Building Bridges for America

Starting Your Grassroots Organization

What is Grassroots Organizing?

PEOPLE WHO ARE DRAWN TOGETHER TO ORGANIZE TO SUPPORT A CAMPAIGN, CANDIDATE AND ISSUES.

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS CAN LEAD THEIR OWN ACTIVITIES AND ALSO WORK IN CONJUNCTION WITH EXHISTING CAMPAIGNS.

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Permission Granted

Janis Foster defined the movement in her blog as "people who are drawn together by something that they have in common that has both personal and community consequences, and **grant themselves the authority to solve the problem they are facing or create the future they desire."** The movement may start with two or three people who canvas an area and speak out, gaining support from like-minded individuals.

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The Power of Grassroots

The power of grassroots organization is in its ability to:

- Move quickly
- Harness local power
- Build a volunteer base
- Relational Organizing

Relational Organizing reaches out to your exhisting network of people you know.

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Starting a Grassroots Organization

Who is a grassroots organizer?
Everyone! Anyone with passion about a candidate or issue and is willing to learn and support people to find ways to take action.

The first an most important step is building a team who will work together.

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Let's Get Started!
Exploratory Stage

Who in your network is passionate about this candidate, campaign, or issue? You may have people in mind. Also check out your social media feeds and online groups? Are there people who are posting more than others? Posting effectively? In some cases if you are supporting a campaign they may have a list of people interested in volunteering or learning more about supporting the campaign. Check out other organizations, attend meetings and introduce yourself.

List the names here:

1.

2.

3.

Additional Names:

Set up a time and place to meet with those who are interested.

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Exploratory Stage: Recruitment

Ask the group to reach out to potential members to test the level of interest.

Set a goal and timetable for the outreach

- number of contacts,
- make contact by a certain date .

Perhaps everyone contacts 3 people within a week.

Reconvene and share feedback and refine the goals and target membership as needed.

Create Your Steering Committee

Expand the original group to form your first steering committee for the organization. This group will meet regularly to make plans, set goals and actions for the group.

Taking the steps to set goals and identify your members will help you get started on the path to forming your organization.

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Steering Committee

The Steering committee is a group of people who will decide the purpose, scope and function for the organization. Set up regualar meetings, take notes and assign action items to members to complete.

They will serve as the backbone of the organization, and decide which programs you will host, candidates to support and long and short-term plans for the organization.

Getting Organized: Focus

With your steering committee decide what will be the groups purpose and focus. What problem needs to be solved? Examples: Too many potholes on your street, desire to support a candidate running for office, advocating for legislation to improve broadband. Where can the organization be useful, what unique service/tool can we provide?

What do we want the organization to accomplish and focus on?

What makes our group unique?

Be specific, where is there a need? What do we have to offer ?

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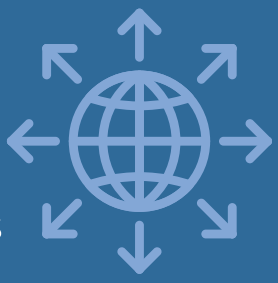
Getting Organized: Reach



Before taking action, an effective grassroots organization needs clear statements of purpose, operational lenses, organizational structure, and position in the community. Invest the time and talent in preparing these statements to provide guidance and direction to the actions of the organization adding structure and focus.

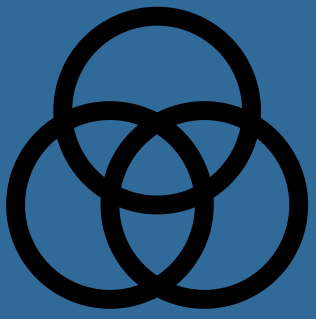
What is the geographical reach of the organization-statewide, county, city, etc.?

What are the basic membership parameters-women, progressives, educators, rural, etc.?

What is the goal of the organization-improve voting rights, access to healthcare, support a candidate, etc.?

How will the organization achieve its purpose-through education, activism, etc.?

Getting Organized: Lenses



How do you decide if an acitvity fits within the focus of the organization? It helps to have established areas that are important to addressed by the work the organization embarks on-be sure to check in periodilcally to make sure and update as needed.

Will the organization focus on social justice, rural and urban communities, racial and gender equality?

Will the organization actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization and its actions?

Will the organization promote a sense of belonging among its members?

Will the organization have standards for communication among its members and others?

