



HOW TO STOP A PRISON in your town

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About the California Prison Moratorium Project

The California Prison Moratorium Project seeks to stop all public and private prison construction in California.

The money saved from California's prison construction budget should be used to fund and actively pursue alternatives to imprisonment for as many people as possible. As a result, communities will have the power to examine the reasons people break the law and seek alternatives to prison.

Most people who are being put in prison do not need to be removed from society and could effectively be diverted into

community-based programs. Since the majority of people are being sent to prison for non-violent drug-related or economic crimes, we believe these people should have access to drug treatment and/or economic assistance (such as education, affordable childcare, job training and placement, or welfare) instead of prison terms. Even the diminishing percentage of people convicted of violent offenses can be helped outside the prison system, through programs that address aggressive behavior and abusive relationships, and drug and alcohol treatment.

We consider prisons to be a form of environmental injustice. They are normally built in economically depressed communities that eagerly anticipate economic prosperity. Like any toxic industry, prisons affect the quality of local schools, roads, water, air, land, and natural habitats. We join forces with other groups working for environmental justice.

We believe that prisons do not make our communities more secure, and that alternatives will work. As long as prison construction continues, viable alternatives will not be utilized to their fullest potential.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizing to stop a prison



When a couple of friends heard that the state wanted to build another prison in El Centro, Imperial County, California, they's had enough. The small rural community already held two state prisons and a massive Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS - now Immigration and Customs Enforcement - ICE) detention center.

Folks did not buy the California Department of Corrections claims that the proposed prison would benefit the town. They had several years of experience to draw from. Residents had seen few benefits from Centinela State Prison or Calipatria State Prison; the unemployment rate in Imperial County is around 19.2 percent. The major immigrant detention center did not help unemployment or local businesses. Instead, it taxed already poor social and health services, roads, water and sewage systems. "We already have an overabundance of law enforcement in the community," activists pointed out. "Too many law enforcement employees don't make for a well-balanced community emotionally."

Imperial County is a predominantly agricultural, Latino county. The county population is 72.2 percent Latino and 32.2 percent of county residents are foreign-born. It is home to one of California's largest water suppliers, providing irrigation for \$1.2 billion in agricultural sales. But the people who supply labor for the sprawling farms see little of this revenue, just like they have seen little of the supposed benefits from all the prisons in their town.

Residents in El Centro knew that if they wanted to stop the latest prison they had to get the word out to as many people as possible. The group wrote a quick petition calling on the County Board of Supervisors to reject the state's proposal. They arranged to have a table at the upcoming Holtville Carrot Festival. They sat in the warm January sun and collected a few hundred signatures on their petitions. They began making phone calls to friends and organizations, including the California Prison Moratorium Project. Within a few weeks, they had gotten in touch with another community that had successfully fought the same project and set a meeting to discuss stopping the prison.

By the meeting time, the group knew when the first public hearing on the prison proposal was scheduled. Everyone at the meeting was given copies of the petition and the group brainstormed every possible organization who might be persuaded to join the opposition: clubs, churches, unions, chambers of commerce, city governments.

One person wrote a speech, outlining the many objections to the facility, which was delivered in various forms all over the County (see page XX for the speech). Calls were made to the local radio, TV and newspapers, and to individual reporters who were covering the story. The group made sure as many people as possible knew that there was another perspective on the proposed prison besides the claims the CDC were making.

By the time the County Board of Supervisors voted on whether or not to approve the project, local organizers had delivered over 15,000 signatures opposing the prison. The Supervisors voted 3-2 to accept the project, but with a very important condition. Opposition groups had successfully convinced the County that the costs of the facility would run around \$15 million dollars. The County accepted to the proposal ONLY if the state offered the total amount to offset the costs, instead of the \$4 millions they were offering.

The group wrote letters to elected officials, from the Governor of California to the Mayor. They hired a lawyer, but before any lawsuits were filed, the state backed out. By educating and organizing about the true costs of the prison facility, local organizers lost the vote but won the fight: the state wasn't willing to pay \$15 million and the County wasn't willing to take the project for less.

