Running Kick-A** Actions!

MARCHING THROUGH THE STREETS

“What do we want?”
“Paid jobs!”
“When do we want them?”
“Now!”

These chants echo through the canyons of lower Manhattan, as 150 Community Voices Heard (CVH) members march to various Work Experience Program (WEP) worksites on a mild spring day with one clear demand: pass the New York City Transitional Jobs Bill to create real, paid jobs for people in workfare. At Two Lafayette Street, scores of WEP workers are inside, working for no pay. The CVH marchers, most of whom are WEP workers themselves, set up a moving picket that stretches an entire city block. City workers leaving for lunch on this first nice day of spring have to stop on their way out of the building and maneuver through the handmade signs and demonstrators with noisemakers wearing blue “CVH” baseball caps. The CVH members hand out sheets of paper listing what they want as well as flyers asking people to call the city council speaker and tell him to pass the jobs bill now. Some of the city workers read the materials, pull out their cell phones, and call the number on the sheet, to the cheers of the demonstrators. As the picket continues, a group of women come out, holding signs that read: We work! We deserve a paycheck too! They are WEP workers who are joining the march on their lunch hour.

After twenty minutes at this site, the group heads to the building where city council members have their offices. The marchers carry a huge copy of a letter signed by all the WEP workers who joined the demonstration. The top of the letter reads: “We want real jobs! Pass the TJP bill today!” They plan to deliver the letter directly to the speaker.
What Is an Action and Why Is It Important?

An action is a public showing of your organization’s power. Actions show your numbers and the quality of your organization’s leaders.

In an action, community members challenge the power of their campaign’s target, often in creative, bold, or energizing ways. They make a public demand to which the target must respond either by saying yes or no or negotiating.

Each action helps you get closer to winning the campaign. Actions are the most critical opportunity to flex your organization’s muscle with a target.

What Are Some Important Characteristics of Actions?

The best actions have a number of characteristics in common:

Tension. When you introduce tension, you make the target uncomfortable. When a target is uncomfortable, he or she moves to do something to stop being uncomfortable. Introducing tension does not mean yelling or screaming. You introduce tension, for example, when you force a target who is used to doing all the talking to stick to the agenda your organization prepared.

Member-driven. Actions are the best opportunity to develop the skills, confidence, and power of members. Actions have many roles members can fill. The best actions have activities that members are willing to do and are trained to execute and that stretch them to try new things.

Connection with strategies. For example, if you are using a legislative strategy, actions include lobby days and meetings with legislators.

Creativity and energy. Great actions are fun and exciting and become part of the story of your organization. They are public shows. You make them fun to relieve tension and to get your point across in ways that people can hear and understand.

Education. Through actions, members see and learn how political power operates.

Careful planning. Actions require detailed planning and preparation. If an action fails to illustrate your power—few people show up to fill a large room for an accountability meeting or leaders are not prepped to press the target strongly to meet their demands—it can have a negative effect on your organization for a very long time.

Within your capacity. You only choose actions that your organization can run effectively.

Essential for winning. Every campaign requires a series of collective, public actions in order to shift power.
Putting an Alinsky Principle to Work

Saul Alinsky stresses that the best actions are within the experience of members and outside the experience of the target. Here’s an example of that principle. Members of A Cleaner Southside (ACS) are concerned about the poor quality of their water. They believe Leather Works, a big manufacturing company, is responsible. They take a bus to the vacation beach home of Jed Brown, CEO of Leather Works. Brown is used to facing protesters, including ACS members, in town meetings or even at his main residence, but no group has ever come to his vacation home. Rather than chanting and rallying like they usually do, ACS members go to the beach. They lay out on blankets while their children play in the sand, just like any other day at the beach. Except on this day, they offer cups of dirty water from their coolers to other beachgoers, explaining how the pollution from Jed Brown’s plant is affecting their health. The protest generates a great deal of press coverage and moves Brown to schedule a meeting with a team of ACS leaders.

When Do We Organize an Action?

You move to action when you can exercise your power effectively.

If you wait too long to engage in action, members lose interest. You can start with internal actions, as we describe later in this chapter, soon after you start the campaign development phase. When you enter the campaign implementation phase, the organizing committee refers to the campaign plan to see if a potential action helps reach the campaign objectives and how it will do so. For example, the campaign plan says that in April you need a public show of power to affect the legislative session. In January, members assess their capacity and the needs of the campaign and choose a specific type of action.

Use small actions or joint actions, if necessary. Even if your organization does not have the capacity to pull off large actions, small actions help members to build the skills, confidence, and experience to manage more sophisticated actions. For example, they hold community meetings that bring in new members and prepare them to run large meetings with targets. They organize a small informational picket so they experience what it is like to deal with security guards or police. They deliver something that represents the campaign issue to a target’s office.
You can also organize an action with a more experienced group. With larger numbers of people and seasoned staff, members have safe experiences that prepare them to try similar tactics and actions in their own organization.

Some organizations move to action quickly and easily; others take longer. Organizations of people who are in crisis tend to move to action more quickly than organizations where issues—although important—are not perceived to be issues of life or death. For example, when we started CVH, the members were facing severe cutbacks in the social safety net they needed to support their children. They moved to action very quickly and established an organizational culture in which members expect action to take place regularly. Similarly, if an organization has members and leaders who have been in a lot of actions, it is able to organize actions more quickly and easily than a group of people who have never moved into action or who are used to other forms of showing their power.

**What Are the Types of Actions?**

*Actions can be internal or external.*

External actions may or may not be direct actions, but the most significant kind of action you undertake is an external direct action that puts you into contact with your target.

*Internal action.* An internal action is both a test of members’ commitment to an issue and a campaign and an opportunity to train members to conduct larger public actions. Internal actions allow you to see how members engage in the work of organizing. An example of an internal action is a survey project. For instance, members of an environmental justice organization go out into the community and ask people about their health in order to detect patterns of disease they can link with a toxic site. You can run internal actions during the campaign development phase as well as during implementation.

*External action.* An external action moves members to exercise their power publicly. External actions build your campaign so you can move the target. An example is mobilizing members to join a rally for better working conditions organized by a local health workers union whose support you want for your campaign. You do an action that shows your organization can turn people out. If you are focused and confident that you can mobilize people, you can run an external action at any time in the campaign, including during campaign development, to show your power.
Direct action. A direct action is an external action that puts members in direct contact with the target. An example of a direct action is a meeting in your office with the parks commissioner to discuss the budget for a neighborhood park or a large community meeting that you organize to ask the mayor to create a special initiative to build more parks. It can also be a takeover of the lobby of the state agency that funds the local parks system.

You implement direct actions in nearly every campaign, whether or not you choose a direct action strategy as described in Chapter Nine. You only do direct actions when you have a campaign plan in place. You have many ways you can exercise your power through direct action, no matter what strategy you choose. The following sections describe the types of actions you can do in the street, in the room, and in the target’s space.

People Power in the Street. These actions disrupt normal business operations where a target lives, works, or is expected, such as at a fundraising dinner. They include picketing, marching, rallying, and taking over a building.

Picketing

- What it is. A picket is a moving line of people who are chanting, holding signs, and handing out printed information to the public. The moving line is usually blocking the entrance to a building or is close enough to the entrance that people going inside cannot avoid it. The target of the campaign is usually in the building or closely associated with it. A good picket is as close to the target as possible.