For example BB4AM 's lenses are: Racial Equality, Belonging, Democratic Reform, and Rural/Urban

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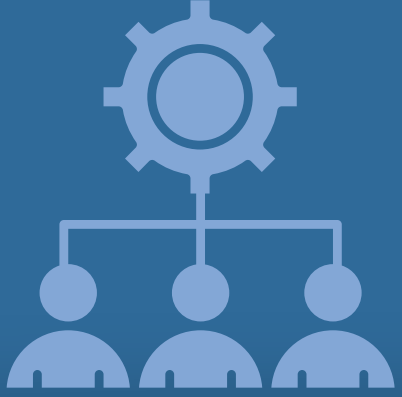
Getting Organized: Structure

How will your organization look?



What will the leadership body of the organization look like? Committees, steering committee?

Who will be members of leadership i.e. steering committee, chair, vice chair, how often will the committee meet?

How will actions be divided and organized i.e. teams with team leaders, special project leaders, at-large members, when will teams and committees meet?

What social media platforms and communication tools will be used i.e Facebook, twitter, Instagram, slack, mobilize?

Will the organization have a website?

Getting Organized: Community

How will the organization grow and interact with the community and other organizations who have simmilar goals? Grassroots organizations want to be effective and seek ways to amplify their impact and support other progressive organizations.
Offer to promote and share resources with your members and at your events.

Are there organizations in the community that have similar goals?

What efforts will be taken to collaborate with them-consider assigning a Coalition Coordinator?

What organization(s) will be our allies?

When and should we collaborate?

Meet with them regularly?

Should we share content and activities?

What's in a name? Selecting a Name & Branding

It is likely that from the planning stages the core group used a name for the organization in the planning and organizing steps. Or, you may have a Facebook or other social media group. After the exploratory stage it is a good time to revisit the name.

The group should ask:
Does the name fit the purpose and is the name consistent with the lenses? Organization? Position in the community?

After selection and confirmation of the name it is a great time to make the official launch of the organization.

- Make the announcement of your name a special event, include the primary purpose of the organization.
- Develop an announcement or "roll-out" plan .

Branding

Now for the fun part: This is a time to develop the "branding" for your organization. Design a logo, pick colors and fonts to be used across platforms. Having a consistent brand or "look" will make your organization easily identified.

For graphics we recommend →

Canva

Join us to discuss tools for branding and examples in our session *Grassroots Organizing for Change*

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What are we doing? Planning your activism.

Grassroots organizations engage members to be active in causes and campaigns. To achieve this activism, grassroots organizations adopt an activism plan to offer a variety of activities for members with differing levels of experience with various skills-with a goal that they will evolve in their level of engagement. All activities should be consistent with the organization's purpose and be viewed through the operational lenses.

For each activity, select a co-chair or leader to take the lead. Include leaders in the steering committee, where they can report on activities and get input. The leaders set the agenda for the activities.

Host periodic meetings to discuss activism, this helps engage members. Be sure to provide trainings for activities at the beginning of each activity. Consider establishing "captains/leads" for each activitiy and have them to follow-up with participants. Provide an opportinty for members to offer feedback on activities.

Building Bridges for America has grab-n-go resources and training sessions on activities.

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Activity:
Getting Out There

This is the time to get out and get engage the community. Below are some ideas for activities your organization to host:

- Member & Volunteer Recruitment
- Resource Sharing, share information on voter registration, other organizations
- Education: Host trainings, workshops, voter registration
- Signature Collection: Candidates and referendums need signatures to get on election ballots
- Visibility: Farmers markets, state fairs, local community events, vigils. Also called "tabling"
- Phone Banks: Reach out to campaigns and offer to host a phone bank, we have resources for hosting
- Postcarding: Many candidates and campaigns need help running and getting volunteers to write post cards
- Canvassing: Door-to-door canvassing needs manpower to reach everyone in the community
- Coordinated Campaigns: Close to Election Day campagins will start to work together (state, national and down-ballots) they will need support with get-out-the-vote events.

BE CREATIVE!

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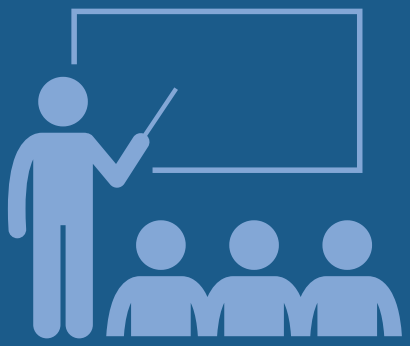
Activity: Education & Training



Education and training sessions offer members the information they need to take action. Below are some prompts to guide your group.

