

Local Organizing

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Many thanks to [Incite! Women of Color Against Violence](http://www.incite-national.org/index.html) (<http://www.incite-national.org/index.html>) for much of this organizing information.



The **Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC)** is an association of national and local US-based grassroots Latin America and Caribbean solidarity groups, is made up of hundreds of local groups around the hemisphere, in order to find common goals and shared strategies for groups within the coalition. We recognize the interconnectedness, from the local community level to global issues, therefore it is essential that your work be linked as a key part of our movement's work to end militarization throughout the Americas and beyond.

Please refer to [LASC](http://www.lasolidarity.org/) (<http://www.lasolidarity.org/>) website for more information.

General Thoughts on Local Organizing

- It is not essential to begin your work only once you have a big support base. Three people are enough to begin effective organizing for a local group. Even if your group does not attract lots of members, you can still do important work in your area.
- Having open communications on a regular basis about the amount of time and effort people are able to put into organizing. It is important to understand that people will have varying levels of commitment. A few people will do lots of work; some will contribute every once in a while; others will show up at special events; some will only contribute financially, etc. Rather than become frustrated that not everyone is putting in the same amount of work, learn to work with what people ARE able to do and make the most of what they ARE willing to contribute. That way, they will not become alienated from the work, and will hopefully later increase their commitment to the group.
- You do not need to be an expert in organizing. Most successful organizers learn by doing and by trial and error.
- Do not become disheartened by failure and mistakes. It is through mistakes that one learns how to organize effectively. For every successful event or campaign someone organizes, they probably were involved in ten events/campaigns that did not work.

Possible Activities for Local Groups

- 1.** Form study groups to educate yourselves on the issues of militarization, U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America, as well as institutional and individual racism.
- 2.** Education within your larger community. Host a public video showing of a film (please refer to the RESOURCES page). Table at local events and hand out flyers. Support the work of community organizations in your region, and work to connect local issues with those on a broad context throughout the Americas and beyond. Host a speaker in your community to talk about the relevant issues (see [here](#) for speakers).
- 3.** Find out more about Congressional petition or letter writing campaigns that are relevant to your interests, and ask Senators to sponsor similar legislation in the Senate.
- 4.** Coordinate, sponsor and actively participate in discussions, rallies and demonstrations addressing issues central to militarism, to US foreign policy towards Latin America, to racism and to the lives of those most affected by US imperialism.
- 5.** Conduct teach-ins and consciousness-raising sessions among your communities.
- 6.** Promote activities which create dialogue and coalitions among activists working for justice.
- 7.** With your local group, write letters to the editor of local papers responding to coverage of militarism, of Latin America, of community struggles for justice.
http://www.soaw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=266
- 8.** Promote activities which organize and advance the leadership of youth and connect with local student groups working for peace and justice.
- 9.** Use media advisories, news releases and follow-up calls to get media coverage of your community events, vigils, speakers or demonstrations.
- 10.** Produce and distribute public information in the form of flyers, stencils, graffiti, posters, etc.
- 11.** Plan direct action in your community ...

[Not Just Change, But Justice!](#) See:

http://www.soaw.org/presente/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=195&Itemid=74

So you're ready to organize?

Below you'll find:

- Creating egalitarian structures
- Building community
- Developing allies
- Developing a campaign
- Organizing actions
- Holding meetings
- Speaking publicly
- Fundraising

Creating egalitarian structures

Most organizations concerned with social justice find themselves in the dilemma of fighting for equality in a society while at the same time working within hierarchical structures. They struggle with forming structures to work in that mirror the society they want to create. This task is very difficult, but here are some thoughts on how to begin.

- 1.** Hold structured meetings with a rotating facilitator.
- 2.** Always let someone who has not spoken talk before someone who has.
- 3.** For major decisions, vote using a consensus model that requires everyone to agree on an outcome that is best for the project. Remember that smaller decisions can be left to individuals. For the consensus model to work, however, everyone must take responsibility for the group process and realize that consensus is built on compromise. Thus, if an individual feels strongly enough to block consensus on an issue, she should also come up with an alternative suggestion that can bring consensus.
- 4.** Test the impact of tough decisions with trial periods.
- 5.** Let each person choose her own role and title. Then regroup and collectively agree upon who should do what and expectations for each role.
- 6.** Rotate leadership positions.
- 7.** It is critical to develop clear structures of accountability. Establish a common understanding of what should be done if someone is not able to fulfill their assigned tasks.
- 8.** Often in more egalitarian organizations, individuals may not hold *formal* positions of power, but they do hold *informal* positions of power. As a result, it is often difficult to address these problematic dynamics because they are informal. Establish within the group some process that allows people on a regular basis to assess and discuss the

power dynamics within the group.

