.

Know your rights

- It is imperative to know your legal rights and possible penalties.
- Depending on the kind of action being considered, it may be appropriate to consult a sympathetic lawyer and get advice before you act.
- A few simple legal points you should know are that you absolutely have the right to hand out leaflets and it is not always mandatory to have a permit.

Network

- Talk to organizations who support your work and who may be inclined to join your action.
- Ask progressive media to cover the event. Engage in extensive outreach to gain more support.
- Call people with direct action experience for advice or a short presentation or training. This will make people who are inexperienced with actions feel more assured and knowledgeable.

Tell the media what you're doing and why

- If possible, schedule your event for a normally slow news day such as a Monday or the day after a statutory holiday.
- If you are planning an occupation, make sure you have a cellular phone (and a charged back-up battery) to contact media and conduct interviews during the occupation. Remember to take a list of media telephone and fax numbers into the occupation.
- In the event that media cannot gain access to your location, always leave at least one person outside the office to liaise with the media when they show up.
- Don't let anyone detract from your action by acting in an intimidating manner or resorting to violence or other non-peaceful actions that may distract media attention away from the reason for your event.
- For more tips on working with the media, see p. 26.

Stick to the plan

- If you must make changes to the initial plan, inform everyone at the same time. Be sure to integrate participants' input and concerns into the final plan.
- Authorize a few (preferably experienced) people to make immediate decisions and deal with the police, if need be, at your action.
- Meet once before the action to solidify all plans and deal with last minute problems.

Be aware of potential problems

- Even though your action may be legal, the police may cite you for violations or make arrests. If you have a permit, although they are not usually used in direct actions, have it ready and have numerous copies on hand.
- You may want to get in contact with a lawyer who does *pro bono* work for social justice causes. If he or she agrees to provide emergency legal help, make sure everyone participating has the lawyer's phone number on them at all times (write the number with permanent marker on peoples' arms).
- You may experience people trying to impose their agenda at your action. Plan how you will deal with this. A good idea is to ask them to comply with what has been planned and if they refuse ask them to leave.
- Encourage people to ignore hecklers and work to ensure that the action is non-violent. Stay unified! Remind people they will be photographed and may be in the news.
- When you leave, leave in groups if not all at once.

Follow-up

- Appoint people to specific follow-up tasks.
- Designate a media spokesperson, so the authorities aren't the only ones communicating your reasons for acting.
- As a group, collectively critique what happened and begin your planning for future actions.

How to design appealing posters, signs and banners

Posters and signs are an important part of most campaigns. They tell the public and the press why you are taking action and what it is you want.

Your message can be depicted either in words or by illustration. Either way, it is important that your message is brief, consistent and to the point.

Your message should be something anyone and everyone can understand. While “inside jokes” or innuendo can be an effective way of mobilizing activists, they can prove confusing to the public.



Your message must be effective but not offensive. Using humour, sarcasm and wit are fine – unless it alienates others. Keep in mind the diversity of your community and be sure your messages and images are culturally sensitive.

Short, to-the-point slogans are better than long statements. Slogans that rhyme or include a clever play on words, or those that would be suitable for chants make the best poster slogans.

Art is good, but it should not be complex. A symbol or stick figure can be more identifiable than trying to illustrate a person or a complex design.

If you have a logo or motto, it is important to make this clearly visible.

Putting it together

- Make sure the print on your signs is large, with tall lettering that is easy to read at a distance.
- Use both sides of your sign, poster or banner. It is okay to create two different messages, one for each side.
- Use a dark colour for lettering against a light background or light lettering against a dark background.
- Choose script that is easy to read – this is not the time for calligraphy.
- Lower case letters are easier to read, especially from a distance, so avoid whole sentences in full capitals.

Be prepared

Plan in advance for inclement weather. Choose materials that are waterproof or find a way to make them so by using a plastic covering, laminating and/or by using rainproof fabric for banners.

Whether you use a pole or a string around the neck or you carry your sign with your hands, choose your method of display based on what will be the most effective under the circumstances. Signs attached to poles or sticks are difficult to carry on a windy day and can get heavy after a while. Still, they are more easily seen in a crowd than signs draped from a string around the neck.