- When to use it. Picketing has an element of surprise because it does not require a permit. It also gets you close to the target. Picketing is very effective for public education. For example, members picket outside of a political fundraising event to draw attention to the fact that none of the candidates has taken a clear position on their issue. Picketing gains attention by causing disruption. You slow down entrance to a building or ask people to join the picket or not to cross the picket line in solidarity.

- Time required. Usually about one hour.

- Legal considerations. Picketing is legal, but learn if there are local ordinances about pedestrian traffic and noise and follow them. You do not need a permit. You occupy a space of your choice without risking arrest of members.
who stay in the picket line. If the police show up, and often with a non-permitted action like this they will, keep calm and professional. You have the right to assemble. Focus on negotiating with the police how close to the target you can get. In most cases the goal of the police, especially at a small protest, is to stop it and have people leave of their own accord. They do not want to arrest a lot of people and process them. However, police will sometimes target the organizer or leader, hoping that neutralizing that person can end the protest.

Only one person from staff and one person from the tactical team speak to police. Other people are not involved in negotiating. You reinforce this rule in your planning and training before the action. The tactical team makes the final decision about where to move and what to do.

In this kind of action, any illegal activity, such as smoking marijuana or jaywalking, can get people arrested. Stay focused on the purpose of the action. In addition, everyone should bring identification, just in case of any unforeseen problems and possible arrests.

Depending on your local ordinances, you will probably not be able to use amplified sound at a nonpermitted picket.

• *How many people.* With a minimum of just twenty people you can hand out a great deal of printed information. With a larger group of up to sixty, you can force the target to see or hear your organization’s presence. You can also do mass pickets that include hundreds of people, but these actions require a lot of coordination with many experienced leaders.

• *Preparation.* Visible clothing or buttons as well as signs that identify the organization and its demands draw attention to a picket and to its purpose. Clear, provocative written materials that people will want to read help reach the public education goals of a picket.

   A good picket is lively, colorful, and noisy! A chant captain keeps everyone vocal and ensures that the whole group is chanting the same thing. Cans with pennies inside as well as tambourines and whistles make noise. Members use a clear rap while handing out materials. Everyone knows what to do or say if the target emerges. Leaders have press packets and are prepared to speak with the press.

   Four people serve as anchors for the point at each end that people march around, and another three or four people act as picket movers, moving the
picket along and keeping picketers close together. All participants hold up signs.

You scout out your location ahead of time. If you are picketing outside a fundraising event, for instance, you know how many doors the candidates could enter so that you can have members picketing at each location.

- **Action tip.** Some things that make these actions fun and attract press include making large puppets resembling the target and using three-dimensional visuals, such as costumes and statues.

  Tool 12.1 is a handout on picket rules.

**Rallying**

- **What it is.** A rally is a static group of people who are standing in a defined area. They are chanting and listening to speakers or music. There is usually one keynote speaker as well as other speakers representing different aspects of the issue.

- **When to use it.** Rallies tend not to cause major disruption and are better for getting out a message or showing your organizational power than for getting a demand met.

- **Time required.** The length of a rally depends on its goals and other actions it is connected with. If it occurs on its own at lunchtime in a local park, for example, it goes for no more than an hour. If it marks the end of a small, local march, it is also about one hour long. National or large marches often end in rallies that are two or more hours long as the marchers wait for everyone to reach the final site. A rally could also be part of a full-day or half-day event to raise awareness about an issue.

- **Legal considerations.** You usually need a permit for the number of people expected as well as for using a sound system. Rallies are common and the police carefully control them.

  You negotiate for a visible site as close as possible to some aspect of the issue you want to highlight. It is better to have too many people in a small space than too few in a large space. If you can’t get a satisfactory site, you make an issue of it in the local media. For example, organizers unsuccessfully sought a space in New York City’s Central Park for a protest against the Iraq war. They raised a great deal of awareness about the event and its goals by getting the press to cover their site negotiations with the city.
• **How many people.** Rallying is most effective with a large number of people, at least one hundred.

• **Preparation.** You organize a rally as far in advance as possible to allow for time to negotiate for a site, prepare speakers, and turn people out. If you want to gather more than a thousand people, you start planning nine to twelve months in advance. Smaller rallies of fifty to several hundred people require three to six months of planning. Exceptions occur when some public event turns the spotlight on your issue, making it easier to galvanize people. In these situations rallies can be organized much more quickly. If you are organizing the rally with other partners, it will take weeks or months, depending on the number of groups involved, to negotiate who will speak, how to deliver a consistent message, and similar aspects of the event.

Public service announcements, op ed pieces, and radio interviews ahead of time help with turnout and raise public awareness about the issue. Keep up the energy by keeping speakers to a minimum and limiting the topics as well as the length of time each person speaks. Have an engaging emcee and include some music or performance.

Have press packets available and leaders prepared to speak with the press.

• **Action tip.** At the end of the rally use an energetic, powerful act to build the collective spirit. Examples are a mass die-in, taking over a street, or bringing everyone into the lobby of a building to ask for a meeting with the target. Use cell phones and speaker systems to involve everyone in the crowd to talk with the target.

**Marching**

• **What it is.** A march is a group of people moving from one spot to another.

• **When to use it.** Marching is an energetic and effective way to get members out and to get issues known in the community. A march can keep people motivated for a longer action. For example, if you need to go to the offices of two targets, marching from one to the other keeps up energy in between. Marching is especially exciting and activating for new people.

• **Time required.** Usually one to two hours, but it depends on the goals and the other actions the march is connected with.

• **Legal considerations.** A march can either be permitted or nonpermitted. In deciding whether or not to seek a permit for a march or other action,
research how your local police department reacts to protests and demonstrations. For example, if your local law enforcement agencies are difficult to work with or have little experience with protests or a history of arresting people at demonstrations, it could make sense to apply for a permit.

When seeking a permit for a march, you negotiate with the police about a route for you to march along. You can usually have a permit to amplify sound and a police escort. You also agree with the police on where you will assemble, where you will start your march, and where you will end.

If you negotiate to get a permit, the police may want to put you far away from where you want to be. You may then instead choose a non-permitted march, which could get you closer to the target and has an element of surprise. For instance, if you want to do a building takeover or a picket at a target’s office at the end of the march, the police are unlikely to allow you to get that close to the target. If you forgo the permit to get closer to the target, keep in mind that you can legally march on the sidewalk without a permit. If you march on the sidewalk and have enough people, you can try to negotiate with the police to expand your march onto a street or at least a lane of traffic.

When negotiating for a permit or during the course of a march, you try not to let the police steer you into an isolated side street or a wall. These common tactics effectively disperse the marchers or even frighten them off. For example, marches protesting the United States invasion of Iraq drew nearly one million people in New York City. When police on horseback prevented marchers from following the course of the huge march, participants found themselves bottlenecked and pinned against walls and one another. Many panicked marchers just pushed their way out and left.

• **How many people.** The right number of people depends on where you are marching. One hundred people in a small downtown business district will attract attention, while in a large city you may need one thousand people to create the same effect.

• **Preparation.** Members and leaders receive training to serve as marshals who maintain order and give directions in the march. They also serve as communicators in situations such as the police trying to change the course of the march or leaders deciding to try to take the street. A march is often connected to other actions, such as delivering petitions or holding a rally, so members need to be prepared to follow the full course of events.
You have press packets available and leaders prepared to speak with the press.

- **Action tip:** Ask marchers all to wear the same-color shirt or organizational hats or jackets to show your numbers more visually. Also, when people carry flags and banners high above their heads, it is more effective than holding them waist-high.