9. Keep stirring the pot: co-sponsor projects with communities you do not already attract. Broaden your issues to diversify your following.

10. We all have something to teach, as well as something to learn, so provide equal access to skills and knowledge.

11. Build community by making time to do fun activities and celebrate together: birthdays, campaign victories, etc.

Building Community

To organize effectively, it is important to both build communities of support and involve pre-existing communities in your work. Here are some issues to consider in building community.

1. Define the communities in which you will work.
 - What are the various and groups and communities to which everyone in the group belongs (geography, ethnicity, religion, occupation, etc.)?
 - Which of these communities is most directly affected by the issue you are working on?
 - What communities besides your own are also affected by the issue?
2. Plan your outreach
 - When and where do you naturally come in contact with the other people in your communities?
 - What mobilization strategy would work best for the community and the issue? Door-knocking? School organizing? Individual networking?
 - What individuals or groups might be a little more difficult to get involved, and what would facilitate their participation?
 - How can you involve the maximum number of interested peoples?
3. Design the materials
 - What basic printed materials are needed to give people an idea of the group and your issue?
 - The same materials will not work for each group. How do the materials need to be crafted to appeal to each group with which you want to work?
 - Who should serve on a team to write, design, and print these handouts?

- Handing our materials to people is not a substitute for personal interaction. How can material distribution be complemented with other forms of outreach?

4. Identify leadership and specific skills

- What types of skills or equipment are needed for the campaign? Computers? Artists? Good public speakers?
- Who else should be involved? How can they be approached?

Developing Allies

Once you have developed a base from which to organize, you want to develop as many allies as possible to support your campaign. Here are some suggestions for building allies.

1. Reach out

- What resources do you still need and what other groups or organizations might have them?
- Is the issue one that other organizations will have an interest in?
- Does your organizing effort encompass the diversity of the community? If not, how can you expand your effort to bring more people in?

2. Find potential allies

- Make a list of groups or organizations that might have an interest in the issue.
- Make a list of groups outside the community with potential interest in the issue.
- Who, within these target groups, do you already know?

Organizing Actions

In doing organizing work, sometimes it becomes necessary to take more dramatic actions, such as rallies, demonstrations, etc. Some things to consider before planning actions:

1. Is it time for an action?

- Have the conventional routes for solving the issue been attempted?
- What previous contact, personal or indirect, has been made with the decision-maker?
- What is the decision maker's position on your goals?

- Are there any restrictions or limitations on the decision maker that might get in the way of her/his meeting your demands?

2. What is your group prepared to do?

- Make a list of several possible actions. Which one is the most appropriate?
- Will your group and the broader community support these tactics?
- Would any of your allies or other formal supporters or sponsors have problems with any of the possible tactics? (Don't assume, ask. Allies should be part of the discussion on actions and tactics).
- If there is internal conflict over tactics, can you choose another? Or compromise a little on the details to make it more acceptable? Or allow some allied groups or endorsers to sit out the action and provide support in other ways?

3. Plan your action logistics

- Decide on the action and the time, date, and place. Make sure you pick a time and place where people can actually get to and will also have public visibility.
- Are you scheduling an appointment with the target or showing up unannounced?
- What specific demands will you make? What do you hope to actually win?
- Is this an action that the media will be interested in? Would a media presence be helpful to you? Who will be responsible for contacting them? What creative actions can you employ to attract the media? If you have difficulty getting media attention, one strategy is to picket the media itself.
- What "props" are needed?
- Carefully consider all the logistics. Do you need a permit? Is the venue accessible? If there are speakers, do you have microphones so everyone can hear them? Are restrooms nearby? Etc.
- Is the action legal or illegal? Do you have someone who can advise you?
- Be creative in thinking about actions. People often get tired of the same kinds of rallies and demonstrations. Try to think of something different that will attract more allies and prevent your opponents from easily dismissing you.