The California Prison Moratorium Project's handbook starts off with this story to show how successful local organizing can be, even if it is on a short time line, with no money, and driven by the many people who have jobs and families to take care of. The residents in Imperial County used many of the strategies we outline in the coming pages. If all the talk of intervention and organizing ever seems overwhelming, hopefully you can refer back to this example and remember how possible it is to take control of your town's future.

A SIMPLE Idea



NO ONE IN TOWN REALLY WANTS A NEW PRISON

No one in town really wants a new prison. So why would people try to get one placed in their town? What good does a concrete building full of cages do? Or, more to the point, what good do people *think* and *say* it will do? What are they really trying to get?

Jobs are always at the top of the list. People want a strong local economy so that their children will have jobs when they grow up. They want increased tax revenues so their towns can provide more city services: road repairs, libraries, education, summer programs for kids, a local hospital or clinic. People want their property values to hold steady or to increase. People want local businesses to stay healthy, not only for the benefit of merchants but for the community in general. People want to live in nice places that aren't clogged by traffic, choked by air pollution, or poisoned by bad water.

Anybody trying to bring a prison to your town argues that it will bring benefits, but the evidence shows that in most cases the argument doesn't hold water. A prison doesn't bring jobs to local residents, it doesn't make local businesses any busier, it doesn't get the local economy back on track. In fact, building a new prison comes with big downsides. Prisons damage the environment, and can drain away more money from city and county coffers than it brings in.

Wanting the benefits prison boosters promise is not the same thing as wanting a prison. People want particular social and economic benefits, and are trying to get them by building a prison. It's likely that these are the things you want too. If these are the things everyone wants, but a prison can't bring them, then no one in town really wants a prison.

PRISONS DON'T BENEFIT ANYONE

Prisons benefit almost no one. You'll find that most towns are promised the same benefits – job creation, employment security, increased city services – but that almost none of those promises come true. Different groups of people in your community are attracted to different promises. For each of these groups, there is a particular way to explain why a prison will be damaging rather than beneficial.

Making these arguments means pointing out what the prison will do. Prisons make it harder to attract other industries later on that can bring the benefits people really want. They are environmentally “dirty” industries—polluting water, light, and ground. And, even though they're advertised as “recession proof” (meaning the jobs will stay even in economically bad times), recent research shows that this isn't true—prison towns haven't been immune to economic downturns. What's more, a prison is almost certainly “boom proof.” It's not an industry that will grow as the rest of the economy does. If a new prison isn't going to bring new

jobs, or increase city revenue, or be a boost to local business, or improve property values, then nobody is going to benefit. And if nobody is going to benefit, then everybody is potentially your ally in fighting the prison.

Nobody really wants a prison. Prisons benefit few people in a community. If you separate the idea of wanting a prison from the idea of wanting jobs, city services, and other benefits, then you can help people figure out how unlikely it is that a new prison will bring those things. We know from working with people around the country that people have a vision for their town. The challenge is how to make the vision a reality. And, as we'll help show you, a prison will prevent the vision from being realized. Fighting a new prison doesn't mean sacrificing economic and social benefits, but is in fact an important part of fighting for them. If you show how unlikely it is that anyone will benefit from a prison in your town, you'll be more forceful in showing that nobody wants it.

PRISONS ON THE HORIZON

Expansion in the 80s and 90s



In the United States, “between 1980 and 1989, the number of prisoners grew by 14.5% a year. During the 1990s, the growth averaged 6.3% a year. From 1996 to 1997 alone, the number of prisoners behind bars jumped by nearly 12,000.”¹ In 2002 the prison population in the US passed 2 million for the first time in history. There are over 1,600 adult prisons in the US—and 200 of them have been built in just the last five years.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Common sense tells us that people go to prison because they committed a crime. After all, why else would they be in prison? So we would expect that the incredible explosion in the prisoner population over the last 20-odd years must be because of an equally incredible explosion in crime.

However, common sense is dead wrong in this case. In fact, crime is at a 30 year low. This means that most states and the federal government didn’t start to build and fill the prisons until after crime had begun to decline. So why is it that all of a sudden, we as a society find it not only acceptable, but actually necessary, to spend tons and tons of cash to lock up tons and tons of people?