Discuss these questions with the leaders of this activity

Should we establish a schedule of meetings to provide information on issues, causes and candidates?

Should we maintain a list of education and training resources from other organizations?

Should we provide resource materials for our members?

Should we establish an in-depth discussion series to inform and engage the public?

Should we offer training on specific skills (i.e. writing an op-ed, software programs , etc.)

Should we offer training on how to communictate with policy makers?

Having readily available resources materials helpful to members.

Activity:
Call to Action

A Call to Action is a special event tied to key events in a campaign of issue. Grassroots organizations provide their members with various opportunities to take action around key events -votes, campaigns, and milestones.

Decide the Date:

What Opportunities will we promote?

How will volunteers sign up?

How many days/shifts should we ask volunteers to sign up for?

How do we follow-up and confirm shifts with the volunteers

What training needs to be provided? Data? Phone/Text Banks?

Collaborate with the campaign/organization so they can provide you with resources.

For more ideas and how to run events join us for BB4AM's *Events for Change*

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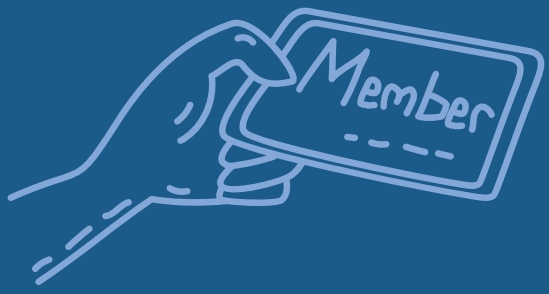

Activity: Membership and Outreach

Grassroots organizations want to reach like-minded individuals to encourage them to take action. It is important to always be recruiting members.

Discuss these questions with the leaders of this activity:

How should we grow membership to increase our impact?

How do we include DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) in our membership?

How should we bring new members to the board and leadership?

How should we follow-up with members who drop-off?

Activity: Messaging & Communication

Through messaging and communication a grassroots organization gives its members an opportunity to express their positive views.

Discuss these questions with the leaders of this activity

What steps should we take to maintain our social media platforms?

What steps should we take to promote the organization, including its purpose and identity?

How should we moderate content within the organization's guidelines?

How should we share content with members and the public?

Who will seek and post appropriate messaging in support of our goals from other organizations (i.e DNC, White House, other progressive groups)?

Who will develop and train others on messaging?

How will we combat disinformation and provide rapid response?

How will we encourge input from members?

Learn more at BB4AM's sessions :
Say This, Not That, and Popping the Disinformation Bubble

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It's Not Working! Evaluating

If an activity is not working-no one attending sessions , the session are not well received-it is ok to modify the activism plan or just stop an activity. Grassroots organizations do not have the resources to do everything that the group would like. Rely on your Steering Committee to reevaluate and make decisions about activities and focus.

Find the activities that resonate with your members, pick the ones where you have capacity and expertise.

It's Working! Celebrating

If your activism plan is working, celebrate your success. Acknowledging accomplishments will encourage future engagement. Remember to celebrate all your hard work and achievements!

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OTHER AVAILABLE TOOLS

AVAILABLE AT
WWW.BUILDINGBRIDGESFORAMERICA.COM

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

This session takes you through starting your grassroots organization and presents helpful tools to organize.

UNLOCK YOUR POLITICAL POWER WORKSHOP

Practice writing and telling your story based in your core values. And work through how to start and work through your difficult conversations.

DAYS OF ACTION

Join Building Bridges for Days of Action throughout the week to support candidates and issues.

REAL TALK: POP THE DISINFORMATION BUBBLE

Timely sessions to understand how people can believe lies and how to use empathy to break through with the truth.

REAL TALK: SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Workshop to understand the importance and how to write effective progressive messaging.

VOLUNTEER'S TOOLBOX

Ready to print infographics, online presentations and workbooks.

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Building Bridges for America LEADERSHIP TEAM

JENNY OKAMOTO

Director Leadership Development, Building Bridges for America

CAZ MARGENAU

Director Leadership Development, Building Bridges for America

TERRY MUMFORD

Associate, Leadership Development, Building Bridges for America

Building Bridges for America

Next Steps

Put your story to work. Build your political power and connect with others who are taking action. Make use of our Volunteer Toolbox to get guides and other workshops to help you and your group grow.

EMAIL

buildingbridges4america@gmail.com

WEBSITE

WWW.BUILDINGBRIDGESFORAMERICA.COM

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