**Building Takeovers**

- **What it is.** In a takeover, people enter an office, building, or other significant site. They enter unexpected and with a demand.

- **When to use it.** Takeovers are most effective for getting a meeting with a target who has been refusing to meet with you. Takeovers agitate targets and make them uncomfortable. Takeovers can range from nonconfrontational, with people simply entering an office, to more agitational, with people entering the lobby of the target’s apartment building, sitting down, and refusing to leave until the target responds to their demand. Takeovers are a way to radicalize members and empower them to engage in more confrontational actions.

- **Time required.** Building takeovers usually take an hour to an hour and a half, depending on the objectives and the extent to which you push the limits of legal protest.

- **Legal considerations.** If a building is privately owned, you may be breaking the law against trespassing. If you are impeding traffic and the flow of business, you could be cited for disturbing the peace. Depending on the political climate, the target, the issue, and the powers of government at the time of the protest, you may face more serious charges.

- **How many people.** The larger the space, the more people you need. You can take over a small office or lobby with twenty or thirty people. A larger building can require more than a thousand people.

- **Preparation.** Takeovers require a high degree of member buy-in, strong leadership skills, and organizational discipline. Members and leaders are in continual negotiation with the people who work at the site or with security personnel. Members have to be extremely comfortable with tension, disruption strategies, and dealing with police.
• *Action tip:* Balloons, large signs, and props help you fill up a space. Make sure that you investigate the building’s entrances and security at least twice so that you do not miss anything that will affect your action.

**Building Takeover**

An alliance of community groups working on the redevelopment of lower Manhattan after 9/11 organizes an accountability session with the head of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), the agency responsible for deciding how to use $1 billion in federal funds to redevelop Lower Manhattan. As the date approaches, leaders learn that the target will not come to the session. The organizing committee plans a march to the LMDC’s offices a block from the World Trade Center site to demand that the head of the LMDC meet with the groups about their proposals. When marchers arrive at the building, two hundred people enter the lobby holding signs and balloons and shaking noisemakers. They hold the lobby for twenty-five minutes, stopping business. In addition, five members get directly into the LMDC office and sit in. As a result of the disruption and the show of power, when alliance leaders call the head of the LMDC, he agrees to meet with members of the alliance in one week.

**People Power in the Room.** These actions show powerholders and targets that an organization represents and can mobilize large numbers of constituents and that these constituents can control an agenda. Examples of these types of actions include accountability sessions, meeting with a target, and “day in the life” actions.

**Accountability Session**

• *What it is.* An accountability session is a public meeting where an organization mobilizes a large enough number of people to pressure a target to deliver on a demand. Community power-building organizations regularly conduct these important actions.

  In an accountability session, leaders of the organization make specific demands of the target, to which he has to answer yes or no. The target does not give you a speech. This is not an occasion for the target to tell you what he thinks. At an accountability session a target tells your organization whether or not he is willing to do what you want him to do.
The organization establishes a clear format. It has timed periods for questions and answers, which it records for public knowledge. Organizations often use a large scorecard to record the target’s responses. They give the target the questions in advance so that he can prepare a response and so that he can’t say he needs to study or investigate it.

• *When to use it.* You use an accountability session when your organization has enough power or when the political conditions are right to get a target into a room. You also have enough power in your track record and in your membership and alliances that you can mobilize to move the target. In addition, you have a large enough leadership team to take on the roles necessary in a large and structured meeting.

You use an accountability session when the target will only move because of mass public action. An accountability session offers the opportunity to politicize your members. They see their relationship to a public official from a perspective of power and control, and they witness a powerful person working and managing a public negotiation with his or her constituents.

If the target will not accept your invitation, you can hold the session with an empty seat. You make it more of a rally, with the press hook that the target does not care about the community. This tactic will only work if your membership is more experienced, as it is depleting to new people to hold an accountability session with no target there.

If you hold the session near the target’s home or office and the target does not show up on the day of the event, you can march over and try to bring him to the session. When doing your phone calls to turn people out, you let leaders and members know that such a march is a possibility so they are prepared for a potential change in plans.

• *Time required.* An accountability session usually lasts around two hours. The audience arrives first, at least thirty minutes before the target, so you can make sure the room is full, that people know the format, and that they are energized with chants or props.

• *Legal considerations.* There are usually no legal considerations regarding accountability sessions. If you are doing a session with a candidate running for office, contact a legal advisor to make sure you follow local election laws.
• **How many people.** In most cases, you need at least two hundred people. More often, you need to pack an auditorium with five hundred or more. Accountability sessions can also have thousands of participants.

• **Preparation.** Before the event, you negotiate with the target’s staff about a date, location, and the format. You agree on the format and the amount of time the target will have to address questions. Getting the target to agree to an agenda that your organization controls may not be easy, as most targets are used to being in charge, but it is essential. You forward the questions to the target before the session and communicate that you expect clear responses—yes or no. Having a target respond to the community in this way clearly demonstrates your power.

If you are organizing your first accountability session, you start at least six months in advance. Getting the target to commit, negotiating about time and format, and mobilizing your membership all take time. Once the organization has experience successfully executing this type of action and it has a well-established base, you may be able to organize a session in three months.

Members prepare the demands that they will make of the target on the day of the action, usually in the form of yes-or-no questions. For example, if the accountability session seeks to hold political candidates accountable on the organization’s issues, a sample question is: “If you are elected, will you require The Big Company to clean up its toxic waste?”

Organizers prepare strong, experienced leaders and members to ask the questions at accountability sessions. Other members energize the audience by leading chants. Other important roles include giving testimonials or brief motivational speeches, speaking to the press, and greeting the target when he or she arrives.

If you decide you need an accountability session but can’t turn out enough people or get the target there on your own, you might consider working with a cosponsoring organization. The organization must have a proven ability to turn people out and care about the campaign as much as your organization does. Ultimately, you don’t do this type of action unless you have a foolproof plan to fill the room with constituents. If you work
with a cosponsor, you make sure that members of your organization play key roles in developing and executing the session.

You carefully consider the location and size of the room. If you are concerned about turnout, have a smaller room than you think you will need. If turnout is weak, you will still pack the room. Even if you’re certain you can fill a room, never have a huge space that will make hundreds of people look small. It is better to be in a smaller room packed with people than to be in a larger room with empty seats. Keep a couple of rows of chairs folded until you need them. When people see more chairs being set up in a hurry, it builds excitement.

At the session, have press packets available as well as leaders prepared to speak with the press.

Tool 12.2 provides a sample agenda for an accountability session.

• *Action tip:* Always have a plan of what you will do if the target does not come or is late.

**Accountability Session**

The mayor wants to spend up to $600 million in public funds to build a new football stadium. CVH opposes this plan. The organization holds an accountability session with the speaker of the city council in a church in his district. One goal of the session is to pressure him to come out against public financing for the stadium. Organizers prep four strong leaders to ask him if he will oppose public financing for the stadium as well as to state his position on several other matters. On the night of the session, members place a scoreboard behind the speaker and the leaders ask their questions. He gives a noncommittal response on the stadium funding. The audience of more than three hundred people chants and sings about the folly of tax cuts for wealthy developers. The speaker, visibly upset, tries to clarify his statement. The chair asks him to simply state clearly whether he agrees to come out against public financing for the stadium or not. She reminds him that his time to address this question is almost up. This makes him more agitated. Finally, time is up. Over his objections, a member records that his position is no. Within a week of the event, the speaker comes out publicly to oppose the stadium financing, helping to cement the defeat of the mayor’s position.
Target Meeting

- **What it is.** A small group of people who represent the larger organization meet with the target. You show your power to the target by having strong leaders interact with him or her. Your organization sets the agenda. It’s best to have the target come to you or to a neutral space you determine. If you rent or borrow a space, you clearly identify it as being in your control with banners, signs, and people.