Let’s start with a fact that may surprise you: prisons have only been around for about 200 years. They’re a relatively

new invention in human history. Of course, there were dungeons and towers and other unpleasant places with locked cages before that, but those places were nearly always places people went before they were punished—usually through torture, execution, or banishment. Prisons—places where being locked up is the punishment itself—were actually invented to reform those systems of physical torture. So even if today it’s hard to imagine a world without prisons, we can also recognize that such a world actually existed only a few generations ago.

Let’s skip the first 180 years of the history of the prison, and catch up to the early 1980s. Prisons were beginning to pop up all over our rural landscapes, and people from urban areas started disappearing from their homes and reappearing in cages. Again, this wasn’t a time when crime was rising, and anybody who tells you that we needed prisons then (or now) because of rising crime rates simply isn’t looking at the facts.

In California, the leader in prison expansion in the last 20-plus years, only 12 state prisons were built from 1858 to 1982. That’s one prison every 10 years. However, in just the next 22 years, 24 prisons were built. That’s more than one prison a year!

In New York, prison spending has doubled in the last ten years. But since

1988, the Empire State’s public universities have seen their operating budgets plummet by 29% while funding for prisons has increased by 76%. In actual dollars, there has nearly been an equal trade-off: the Department of Correctional Services’ budget increased by \$761 million over that period, while state funding for New York’s city and state university systems declined by \$615 million. Across the country, the story is the same: huge and unnecessary prison projects have pushed other priorities—like education and health care—into the background.²

WHAT MOVED MORE PEOPLE INTO CAGES IN THIS PERIOD?

While the real reasons are a little more complicated than a simple crime boom, they aren’t all that mysterious. Here are a few of the factors we think are most important. This can help you understand your current fight in the context of the Prison Industrial Complex.*

If you’re fighting prison expansion, prison boosters are sure to make it seem like you don’t care about community safety. However, if you can explain that prison expansion doesn’t have anything to do with increasing crime—because crime ISN’T increasing—then you’ll be able to explain both that you’re concerned with community safety, and that opposing the prison system actually helps to make us safer.

*The PIC isn’t just prisons. It’s the whole system of dealing with social problems and harm using prisons, police, courts, and punishment. We believe that to really understand prisons you need to understand the whole system. The more you know about the history of the prison system, the more ready you will be to keep it from harming your community.

Although there may be differences in specific regions of the country, these three factors fit together as a general explanation for our increasing prisoner population:

1 Creation of new crimes (new laws that defined new crimes)

2 Intensified policing

3 Longer sentences.

1 New Crimes

This *doesn't* mean that in 1980 a whole lot of people came up with a bunch of ways to do bad things that no one had ever thought of doing before. It does mean that politicians started to change the laws to make things illegal that weren't illegal before, and to make the penalties more severe for some offenses that hadn't been harshly punished before. A crime isn't just harming someone or something, it's an act that is defined as illegal—by Congress, your state legislature, or your city council. Starting around 1980, many behaviors that had been legal were made illegal—they were criminalized. Some behaviors that were completely legal before have been made grounds for arrest—like hanging out in groups of three or more, which was criminalized under Proposition 21 in California in 2000. Other things that were illegal but carried only a minor ticket or citation were made into misdemeanors or even felonies—carrying small amounts of marijuana, for example, could only get you a ticket in the late 1970s, but could land you in prison today. Misdemeanors were turned into

felonies; felonies that carried short sentences were turned into felonies that required long sentences. So even if people's behaviors haven't changed, it is more likely they will wind up in a cage—and stay there longer—today.

2 Intensified Policing

Around the same time, federal, state, and local governments have begun to put more and more resources into catching and prosecuting people who broke those laws. During and after the Vietnam War, the military began to provide training and equipment to police back home. Struggles by black and brown people against racism made it more and more legitimate for police to aggressively monitor communities of color (and gave them a chance to try out their new helicopters and SWAT tactics). And being seen as “tough on crime” has become more and more important to politicians at all levels—even though that wasn't true a generation ago. So again we can see that while people's behavior isn't changing—that there isn't any measurable increase in crime—more people ended up behind bars because the police were given more resources to do so.