4. Prepare all participants for the action

- Who should be part of the action? How many speakers are appropriate? (Don't have too many).
- What additional tasks can be delegated? To whom?
- Create a plan to inform and mobilize people for the action
- Schedule a pre-action briefing for all participants, and leave enough time for questions.
- Brainstorm several possible scenarios for the action, including such problems as: What if the target isn't there? What if s/he claims to be helpless to meet your demands? Suppose s/he simply says "no." What if the police turn up? What if you have someone in the group causing trouble? Role-play scenarios ahead of time.
- How will the action end, and when?
- Plan a time to debrief after the action.

Developing a Campaign

After you have defined the issue you want to organize around, it is time to develop a campaign around that issue. Following are some questions that can help guide the development of a campaign.

1. Define your goals

- What are your long- and short-term goals? How do your short-term goals fit into your long-term goals?
- How will this campaign help build your organization?
- What is your group's capacity for carrying out the campaign?
- How many people do you need to be involved?
- What resources (financial and otherwise) do you need to secure?
- How many spokespersons do you need?
- What are your group's strengths and weaknesses?

2. Identify your allies and opponents

- Who has the power and authority to meet the demands?
- What is their position of your target on this issue?
- What do you want your allies to do?
- Do a power analysis of all the players involved. What are the positions of all the players and how strongly do they hold those positions? How can opponents be pressured to be less opposed to your position, and how can allies become more supportive.

- What access to power do all the players have? How can you and your allies gain greater power to influence decisions?
- Given this power analysis, what tactics are best for winning over decision-makers?

3. Create the message and identify the campaign

- Who is the primary target of your message?
- Develop a short, clear statement about your campaign.
- Fine-tune and discuss the message statement with allies and agree on how and when to use it.
- What additional ways can you "market" the campaign? Use a logo, a name, identifying colors?

4. Map out actions and activities on a calendar

- Are you giving yourself enough time to be thorough, but not so much that time that allies lose interest?
- Plan actions and events that keep, and gradually increase, pressure on the target.
- Plan in some time for fun, celebration, and evaluation.
- At each event and action, make sure the next event is already at least somewhat planned so you can inform participants and keep their interest in your activities.
- Always use the campaign to build the capacity of your organization. For instance, while petitions are not always that effective in influencing decision-makers, they are a great opportunity to educate the public and to gather addresses and phone numbers for either fundraising or recruiting new members.

5. Plan for outreach and education

- What activities will be appropriate for media coverage? Those events should feature something visually striking in order to increase your chances of receiving television coverage.
- Do you have a variety of plans for community education?
- What are your ongoing plans for getting others involved?
- What additional materials do you need to develop?

6. Develop monitoring and evaluation plans

- How will you track participation?
- How will record promises from targets?

- Who will document what you have done so that the knowledge can be passed to the next generation of activists?
- At the end of the campaign, plan some time for final evaluation to assess the effectiveness of your work.

Holding Meetings

Organizing work inevitably requires meetings. How can you boost attendance and minimize boredom and monotony at meetings?

1. Plan the meeting

- What is the purpose of the meeting? People lose interest in meetings that do not have a clear purpose.
- Who needs to be there?
- What day, time and place will be best for people?
- Consider the barriers that would keep people from meeting. For instance, if the people you want do not have cars, then the meeting needs to be very accessible by public transportation. Do people need daycare? Is the place somewhere people feel comfortable going?

2. Establish a plan to get people to the meeting

- Develop a variety of activities to encourage participation: flyers, phone calls, postering, etc.
- Phone potential participants a week in advance and remind people the night before. Even the most committed people forget meetings because they are swamped with other things to do. The more you remind them, the more likely they will come.

3. Design the agenda

- Set a time limit for meetings
- Develop an agenda before hand. Prioritize the most important items first.
- Decide what outcomes you need from each agenda item.
- Decide how long discussions need to take for each item.

4. Holding the meeting

- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to talk. If there is a major issue to be decided, perhaps go around make sure everyone has the opportunity to give her opinion.
- Make sure someone takes notes.

- Get contact information for any new person who attends the meetings.
- Realize that there are just some people that will not attend meetings. However, that does not mean that they cannot help in other ways. Find ways to involve them if they seem interested, but never seem to make it to meetings.