- **When to use it.** A target meeting is often the follow-up to a previous action, or it may occur because you are in the thick of an issue and have enough juice to get a meeting with a target.

- **Time required.** Target meetings usually last an hour.

- **Legal considerations.** None.

- **How many people.** Eight to ten people usually attend a target meeting. Target meetings can show broader participation through having the representatives bring petitions, membership cards, or letters to the meeting or having additional members waiting outside the office.

- **Preparation.** Target meetings require at least two good prep meetings, with role plays and a discussion of what ifs. It is useful to have a run-through practice the day of the meeting. You practice, for example, what if the target sends a representative? As always, you call members two or three times before the meeting to make sure they will come to the target meeting.

- **Action tip:** Seating placement is everything in small meetings. You don’t have a lot of people to create tension, but you do have the organization’s best and most courageous leaders. You deconstruct the usual power set-up. Force the target to sit right next to leaders, as people equal to him or her. If the target brings aides, keep them as far away and out of sight as possible. If you have a low chair in your office, make sure the target sits in it. Seat everyone in a circle or around a table. Do not let the target stand or position himself or herself as the head of the room.

Day in the Life

- **What it is.** You introduce the target to an issue and make a set of demands in a place that illustrates the issue. An example is visiting welfare centers to
understand what welfare recipients experience or conducting a “toxic tour” of polluted sites that are affecting people’s health.

- **When to use it.** You do a Day in the Life when you want a target to understand an issue more personally and on a deeper level. This may help move him to support your demands. This action can also uncover problems that a target does not see. It attracts press, which helps pressure the target to act.

- **Time required.** These actions require six to eight hours from members as well as from the target or the target’s representative.

- **Legal considerations.** None, unless you go to places that do not have public access.

- **How many people.** Day in the Life actions need two or three good leaders and two or three “tour guides” at each spot. Having a group of five or ten members available for discussion at the beginning and end of the action also lets the target see your power.

- **Preparation.** You map out the tour and account for travel and other factors. You prep all the participants, both those who accompany the target and meet the target at the sites as well as those who are available to speak with the target before and after the tour. Since this is usually an action that press attend, you prepare press packets as well as leaders to speak with the press.

- **Action tip:** Start or end the day at your office with a larger group of members both to show your power and to include more members in the action. Include a question and answer session with the target over lunch or dinner—even better, a dinner that members cook.

**People Power in the Target’s Space.** You achieve people power in the target’s space when you shift the control of a powerholder’s space to your organization’s members. You make the target uncomfortable and more amenable to your demands by changing the way his or her space operates. Examples of people power in the target’s space include packing hearings, altering the dynamics of hearing or meetings rooms, and street theater.

**Packing Hearings and Other Public Events**

- **What it is.** Your organization fills up the audience in a room where, for example, people are giving testimony about a piece of legislation. You change
the hearing from being a show of the legislature's power to being a space that your organization's members control. In another example, you go where the target is giving a speech and fill out the audience.

- **When to use it.** When a hearing occurs or when a target will be accessible to the public. You know when and where this event will occur in enough time to mobilize your members. You can use this action when you can't get the target to respond to your requests for a face-to-face meeting. By going to the target's space with large numbers of people and good messaging, you amplify your power and keep the issue in the target's face.
- **Time required.** Depends on the public event—minimum one hour.
- **Legal considerations.** Depending on the event, you may have the right to assemble there or you may not. If you do not, you prepare to negotiate with police. If you decide you want to break the law intentionally as an act of civil disobedience, you contact local legal resource groups for assistance before the action.
- **How many people.** Enough people to pack or fill out the space.
- **Preparation.** Props and signs are essential when you pack a public event—for example, people wearing the same visible piece of clothing, such as a hat or T-shirt, or holding signs that state the organization's name boldly.

### Packing a Public Event

CVH turns out more than four hundred transitional jobs workers to a city council hearing about the future and effectiveness of the transitional jobs program. CVH members fill every seat in the chamber, and people are overflowing into the hallways. Because of their extensive preparation, they chant on cue and stand on cue. CVH controls the room. It has the power to either end the hearing by frustrating the council or to keep it going by stopping the chanting. When members do stop chanting, they hold up signs and put on their CVH hats to make it clear that they still control the space.

### Alter the Dynamics of Hearing or Meeting Rooms

- **What it is.** You throw targets off in their space by altering the dynamics of a room they usually control. For example, members enter the hearing room
and sit in the seats of legislators or commissioners. They rearrange audience chairs in a circle as opposed to theatre style. Members stand right next to officials as they conduct the hearing.

- **When to use it.** To many public officials, one hearing can be the same as another, particularly on issues they do not really care about. When you want to show a target and potential allies that there is dedicated support for your issue, you alter the dynamics of a meeting room. Just as when you pack a meeting room, you can also use this action when you can’t get the target to meet with you or when you need to keep the issue in the target’s face.
- **Time required.** As long as the hearing lasts, or at least until the target leaves the space.
- **Legal considerations.** None, unless you ratchet up the action and do more to disrupt the meeting.
- **How many people.** Although you can do some of this action with a small group of at least ten people, the more people you have in the room, the more you not only alter but control the space.
- **Preparation.** Altering power during a hearing or other scheduled event requires extremely trained leaders who can effectively deal with confrontation.
- **Action tip:** There is a difference between altering the dynamics of a space and controlling it. You can only control a space when you have enough people.

*Street Theater*

- **What it is.** A group of people develop and perform a theater piece or engage in a short skit that dramatizes an issue or demand. Street theater usually includes speaking roles, costumes, and props, as well as singing and playing instruments.
- **When to use it.** Street theater gets media attention. It is also public education. You can do it in the street or at the target’s home or office. It is a great way for members to bring their cultural experiences and creative skills directly into an action. You can use a theater piece over and over again in different places. You can also tie it into holidays or other events.
- **Time required.** You need at least two hours, including time to set up and clean up. Members can perform the piece over and over again, but after an hour so, they usually need to rest.
• **Legal considerations.** You can do street theater with or without a permit. If you need a stage, equipment, or to amplify sound, or if you want to make sure the police will not move you to where the media cannot find you, a permit can be useful.

• **How many people.** You need a minimum of about ten people, but the more people you have, the more able they are to attract attention.

• **Preparation.** Theater skits require extensive prep. Members need at least two meetings to conceive an idea and start to write it out. They need another two meetings for practice. If they make props or costumes, they need to meet more often. If the piece is more visual than written or spoken, it can take less time to produce.

• **Action tips:** Preparing an effective script can be harder than it sounds. It may help to invite a person with some theater experience to help. The best approach is to keep it simple. Go for broad strokes and statements, not nuanced dialogue.