3 Longer sentences

Like we said above, one of the reasons sentences are longer today is because infractions (which carry no jail time) have been turned into misdemeanors (which carry sentences of up to one year in a county jail), and misdemeanors have been turned into felonies (which carry sentences of over a year and are served in state prisons, not county jails). But there are other

so-called “sentence enhancements” that have greatly increased the amount of time people have to do. One sentence enhancement is the “mandatory minimum.” Mandatory minimums create unchangeable minimum sentences that prisoners must serve if they are convicted of a crime. One of the first and harshest versions of this law was Michigan's “650 Life Law,” which required a life sentence for possession, sales, or even conspiracy to sell just 650 grams of cocaine or heroin. This didn't mean that people selling these drugs were doing so any more frequently or dangerously than before, nor did it decrease the number of people doing those things. It simply made more people sit in more cages for longer than before.

Another type of sentence enhancement is the “three strikes law” now on the books in a number of states. These laws drastically increased minimum sentences for people convicted of third felonies. In California, which has one of the harshest “three strikes” laws in the country, a person who has committed two prior felonies can end up with a life sentence for stealing golf clubs. Again, this doesn't mean that people are behaving any worse. It means that we are putting people in cages for more and more time.

DRUG WAR

The “War on Drugs” has played a major part in the creation of new crimes, increasing enforcement, and extending sentences. In 1983, one in

ten prisoners was behind bars for a drug offense. In 1996, the ratio was one in four. The War on Drugs has disproportionately affected blacks and Latinos. As Marc Mauer of the Sentencing Project reminds us, “We know from national surveys that drug use cuts across all races at roughly equal rates, but drug enforcement tends to focus on communities of color.”

The “War on Drugs” combines the three elements of prison expansion we just talked about:

1 Criminalization.

Lots of things that people get sent away for now (like conspiracy to sell) weren’t crimes 25 years ago.

2 Intensified Policing.

Under the cover of “looking for drug dealers,” police have been able to drastically increase their surveillance over communities of color and poor communities. This is true even though we know drug use is equal across racial and class lines.

3 Sentence Enhancements.

Mandatory minimums for drug offenses is a major factor in the increasing prisoner population. For more information on sentencing enhancements, check out www.sentencingproject.org

The bottom line is that there aren’t more prisoners because there’s more crime. There are more prisoners because it’s more likely you’ll be put in a cage for doing something that wasn’t

a crime 20 years earlier, because there are more police who have more resources who are out to get you, and because prisoners who are sent to prison stay there for longer and longer.

BUT ARE WE SAFE?

It’s hard to let go of the thought that we aren’t safe, and that we need more cops and prisons to be safe. Prison boosters will almost surely say those things—that one reason to support the prison is to do you part for public safety, or that people who oppose the prison don’t care about community safety. And although we can’t tell you how to reach every person and explain how that isn’t true, we hope this chapter gives a sort of outline for how you can make your argument:

Building more prisons has not cut the crime rate.

We don’t need more prisons to be safe, because there isn’t more crime than there was 30 years ago, when we had over 1.5 million fewer people in cages.

Building prisons wastes money that could be used on the things that actually make us safe.

Relying on prisons to deal with our problems actually makes us less safe. When we spend money and other resources on prisons and decide that prisons are the way we’ll deal with problems, then we’re forced to neglect lots of other things like education, affordable housing, sustainable economic

development and health care.

In the end, prisons are not about safety.

Safety comes from having control over housing, food, health care, work. Safety comes from having people you trust around when you need help. Prisons don’t get you any of those things. We don’t oppose prisons in spite of our desire to live in a safe and fair world. We oppose prisons because we want to live in a world that is safe and fair for everyone.