Banners are best carried by hand – one person at each end – in a long march but are best displayed using poles during a rally.

Banners are effective when used as a backdrop for speakers and/or chants, songs and theatre. Where possible, banners can be hung in central locations.

It is not essential for everyone in a large group to carry a sign or banner. This task can be shared by the participants while others are handing out leaflets, leading chants and so forth.

Remember, it's all about the message. Keep it simple, be creative, and have fun!

How to create a dynamic and easy-to-read leaflet

A leaflet may have several purposes. Decide which of these is most important. Do you want to:

- Mobilize people for a protest rally or demonstration?
- Announce a meeting?
- Gain support for an issue?
- Popularize a slogan or message?

Once you figure out your message, determine how to get it across in as few words as possible. Use everyday language that best captures the idea.

Example: Consider the following slogan for a group that is fighting federal and/or provincial cutbacks and privatization in order to save union jobs and ensure quality public services and an adequate social safety net for all: "Public service works for me."

It is hard to imagine a simpler, more popular way to express an idea.



Less is more

Sometimes you need a few sentences to expand an idea. You may set this message off in a box with an interesting headline. Write as close as you can to the way you talk. Stay away from technical terms, acronyms, and jargon.

Clear design

Make the main message, slogan or demand as well as any information pertaining to time, day, date or location of an action big and clear.

Choose a high contrast, black and white graphic, cartoon or photo that reproduces easily on a photocopier or small press.

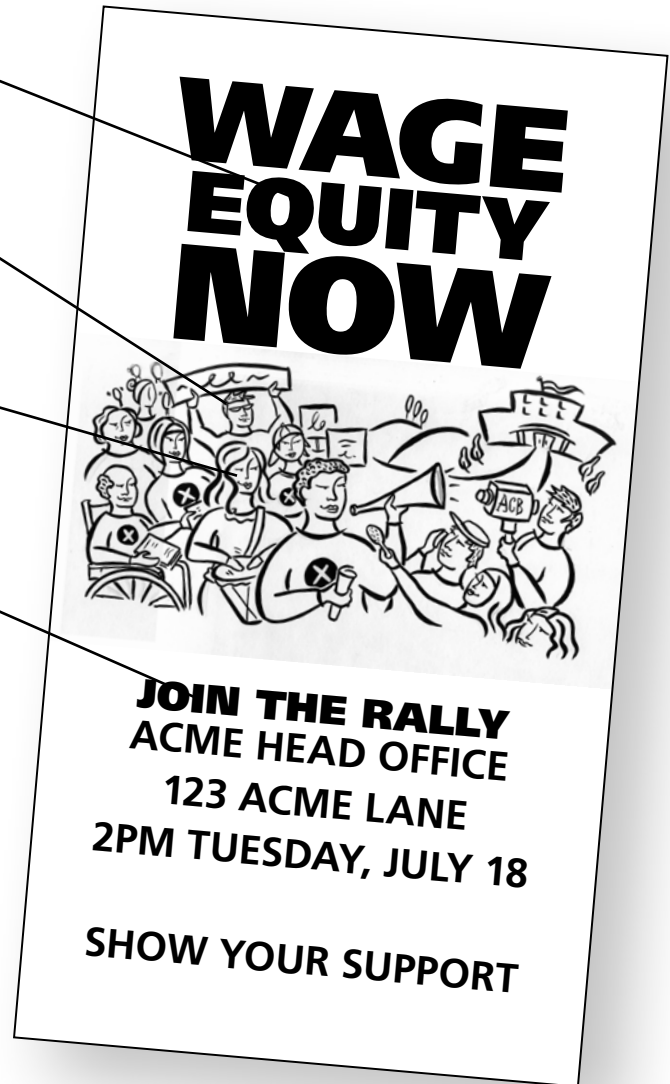
Remember, your images should reflect the diversity of your workplace.

Use one central theme per leaflet.

Don't use too much text.

