

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN: TIMELINE AND STRATEGIES

A campaign is a concerted effort focused on achieving a specific goal. Campaigns are often focused on particular elections, with a concrete timeline and a specific theme. During election season, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of different campaigns being conducted by organizations and lobbyists. To help you make your campaign successful, we've asked seasoned campaigners and community organizers for their ideas.

PHASE I: LAY THE GROUNDWORK

1. Create a Platform

- ✓ Your platform is the issue you are campaigning for—the “candidate” you are trying to “elect.” In creating your platform, remember that while your group has its specific concerns, you want to make your cause appeal to citywide officials. Identify the larger issues represented by your group’s concerns.
- ✓ Develop a well-articulated platform, with both a general goal—e.g., “more money for parks”, which helps to foster partnerships—and specific “asks” that demand an explicit commitment from candidates.
- ✓ Link your issue to the main topics of the campaign season—crime, education, and health care.
- ✓ Do your homework—strong research showing the power of parks and the facts behind the crisis. Make it easy for candidates’ to support parks by making their arguments for them. For example, link data showing how youth crime rates rise in the hours right after school with the fact that most park staff are off duty after 3pm to argue for more staffing.

2. Analyze the key players

- ✓ Prioritize among the key players. Who has **power to change the problem**?
 - City agencies answer to the current Mayor; they can’t do anything without his approval.
 - Elected officials and candidates, on the other hand, answer to voters.
- ✓ The staff of an elected official is more important to reach out to than the official. It is the staff who keeps track of constituents’ needs and issues. If you can set up a meeting with an official’s staff, you can be sure that the official will hear your concerns. (See attached tip sheet, *Partnering with Elected Officials*, for more on this topic.)
- ✓ As you work on identifying the key players, also try to research the ways these players have been persuaded to change positions in the past. Has there been an example of a Councilmember responding to a petition? A meeting with community groups? Use the collective knowledge and memory of your group to tailor your approach accordingly.
- ✓ Never write anyone off. Even if someone seems less influential now, they might change positions and become more helpful or powerful—avoid burning bridges.

3. Set Goals and Strategies

Be realistic—what is your time frame? What are your resources? Choose an ambitious, but practical, goal. Then map out a strategy for achieving it. Some goals might be:

- ✓ Get a commitment from every candidate for Council in your district that he or she will commit to increasing the staff for parks in the district;
- ✓ Get a commitment from all candidates borough-wide that they will double the budget of parks in their first term in office;
- ✓ Get a commitment from all Council candidates in the borough that they will lower crime rates in parks.

4. Set Objectives and Methods

- ✓ When you've determined your goal, it's time to set objectives. These are specific, achievable steps to be executed within a specific time-frame. Think in terms of concrete numbers. Example of objectives include:
 - Hold two rallies every month until the September primaries;
 - Send fifty letters to each candidate by July;
 - Get 5,000 signatures on a petition to present to the candidates at a forum to be held in August.
- ✓ Set small goals that are easily accomplished and will add up to a larger success. People get disheartened and drop out of campaigns when they don't feel they are making progress. Stick to your objectives—keep on *doing* things.
- ✓ Even events that don't have a political agenda can become tools for advocacy. For example, you can have a barbecue or a picnic and provide pens and paper for people to write letters.

PHASE II: EXECUTE THE CAMPAIGN

1. Build a Broad-Based Constituency

See attached information on building coalitions

2. Candidate Outreach and Education

- ✓ Distribute campaign literature and research to candidates; research the issues confronting their districts and respond to them.
- ✓ Develop a questionnaire of candidate positions and publicize candidates' answers to the campaign mailing list.

3. Develop a Web/Internet Presence

Please call (212)360-8180 to request tip sheets on, "Technology Tips: Tool for the 21st Century."

4. Hold Regular Events

Please call (212)360-8180 to request tip sheets on planning events.

5. Petitions

- ✓ Create a citywide petition drive to show citizen support for parks. Have petition forms at every event and encourage endorsing organizations to get signatures.

6. Get Out the Vote

- ✓ Treat the issue of parks as a candidate and campaign throughout the community, just as any candidate would do. This includes massive literature drops—in housing complexes, parks, sports areas, subway stations, etc.—about parks and the various candidates' stances on it.
- ✓ Use the media to publicize candidates' positions on parks (*see information on campaign visibility*).

PHASE III: EVALUATE AND PLAN NEXT STEPS

- ✓ You'll need to continually evaluate the choices you've made throughout the campaign. You may find that you've picked the wrong targets or the wrong approaches. So, be sure you are continually evaluating and adjusting, evaluating and adjusting.
- ✓ No campaign is ever over! When the election is over, even if all the candidates who supported your cause were elected, there is still work to be done to be sure they stand by their commitments.
- ✓ Continual pressure—letters, events, rallies, speeches, press—keep your issue alive and keep it important in the eyes of elected officials.