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**Street Theater: Two Examples**

As part of the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, hundreds of leaders of low-income organizing groups from around the country descended on the corporate headquarters of Halliburton in Dallas, Texas, to hold a mock trial of U.S. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. Bush and Cheney had awarded substantial government contracts connected with the war in Iraq to Halliburton, where Cheney is a former trustee. Timed to coincide with a debate in the U.S. Congress about cutting funding for social services, the action dramatized the view that the administration’s decisions are not based on sound public policy but are made to enrich their corporate friends and campaign supporters. Protesters dramatically read indictments of Bush and Cheney, charging them with putting profits over people. A judge sentenced each of them to participate in workfare and live the life of a poor person in the United States. The action drew a great deal of attention. In addition to shaking up a powerholder’s space, it invited people passing by on the street and reading press coverage of the mock trial to think about the connections among domestic policy, foreign policy, and corporate profits.
In another example, leaders from the same organizations traveled to Washington, D.C., to the home of U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton when she was considering what her position on reauthorizing welfare legislation would be. It seemed to keep changing. Three buses arrived early one morning and dozens of welfare recipients and supporters gathered in front of Clinton’s home. Some of the protesters waved a larger-than-life Hillary Clinton costume and others carried waffles. Several went up to the door, waffles in hand, and told the person who answered that they would like to ask the senator about why she is “waffling” on welfare. The action garnered extensive press coverage, including an article in the New York Times.

**Additional Actions: From Town Hall Meetings to Boycotts.** There are many other types of actions, too many to describe here. Some other internal actions include town hall meetings where community members discuss an issue without a target present, or petition drives, where members go out and get signatures on petitions.

Other external actions include press conferences and legislative lobby days that members and leaders plan and run and where they serve as spokespersons. In addition, many organizations use boycotts and mass walkouts to great effect. Powerful historic examples include the U.S. Civil Rights Movement’s actions to expand voting rights and the United Farm Workers’ grape boycott and campaigns to improve working conditions for farm workers. More recently, actions in 2006 by immigrant-rights groups to move the U.S. Congress to pass pro-immigrant legislation also offer highly instructive examples of using boycotts and walkouts to engage community members, train leaders, build power, and move targets.

These kinds of actions and others sometimes involve civil disobedience, when participants intentionally risk arrest as a tactic for reaching their goals. On the Internet or at the library you can find stories and how-to guides about these and other actions and about civil disobedience, in order to consider them in your own work. Inviting someone to speak with your organization who has participated in civil disobedience actions can be a great way to learn more about how to use these actions effectively. See Resource G for contact information for movement-building organizations that can help direct you to readings, tools, and possibly people in your area.

The following example describes an internal action, external action, and direct action for one campaign.
The Campaign for Clean Supermarkets

*Internal action: membership canvass.* Members of Westsiders Together gather at the office, then go out in teams to the local supermarkets. Each team has a clipboard with a survey form they fill in about the conditions in the markets in one neighborhood. The goal for this action is to develop a report card on the cleanliness of local supermarkets for the press and elected officials. The objectives are as follows:

- To build a list of at least fifty people interested in participating in the campaign.
- To train five members of the organization in outreach and survey skills.
- To get the organization’s name and presence known in the community through at least two news reports.
- To identify a list of other problems in local supermarkets.

*External action: press conference.* Westsiders announces the results of its survey. Members invite the press and key stakeholders to a press conference outside the offices of the local food-safety inspection agency. Westsiders leaders talk about the key findings and make demands of the agency commissioner, who is the target of the campaign. The goal for this action is to deliver the demands and the survey directly to the agency commissioner and officials who monitor the quality of supermarkets. The objectives are as follows:

- To get five press reports of the findings and the issue of cleaning up dirty supermarkets.
- To develop the public speaking skills of three Westsiders leaders.
- To invite potential allies, including the local union that represents supermarket workers, to support the campaign.

*Direct action: office takeover.* The mayor is a secondary target of the clean supermarkets campaign. She is holding a meeting in her office. Ten members enter the office and try to disrupt the meeting while ten additional members chant in the hallway. The members seek to deliver their report on unsanitary conditions to the mayor and invite her to meet with them about the report. They know the mayor’s press corps will come immediately. The goal of the action is to get a meeting with
the mayor at which the organization will ask her to pressure the commissioner for results. The objectives are as follows:

- To get five articles on the supermarket report and the issue of cleanliness in the markets.
- To train and develop twenty-five members in direct actions and using confrontational tactics.

**What Do We Need to Pull Off a Great Action?**

*You need to have a few things in place prior to the action, whether you have been planning it for three months or for three hours!*

*Prepped and trained leaders.* You build in time before the action for leadership prep and take advantage of the multiple opportunities for leadership development during the action.

*Tactical team.* You agree on a tightly organized team of members and leaders to make moment-to-moment decisions at the action, as well as people designated to report back to the full group about decisions or negotiations with the target. More information about the tactical team follows later in this chapter.

*A clear identity and message.* In successful actions, organizations clearly communicate who they are and why they are there. Sometimes called “branding,” this communication includes displaying the name of your organization, its insignia or logo, and a concise message about what you want. Branding is important in actions where the target is not in the room or where you are working with partners. There is nothing worse than mobilizing people for an action, having reporters there, then realizing no one knows who organized the action or what it is about.

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**Exhibit 12.1**

**Ways to Establish an Identity**

- Everyone wears a shirt with the name of the organization on it.
- If people are in coats or at a formal event, they wear hats, buttons, or stickers.
- You display a huge, sturdy, well-made banner with the organization’s name and insignia.
- You place the organization’s name and a consistent message on every poster and on all materials you distribute at the action.

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Agitation. Targets move when you make their public life uncomfortable. For example, a target is in a room with people who use her agency’s services. They know what they want, articulate it clearly, and will not budge.

Negotiation. Actions that challenge the legal limits of protest and seek to gain access to targets require negotiation. Negotiations may occur with police officers, property managers, security guards, representatives of targets, and targets themselves. Negotiations take place when, for example, you want to move a growing march from the sidewalk to the street, or when you show up at an office building with fifty people to request a meeting with the target and the security guard won’t let the whole group in. A member of the tactical team leads the negotiations, usually with staff support. You will have explored many of the issues for negotiation in pre-action planning, and the tactical team refers to these agreements in the on-site negotiations. Random or individual members do not negotiate. After the action, the full group evaluates the action and the negotiated decisions. (For more on negotiation, see Chapter Eleven.)

Discipline. You do pre-action role-playing. You clearly delineate roles and procedures. Participants in the action stick to what’s been agreed upon in advance, including what they do and the tone and manner in which they do it. For example, if the organization has decided to hold a vigil-like action, participants do not start chanting unless the tactical team instructs them to do so. One participant in an action who does not follow directions can ruin months of work.

A clear beginning and a clear end. You start on time. You end on time. Everyone knows when the action is over—people don’t just trickle away.

What Is a Tactic?

Tactics are the activities you do in an action that actually challenge, agitate, and engage people with power.

Through strategic use of tactics, you meet the goals of your action. The types of tactics and the types of actions are generally the same. For instance, if the action is a march to the target’s home, it can include the tactic of delivering a letter to the target. Tactics may be linked with demands. For example, you deliver the letter and ask for a meeting with the target. Then, you use the additional tactic of sitting on his front lawn until he agrees to meet with your organization.

Organizations often use the terms tactics and actions interchangeably. The important distinction is that there is a whole event (an action) made up of distinct, strategic components (tactics).
How Do Actions and Tactics Work Together in a Campaign?