Finishing touches:

- Remember to proofread your pamphlet. Computer spell checkers only find words that are misspelled, not words that are misused or repeated.
- Include your organization's name, logo, website and/or contact information
- Pick a type face or font (examples: Arial, Times Roman), and size (example 14 point), that are easy to read.
- Print or photocopy on light coloured paper.



How to present and speak at meetings



Speaking in front of crowds doesn't have to be a nerve-wracking experience. If you prepare in advance, practice your material and get to know your audience, you are well on your way to giving a dynamic presentation. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

1. **Know the room.** Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, ensure it is set-up so that everyone can easily see and hear you, and where possible, each other. Make yourself accessible to the people you are speaking to. If applicable, set up a table with support materials in advance of the meeting and put posters up that reinforce your topic.
2. **Know the audience.** Consult with the meeting organizer in advance to get information about who will be in attendance with respect to gender and equity representation, work environments and particular

issues at the workplace that may affect discussion at the meeting. Tailor your presentation to the group of people you will be talking with. Use language, examples and stories that make sense to your listeners. Know what level of experience they have with your topic. Relate your topic to what they care about/

3. **Know your material.** What do you want to accomplish by speaking to this group? What key information do you want to provide? Decide on a few main points you want people to remember. Repeat them often. Say them in different ways. If you use numbers or statistics, interpret them or make them part of a story so that they are meaningful.
4. **Organize your speaking materials in point form.** Make sure there are clear spaces between each point, and that your written materials are in large print so you can find your place after looking up to engage with participants. Practice your presentation so you are not dependent on your notes all the time.
5. **Know your limitations.** If you are asked to answer a question or explain something you are not sure of, be honest. You can follow-up after the meeting. If the question/issue is not related to your presentation, let people know where they might be able to go for assistance – don't get caught up in non-related issues.
6. **Build democracy into your presentation.** You are there to share important information with a group of concerned citizens or fellow members. Focus on the points you want to make not how you look making them. Allow time for questions and discussion. Where possible, acknowledge and address concerns raised by participants and try to integrate the audience's input into your concluding statements so they know they have been heard. Don't take offense and always remain calm and in control of your emotions.
7. **Set the mood.** Don't tell your audience how to feel. Show them through your words, your body language and your enthusiasm and commitment to the issues. Use stories, memories and examples to bring out that feeling in them.

Remember, you don't have to put on a grand performance. It's about how effective you are at building solidarity.

How to work with community media

Working with the media in your community is a great way to make sure that your issues and events get the publicity they deserve. The Public Service Alliance of Canada has its own national communications team which drafts press releases and crafts the union's political messages. But there's a lot that you can do on the ground and in your communities to help get the word out.



Does any of the following sound familiar?

“I didn’t say that!”

“They totally missed the point!”

“They got the facts all screwed up!”

“That guy’s out to get us!”

“I don’t trust that rag!”

“I could have told them that if they’d only asked!”

If the answer is yes, then welcome to the wonderful world of media relations. And, while you might well prefer to ignore the media, you simply can’t afford to. Why? Because, however regrettably, most of your non-active, rank-and-file members place much more trust in the “mainstream media” and even in the community media than they do in their own union’s publications and internal communications.

But don’t despair. It’s possible to use the media to your advantage and to get the union’s message out to both the rank-and-file members and to the general public. As with most successful efforts, you have to get organized and build a solid foundation from which to work.

The “labour beat”

In the mainstream media, the “labour beat” has virtually ceased to exist. More often, the reporter on the city beat or from the business section is asked to cover labour relations. Increasingly, reporters are less and less specialized and don’t have a good knowledge of labour law or union issues.

Personal contact with journalists is critical to breaking down the barriers. Having one person who develops an ongoing relationship with your local media can improve your chances of getting news coverage.

Ideally, someone working on your issue or campaign should be responsible for being the media contact. However, the responsibility can be shared where necessary – for example, in large media centres or in areas with both anglophone and francophone media. If you live in an area where people from diverse communities live, you should add to your team members from the major communities who can work with journalists who represent specific communities.

Get to know your local media

Draw up a list of local media outlets. While this list should include daily and weekly newspapers and radio and television stations, don’t forget to include the community or alternative press, campus or non-profit radio and cable television stations.