Learning to Speak Publicly

Public speaking is skill that can be learned. It does not matter how shy you are, how terrified you are of speaking in front of others, or how inarticulate you may feel you can learn to be an effective public speaker. It just takes practice, practice, practice.

1. Develop your public speaking skills.

If you are a student, an effective way to learn how to speak is to join speech or debate teams. Emphasize those events that force you to speak without preparation.

If you do not have access to speech/debate practice, try the following drills:

- Write down a variety of issues or questions related to the organizing you want to do. Then, give yourself ten minutes to come up with a five-minute talk on that issue. Practice this drill in front of your friends incessantly. You will find that the reason some people seem able to talk off the top of their heads in an eloquent manner is simply because they have had to talk on the same issue so much that they do not even need to think about what they're going to say.
- If you have a friend to work with, come up with a issue you want to be able to debate and then stage debates with her. One person takes five minutes to argue her side, then the other has to argue the other side for five minutes. Go back and forth for a couple of rounds.
- Practice giving speeches on issues where you do not write a speech, but you write down one or two sentences to jog your memory for each argument you want to make.

After you have practiced for awhile, take the plunge and do a public speaking engagement. If you are particularly nervous, start by speaking at smaller, no-pressure talks. If possible, bring a friend there to critique your talk and give you constructive suggestions.

2. Preparing and giving a talk

- If possible, learn to give a talk without reading a speech. Instead rely on notes as well as any quotes, statistics etc., you need to jog your memory. HOWEVER, practice your talk in advance so you do not ramble during your speech.
- If you must read a talk, think about performing your speech rather than simply reading it. Otherwise, you will lose peoples' attention.
- Plan out a catchy beginning and ending for your talk.
- Use stories and illustrations to make your talk come alive.

Keep in mind your audience, and speak to it. Is the audience sympathetic, hostile, unaware of the issues you are discussing, etc?

Do not talk too long. It is better to talk too short than too long. Keep in mind the time, and if people are starting to look bored, it is a sign to wrap up.

Humor, when appropriate to the audience, is always an effective way to win over a crowd.

Fundraising

Any campaign will require resources. While fundraising is an activity many people do not like, it is important that all people in a group take responsibility for fundraising in some way. Here are some suggestions for successful fundraising.

1. Estimate Expenses

- Review your planned activities and campaigns and estimate what you will need - both materials and cash - for each activity.
- Make a list of costs of goods and services for activities, as well as extra costs like meeting space, post board, copying, and other operating expenses. Add in some monies for unexpected costs. Add it up. These are your expenses.

2. Develop a Fundraising Strategy

- Review the types of fundraising activities (events, individual contributions, dues, sales) and determine which activities are most appropriate for your community and your issue. Consider

how your fundraising strategies matches the aims of your organization.

- Estimate conservatively the amount of revenue you expect to raise from each activity.
- Add it up. If it doesn't meet your resources, add in another event, or review your in-kind contributions plan.
- After you have had your fundraising plan, reconsider every item on your expense list. Which materials or services could be donated from community businesses or individual supporters?
- Develop a "wish list" of materials and services that you need. Print copies for circulation to participants and allies.
- Consider how to make fundraising part of your larger campaigns. For instance, phone banks or fundraising letters can also be used to educate your constituents on specific issues or encourage them to take part in specific actions.

3. Delegate Fundraising Tasks

- Establish a fundraising team, perhaps subdividing the team by activities - two on events, two on individual contributions, etc. However, the team should develop a plan that involves everyone in fundraising in some way.
- Established detailed plans for approaching potential donors (so the same people aren't solicited twice). Be sure that teams communicate with each other.
- Set reasonable time lines and goals for each activity, based on your budget.
- A simple way to begin fundraising is with the members of each group. Have each member make a commitment (either cash or in-kind, depending on her resources). Then have each member think of people she can ask a donation and how much that person could likely give.

4. Establish a Record-Keeping System

- Designate two people to maintain the financial records of the group in order to ensure financial accountability.
- Set up a ledger, balance sheet, or other records.
- Set up a regular time for the finance team to report to the full group.
- Be sure someone takes responsibility for thank-you notes to all donors.
- Be sure to save copies of all financial correspondence.