*Actions, tactics, and demands go together.*

Exhibit 12.2 gives an example of the types of actions and tactics a “Clean Supermarkets” campaign might employ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Clean supermarkets campaign.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Ensure supermarkets in our community are up to health and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>code standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>Increase funding to hire ten more food inspectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Get mayor’s public support for increased funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 1</td>
<td>Community inspection day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic</td>
<td>Mass surveying of all supermarket customers in the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(internal action). Ask them to fill out a survey and sign a post card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 2</td>
<td>Deliver surveys to mayor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic</td>
<td>Confront mayor at his weekly press conference and deliver surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(external action).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>Meet with us to discuss our proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 3</td>
<td>Target meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic</td>
<td>Directly ask the mayor for support for more funding and to announce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this support at a joint press conference with the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>Support our proposal and attend a press conference to announce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>your support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 4</td>
<td>Clean supermarkets campaign event with mayor to announce his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic</td>
<td>Press conference where mayor announces support for increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>Call on city council speaker to match mayor’s funding in this year’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>budget.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Do We Choose the Best Type of Action?

You choose the action that will move the campaign forward.

In choosing a type of action, the organizing committee reviews the following questions:

What is our campaign objective right now? What concrete result do we need? For example, do we need to get a meeting with the target, to get the target to come out publicly in support of our demand, to get a secondary target to sign a letter to the primary target?

What are our organization-building goals? Do we want to develop new leaders, recruit new members, solidify our member base, train new members in direct action skills, get press, or move our allies to support us?

What is our leadership capacity? How many leaders do we have who can take on key roles in an action? Do we have the staff capacity to prepare people to take on roles, such as making public demands of a target?

What is our turnout capacity? How many people can we turn out for our issue right now? What are their skill levels and commitment to the campaign? Do we have five hundred people or thirty people? If it’s thirty, then what can thirty people do to show their power?

What tenor does the campaign need? How well is the campaign going? Has the target been accessible? Does the campaign need energy, celebration, regrouping, some clear result? Although being confrontational or being militant can be an important way to get attention, it’s the last approach to use. If the target responds to your calls, there’s no need to march to her home.

How does our target respond to action? How does he act in a public setting? Does our target face rallies held outside of his office all the time? In meetings, does he listen or does he deflect questions? Does he come late and leave early, or will he give us the whole time? Even if you already know a great deal about the target, before you engage him in a public action, you learn more. This information helps you know what your best course of action is and enables you to assess your capacity to do effective leadership prep for the action. Knowing about the target also helps you to create an action that is outside of his experience.

The type of action depends a great deal on your relationship with the target. Do you have access and therefore the ability to get a meeting with the target? For instance, can you make a phone call or mail a letter and know it will reach the target, or do you need to march to the target’s home to deliver it? If you do march,
how much power does the organization have and is the target aware of the organization’s power? Once the target knows your organization is outside his home, will he say yes to a meeting, or will he think he can afford to ignore you?

Tool 12.3, Choosing an Action, shows what an assessment of goals, results, actions, and power might look like when you are choosing an action.

**What Are the Steps for Organizing a Successful Action?**

*The main steps for a successful action involve preparation, mobilization, and evaluation.*

The following steps take place in every action, no matter how much lead time you have to organize the action or how large or small the action is:

*Pre-action planning.* Using the questions above as a guide, the organizing committee decides what the action is, when and where it will take place, and who will participate. It determines an overall goal for the action and the following kinds of objectives for the action:

- **Demands.** Example: We want the target to agree to meet with us.
- **Visibility.** Example: We want two news reports of the action, to get our name out.
- **Skill development.** Example: We want two new leaders to negotiate with powerholders under pressure, three new leaders to speak in public.
- **Recruitment.** Example: We want to collect one hundred pledge cards from new people who attend the action.

*Action recruitment.* The organizer uses the database to develop a list of people to mobilize for the action.

*Pre-action prep.* The organizer and organizing committee make sure everyone understands why the organization is planning the action, what it is, and who will communicate with them on the day of the action. Members help print materials to distribute while staff and leaders provide skills training or political education so people can effectively fulfill their roles. The organizer prepares members and leaders to make demands.

*Action mobilization.* The organizer makes sure people who commit to attending the action in fact do so. Along with leadership prep, this is the most critical part of ensuring you have an effective action. You make wake-up reminder calls, rent vans and buses to pick people up and take them to the action, assign captains to turn out their block or building, have members meet people at the train or bus

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station. Generally, you cannot do too much to ensure turnout. More on mobilizing for actions follows later in this chapter.

Final action prep. The members and leaders run through the roles they will play just before the action to make sure everyone is ready to go.

Action. Members show their power—the main event!

Action evaluation. The organizer, leaders, and members who played roles in the action review how it went and evaluate what worked, what did not work, and what they would improve.

Action follow-up. The organizer and organizing committee take steps to ensure that the action’s achievements actually turn into results.

Who Makes Decisions About Actions and What Kinds of Decisions Do They Make?

Actions have three decision-making groups: an organizing committee, an action planning team, and a tactical team.

The following groups make decisions for the action:

Organizing committee. As described in Chapter Eleven, the organizing committee is the primary decision-making group of a campaign. The organizing committee’s tasks for planning an action include the following:

• Referring to the campaign plan and making the initial assessment as to whether or not the campaign needs an action
• Deciding what the action is
• Determining when the action will occur
• Identifying the goals, demands, and objectives
• Determining the target of the action, who may or may not be the target of the campaign as well
• Planning for recruitment and mobilization

Here’s an example of an organizing committee’s work: The fifteen members of the organizing committee for a campaign seeking to improve health benefits for veterans sees that the campaign plan calls for mobilizing members. They assess that the campaign needs to energize members and be more public in its demands of a dismissive health commissioner. They decide to hold a Veteran’s Day march to the commissioner’s home to ask for a meeting.
Every action needs members and leaders who have the time, interest, and desire to organize and lead actions. A combination of people who have had experience in actions and people who are new makes for the best mix. Creative people and people who are comfortable challenging authority are the types of people you recruit into the organizing committee and the action planning team, which the organizing committee empowers to do action planning.

*Action planning team.* This group of members and leaders plans the action. It makes decisions within the goals and objectives set by the organizing committee. Its tasks include the following:

- Planning length of time, location, and other logistics
- Identifying roles and people to take on the roles
- Deciding on what tactics the action will include
- Potentially serving as the tactical team for the action

Continuing with the example above, the organizing committee empowers eight of its members to plan the march to the commissioner’s home and make final decisions. This action planning team decides the march will gather at 8 A.M. at the gym where they know the commissioner often begins her morning and end at 8:30 A.M. at her home where she returns to get ready for work. They will do a legal march, staying on the sidewalk. They identify veterans of three different wars to bring the letter to her door, and get other members to lead chants, distribute literature, talk with the press, and carry signs. They agree that if the commissioner ignores the group, members will do a sit-in on the lawn, though they will leave before risking arrest. The action planning team assigns three of its members to serve as a tactical team at the action.

*Tactical team.* The action planning team empowers this group of members and leaders to make on-the-ground decisions in the course of the action. Its tasks include the following:

- Making decisions at the action when questions come up about what to do next
- Communicating what is happening during the action and what participants in the action should do
- Making decisions regarding what to demand of the target during the action
On the day of the action, the commissioner is at the gym when the group arrives. She stays inside past 8:30. The tactical team decides to continue the march to her home and wait for her there. When she does not show up, the team tells the group and the media that have gathered with them what will happen: three veterans will tape the letter to the commissioner’s door and the group will then sit on the lawn and wait for her to arrive. If the police arrive first, a member of the tactical team will stand up, signaling everyone else to do so and immediately create a moving picket on the sidewalk.