Once you’ve drawn up your list, call each media outlet to obtain the following information:

- the name of the journalist who normally covers labour (if there is no labour reporter, ask who in the newsroom you should contact if news of interest arises);
- the name of a back-up contact (usually the assignment editor);
- the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the above persons, as well as the media outlet’s newsroom fax number;
- the number of daily editions of a newspaper (or frequency of radio/TV news broadcasts); and,
- the deadline for getting news into each daily, weekly, community newspaper edition or radio and TV newscast.

Even though PSAC has access to national media lists, this “on the ground” information can be extremely helpful to the union. Once you’ve done your research, make sure to contact PSAC’s Communications and Political Action section and share what you’ve learned.



Keep in touch

PSAC's media guidelines maintain that only elected officials, or specific spokespersons designated by the Alliance Executive Committee are permitted to speak on behalf of the union. This helps ensure that our message stays strategic and consistent. If you have been designated as a PSAC spokesperson, here are some guidelines to follow when speaking with reporters:

- Never favour one media outlet over another, unless a journalist has come up with a "scoop" because of his or her dogged, hard work.
- Never refuse to answer a question. Remember, the journalist can easily get the answer elsewhere, so you may as well take the opportunity to control the "spin" on the issue and get the credit rather than the opposition.

- Never get caught out in an obvious inaccuracy. If you don't know, just say you don't know. Call back the reporter when you have the answer. If this is information you can't release at this point, say so and call the reporter once you can release the information.
- Avoid using union "buzzwords" or jargon that may be familiar to you but may mystify and confuse others.

How to write public service announcement

A public service announcement (PSA) is distributed to media outlets for use in promoting your event to the public.

Identify the media that runs PSAs and check their deadlines – magazines or bi-weeklies may have deadlines as many as two or three weeks before the event. For radio or TV, it may only be 2-3 days before the event.

[SAMPLE]
PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Run until September 1, 2008

Labour Day picnic will remind the federal government to "Think Public!"

Members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada will host a Labour Day Picnic on September 1st to highlight the positive impact that public sector workers play in the day-to-day lives of everyone in Canada. The event starts at 12:00 p.m. at City Hall. Admission is free, and there will be free food and games for adults and children alike.

For more information contact PSAC at 613-560-4200.

How to write a letter to the editor

Letters to the editor are an effective way to bring your concerns to the attention of a newspaper and its readership. The more individual letters on a subject that can be generated, the more impact you will have. Even if only a few get published, letters increase the likelihood of the issue being addressed at all.

- **Tie the letter to a recent event.** Editors are interested in printing letters that relate to events happening in the community.
- **Make one clear argument.** The piece should be in favour of, or critical of a particular position taken by the paper or described in an article or letter.
- **Be specific.** The letter should focus on a specific issue that was raised in an article or opinion piece.
- **Be brief.** Check the newspaper's letter guidelines and respect them. Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. Generally, two short paragraphs are ideal.
- **Don't go it alone.** Find others to write letters when possible. This will show that other people are concerned about the issue too.
- **Follow up.** If you have sent your letter to the editor and have not heard anything within a week, make a follow-up call to check on its status. Be aware that editors receive hundreds of letters and may not immediately respond to you.

A little effort goes a long way

When it comes to media relations, practice makes perfect. Remember that journalists don't expect perfection. They do, however, appreciate any effort on your part that makes their working lives easier.

Combine your efforts and the journalist's appreciation, and you're well on the way to effectively using the media to get your message across.

Now you're ready to take action

Remember that the tips and tools provided in this document are not definitive instructions on how to be an activist. Figure out what works for you. Evaluate your actions and think about what you can do better next time. Encourage your fellow activists and celebrate victories together.

One of the most exciting things about getting involved in union or community activism is the way it builds stronger friendships and communities. Take good care of yourself and your fellow members. Remember to take a break if you feel like you've been taking on too much. Just because you've committed yourself for the long haul, doesn't mean you can't take time to spend with family and friends.

Most importantly, don't forget to have fun.



If you would like to receive this document in an alternate format, please contact PSAC's National Education Section at 613-560-4200.