When the police do arrive, a member of the tactical team steps forward and the picket begins. Ten minutes later, the tactical team tells the group and the press that it is ending the action and will call the commissioner to get her response to its demand for a meeting.

**What Is a Pre-Action Prep Meeting?**

In the pre-action prep meeting, members get an overview of the action and who is on the tactical team and clarify goals, messages, and tactics for the action.

In a pre-action prep meeting you review the what ifs: What if the target does not show, what if it rains, what if our members don’t show up? This is the last time for the tactical team to get membership input before the day of the action. Tool 12.4 provides a sample agenda for a pre-action prep meeting.

**How Do We Make Sure We Have Enough People at Our Action?**

You mobilize members using effective and persistent contact.

You improve your chances for a strong turnout for an action when you have the following:

- A clear message. You clearly communicate to members why it is important for them to come to the action. For example: “We need you because the governor will be responding to our demand that he pass legislation protecting our communities from hazardous waste. The more people he sees in the room, the more he will understand people are concerned about this issue.”

- A good list. You need a list of names that is large enough for you to meet turnout goals. A good list also includes people who have turned out before for actions. Organizations with a culture of action and turnout are more likely to get the numbers they need. If you are doing your first actions, you cultivate that culture as you develop your organization.
People to make calls. You have to make a lot of phone calls to turn people out for actions, so you need staff and members to work the phones.

Effective mobilization system. An effective system for mobilizing people includes having live, one-to-one personal contact with them. You make this contact by calling or visiting. In addition, you mail a notice that clearly states the date, time, location, and directions to the action. You make a confirmation call and a final reminder the day before the action. In live phone calls you engage people, assess their commitment, and talk through with them their questions about the action and the logistics they need in order to attend. Keep in mind that leaving a message on an answering machine informs a person about an action, but it does not replace a conversation. Unless the person calls back and says he or she is coming, you call again to get a commitment. Tool 12.5 provides a chart of how to use this kind of mobilization system and Exhibit 12.3 gives you a sense of the number of calls you need to make.

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**Exhibit 12.3**

The Number of Calls You Need to Make

You need to get one hundred people at your action.

Depending on your organization, you start with a good list of one thousand people. You make commitment calls and reach and talk to about eight hundred people. Half of these say yes on the first contact. You now have four hundred “commits.” These are soft. They have only said yes once and the action is still a few weeks away. In addition, you are making these calls quickly, so you are not able to make a foolproof assessment of how committed someone is to coming.

When you call a second time to confirm, about one-third to one-half will drop out or you cannot reach them again. Now you have two hundred commits.

When you do final reminder calls, you can expect to reach and confirm about three-fourths, meaning that around 150 people say they will come. Actual turnout will be between two-thirds and three-fourths of that final number—about one hundred.

This number is an estimate and not a firm calculation. Every organization is different and every organization has a different connection to members. The stronger your connection to your members the firmer the numbers will be. The important thing to remember is that you need to make many calls, including that final reminder call, and you need to have conversations, not just leave messages.
How Is Mobilizing People for an Action Different from Turning Them Out for a Meeting?

It is easier to get people excited about doing something energizing and fun than it is to get them excited about attending a meeting. Also, you set and meet goals for turning out specific numbers of people for an action.

You call many more people for an action than you do for a meeting, but you have a much larger pool to draw from. This larger number comes from the fact that most people prefer to come to actions rather than meetings, members bring their networks, and you can draw from the new people you meet during recruitment. Another difference between action mobilization and turning people out for meetings is that you spread the mobilization effort out over about four weeks. For meetings, the time frame is usually shorter.

How Do Mailings Help Mobilize People?

A piece of mail makes something real.

Although technologies such as e-mail or text messaging are changing the picture, for many people, having information in front of them spread out on their kitchen table makes it more real and increases the chance they will come to the action.

You send mail to tell people about the event before they get your call, to prepare them. Mail gives them more information than you could offer in a brief phone call. It also gives them the address, phone number, and directions they can grab when they leave for the action. Having something in writing helps people to invite their friends and neighbors to participate as well.

A final reminder postcard helps to firm up commitment. It expresses appreciation, which motivates people: “Thanks for coming and being part of this important community event!”

Can We Use E-Mail, the Internet, and Other Forms of Technology to Turn Out People for Actions?

Yes, but technology is a tool that supports mobilization, not a replacement for live personal contact and relationships.

To get the most out of using these technologies for turnout, you will increase your success if you ask for a confirmation back from an initial e-mail and follow up with two live contact calls: one in which you talk to people about the event and increase their buy-in and one reminder call the day before the action.
Remember, the more commits you have from an individual, both live and via the Internet or text messages, the more likely someone will come out. And keep in mind that not everyone has e-mail, a computer, or access to e-mail. Calls work.

**Leadership Development Opportunities for Actions**

- **Act as a tactical team leader.** Leaders prepare during planning meetings to be one of the two to four people who make decisions during an action, or to be the primary action leader.

- **Present demands to the target.** Gain skills in public speaking, negotiation, and facilitation by directly asking the target to respond to an action demand.

- **Be a media spokesperson.** Leaders speak to the press before, during, and after the action, on the basis of being trained in how to stay on message and how to handle questions about their personal story in relationship to the action, and on being fully prepped on the background of the issue.

- **Lead chants.** Working with two to three other members, leaders develop and practice chants, and lead people in chanting at the action.

- **Serve as a marshal.** Leaders are part of the team that includes one marshal for every twenty-five people expected, stationed throughout the site, and one lead marshal for every five marshals. Keep the group orderly and get trained and prepared for dealing with the police or potential conflicts.

- **Coordinate volunteers.** Leaders manage database lists of volunteers and participants who sign up in advance of the action.

- **Manage props.** Coordinate the preparation and use of props and visuals for the action.

**Challenges in Running Actions**

“Members want to plan actions that require large numbers of people. We do not have the capacity to turn out these numbers.” Review with members how large your last three actions were so they can see they are being unrealistic. If they persist, go around the room and ask each person to say specifically how they see the organization producing high numbers. Push people to be specific.
“Our members are afraid of being arrested or facing other repercussions.” Fear is real. You talk with members about what they are afraid of and why and address it in ways that are appropriate for the action. For example, if they fear arrest, you can try talking about how many times people in your organization have been arrested for participating in an action. For example, in our experience of more than twelve years of doing hard-hitting actions on poverty issues in New York City, in our state capital, and in Washington, D.C., CVH has not had any arrests. If arrests or other repercussions are possible, you can try to develop a safe zone in the action for those who do not want to get arrested. If members want to engage in civil disobedience, you make sure legal advisors work with them before, during, and after the action. For all actions, everyone brings personal identification and agrees not to carry anything illegal.

“Members develop actions that don’t directly confront the target.” More experienced leaders can challenge people to consider how their actions will move the target without confronting him.

“We are just starting and we really don’t know how many people we can turn out.” Internal actions help you to determine your turnout capacity without jeopardizing your campaign by not being able to show your power to a target. In addition, small, external actions that don’t require large numbers, such as pickets or legislative visits, are good ways to test your ability to turn out people. Always consider the possibility of low turnout as a “what if.” If you are part of a coalition, you are honest about your turnout capacity. It is better to promise fewer people than it is not to deliver. And remember—every organization has had an action where turnout was low.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Elements for Effective Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Only engage in actions your organization has the capacity to pull off. If you do not think you can pull off an action, don’t do it. If you want to try a more complicated action, plan for it, seek help, and take your time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ If the issue requires a quick response—move to action quickly. Even if you are not 100 percent ready, if you are in a crisis, act. Build with smaller actions consistently over a few weeks rather than one large action. This approach gives you time to test and evaluate a crisis campaign.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
✓ Remember the Alinsky principle: The best action is within the experience of your members but outside the experience of your target.
✓ Keep it fun and keep it simple. Actions are the most fun for organizers, leaders, and members. You don’t get too complicated. Your actions are direct, simple, and to the point.
✓ If all else fails, chant and picket. Low turnout? The target isn’t showing up? An energetic picket with people chanting usually helps salvage an action that is just not working.

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**Tool 12.1**
**Picket Rules!**

*The following is a handout you can use for preparing people to participate in a picket.*

**Keep It MOVING!**
We cannot get arrested if we keep moving, out of the way of pedestrians.

**Keep It LIVELY!**
Chant, sing, play drums, and move to the beat.

**Bring VISUALS!**
Good props, signs, and costumes and clothes get attention. Our cause is serious, but we can still be creative, visually appealing, and upbeat!

**FLYER While We Picket!**
Our flyers make sure people know exactly why we are here.

**Get Our SUPPORTERS to Take Action!**
Use the cell phones, portable computers, fax machines, or postcards, letters, and petitions we bring to get people who support us to take action right away by contacting the target. We have enough clipboards and people designated to get the names and numbers of supporters so we can follow up with them.

**Keep It SHORT and to the Point!**
A short, fun picket of thirty minutes is much more effective than milling around for hours. Or move the picket from one site to another.

---

Tools for Radical Democracy
Tool 12.2
Sample Agenda for an Accountability Session

The following is a sample agenda for an effective accountability session. You can use this for planning your session or for training members and staff to plan and execute it.

An accountability session is tight and to the point. The target will probably be available for about an hour, and the whole session should last no more than two hours. Note that each timed period in the agenda is an opportunity for a leader of the organization to play a role. Everyone needs to be focused, prepared, and disciplined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>How Long</th>
<th>Who (Example)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before target arrives:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather, sign in, practice chants</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After target arrives:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Board chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of meeting</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Leader #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing speakers and other key leader roles</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Action chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonial from a member</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Leader #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song or chants</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Chant leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome of target</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Action chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of format and ground rules</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Leader #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member testimonial</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Leader #4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target opening statement</td>
<td>4 minutes</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Leader #5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Leader #6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing remarks from target</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you to target</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Action chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After target leaves:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation with large group</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After session ends:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation with leadership team</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1 hour and 49 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the target speaks for only thirteen minutes. The program itself is only an hour. The rest of the time is devoted to gathering participants and engaging in evaluation.
### Tool 12.3

#### Choosing an Action

The following chart shows what an assessment of goals, results, actions, and power might look like when you are choosing an action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal for Action</th>
<th>Concrete Result</th>
<th>Example Action</th>
<th>Power Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build membership, recruit members.</td>
<td>New active members.</td>
<td>Neighborhood canvass, town hall meeting, rally, lobby day.</td>
<td>Small leadership, Small membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announce the beginning of a campaign.</td>
<td>Community or public know about the campaign.</td>
<td>Press conference, march, releasing of report.</td>
<td>Small leadership, Small membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get media coverage of your issue.</td>
<td>News articles about your issue and campaign.</td>
<td>Editorial board meetings, report release, effective media actions.</td>
<td>Small leadership, Small membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move a powerful stakeholder.</td>
<td>A new stakeholder to work on your campaign with you.</td>
<td>Mass action that your ally sees.</td>
<td>Small to large leadership, Medium to large membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train a new group of leaders.</td>
<td>A core group of leaders who have experienced action and are ready to lead actions.</td>
<td>Small direct actions, town hall meetings.</td>
<td>Small to medium leadership, Medium membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a target to meet with you.</td>
<td>A meeting with the target.</td>
<td>Mass letter delivery, press conference, office takeover or disruption.</td>
<td>Small to large leadership, Medium to large membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show power to your target.</td>
<td>Your target understands you have power and that she needs to respond.</td>
<td>March, rally, accountability session, card or letter signing.</td>
<td>Large leadership, Large membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move a target to deliver on your demand.</td>
<td>Target gives you what you want.</td>
<td>Accountability session, target meeting.</td>
<td>Large leadership, Large membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tool 12.4

**Sample Agenda for Pre-Action Prep Meeting**

- **Facilitator:** Leader from the tactical team.
- **Introductions and go-arounds.** Everyone says what role he or she will play at the action. *(5 minutes)*
- **Action background.** Action planning team reviews why you are doing the action and where it fits into the overall campaign. *(10 minutes)*
- **Goals of action.** Action planning team reviews what concrete things you want from the action. *(10 minutes)*
- **Overview of action.** Tactical team describes what the action is going to be, how many people are coming, press, and other matters. *(10 minutes)*
- **Run-through of action.** Tactical teams says specifically what is going to happen and when. They point out when people will need to do something or play a leadership role. Role play as needed. *(20 minutes)*
- **What ifs.** Brainstorm as a group and discuss every possible circumstance. Agree on a plan to address each if it happens. *(30 minutes)*
- **Review action rules.** Review who will be making on-the-spot decisions and giving direction at the action. Review the importance of discipline and cohesiveness. *(10 minutes)*
- **Questions and Clarifications.** *(10 minutes)*
- **Close.** *(10 minutes)*
## Tool 12.5
### Mobilizing Members for an Action

The following chart shows how to use an effective mobilization system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Contact</th>
<th>Who You Contact</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Who Makes the Contact</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First mailing: Inform</td>
<td>Everyone on your list who would potentially come to the action.</td>
<td>Why we are doing the action. What we hope to achieve. The date, time and location.</td>
<td>Volunteers at a mailing party.</td>
<td>To inform people about the action so they know about it when you call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send a mailing or e-mail.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When: Four weeks before the action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First contact call: Commit</td>
<td>Everyone on your list who would potentially come to the action.</td>
<td>“We need you to attend our action that will achieve the following . . .” “Will you come on date, time, place . . .?”</td>
<td>Staff, members. (These calls do not have to be the strongest.)</td>
<td>The largest number of “soft” yeses possible. You need three to four times the number of people to say yes at this point than you need to attend the action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When: Three to four weeks before the action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second contact call: Confirm</td>
<td>Everyone who said yes on the first call and anyone you left a message for.</td>
<td>“I am calling to confirm that you are coming out on date, time, place . . .” “Are you still planning to join us?”</td>
<td>Staff and strong members. (These have to be strong calls.)</td>
<td>To get the list down to the people who have a real interest and who really commit to come. You need to confirm two to three times the number that you need for the action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When: Two weeks before the action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second mailing: Confirm</td>
<td>Everyone who has said he or she is coming after the second round of phone calls.</td>
<td>“Thanks for joining us and coming out. We look forward to seeing you on date, time, place.”</td>
<td>Volunteers at a mailing party. To strengthen the possibility people will come and to give them the information about the event in writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail out a confirmation postcard. When: One week before the action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third contact call: Remind</td>
<td>Everyone who has said she or he is coming.</td>
<td>“We are calling to remind you that the action is happening. Are you still coming?”</td>
<td>Staff and members. To remind and get everyone out to the action. Only one-third to one-half the number of people who at this point say they will come will actually attend the action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a round of reminder phone calls. When: Two or three days before action, up until the day of the action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>