***REALITY, HALF LIES
and prison truths***



One of the most powerful tools that the prison industry has at its disposal is the promise of a revitalized economy, of more and better jobs, of rising real estate prices, and of better services for you and your family. The promises are the same, whether the county or state Departments of Corrections, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or a private prison corporation makes them. Nearly every town that the prison industry targets for a new prison is in economic trouble. Therefore, these promises are always made to people who are searching for answers to economic problems.

In order to get to the bottom of these promises, to figure out if they're really true or if they're just part of a phony sales pitch that prison industry representatives use to sell a prison in your backyard, we need to begin with the promise itself.

In brief form, the promise might run something like this:

"If you allow us to build a prison in your town, you will see an improvement in your town's economic fortunes. The prison we are planning will bring good jobs for ordinary working people, and reduce your unemployment rate. Prisons are large institutions that need many products and services in order to run properly. With a new prison in your town, the demand for local services and products will rise and local businesses will be able to benefit from some of that new business. Also, with all the new people who move to your town to take prison jobs, both local retail sales and real estate prices will rise. And

because our planning department has worked hard to make sure that the new prison will not have negative social, economic, or environmental impacts on your community, building a prison is a really a win-win situation."

Does it sound too good to be true? Not only do we think it does, we have the facts to prove it — from prison town after prison town. Prison boosters say that a new prison will generate all kinds of benefits for your town. But most of those "benefits" are dreams that will never come true. However, by the time residents in most new prison towns figure this out, the prison has already been built, and the town is left to deal with the repercussions. The prison industry wants to sell you and your town leadership a most misleading bill of goods.

So, one of the most important things you'll do in the course of your work to stop a prison from being built in your town will be to educate your fellow residents about the real effects a prison has on the host town. In other words, you'll be educating your community about the truth behind the sales pitch. In the process, you'll want to show that most if not all of the promised benefits are a matter of smoke and mirrors rather than jobs and dollars.

In the first nation-wide survey of the economic effects of prisons, a team of rural sociologists studied every county in which a prison had been built between 1965 and 1995. Comparing these places to otherwise similar counties in which prisons hadn't been built,

they found that, in terms of employment, for example, counties that don't have prisons are slightly better off than the prison counties. In other words, the addition of a prison tends to have a negative effect on the host county.³

In this chapter we'll go through the most commonly promised benefits and show what effect prisons really have on local unemployment and poverty, real estate values, retail trade, tax revenues, costs to local governments, and so on. After that, we'll move on to talk about some of the negative stuff that comes with prisons — the stuff prison boosters don't want to talk about.

First, the benefits.

PRISON JOBS

Claim: The new jobs a prison brings will lower local unemployment.

Truth: Most prison jobs — and all the better-paying ones — go to outsiders.

In a February 2003 report titled, "Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America," the Sentencing Project revealed the long-term impact of prison construction on rural communities in upstate New York. They concluded that, "over the course of 25 years, we find no significant difference or discernible pattern of economic trends between the seven rural counties in New York that hosted a prison and the seven rural counties that did not host a prison." Their findings, far from being new, confirm what

small prison towns across the country have found: very few local residents get jobs at the new prison, and the few who do get the lower paying jobs.

Example

When California planned a second prison in Delano, the state used figures from the first Delano prison to predict the percentage of new jobs that would go to local residents. When community activists did the math, they figured out that Delano residents would be hired for only 4.8% of the more than 1,500 jobs available — for a grand total of 72 positions. Meanwhile, Delano's unemployment rate, which was about 26% before the FIRST prison opened in 1991, ROSE to nearly 29% by the year 2000. This shows that a 5,000-bed prison in a town of 30,000 actually INCREASED local unemployment.

A new federal prison in Atwater, California, delayed opening at full capacity for months because it couldn't find enough qualified applicants for staff positions in a county where one in every six residents is unemployed. The qualification that kept people from being eligible was a requirement that prison employees have good credit. It isn't unusual for poor working folks to struggle with their credit, of course, but unlike a shoe factory, a food processing plant, a calling center, or almost any other industry, prison jobs require good credit. Prison employers assume that if you

have bad credit, you can't be trusted.

As the Sentencing Project report states, "Counties that hosted new prisons received no economic advantage as measured by per capita income." In fact, prison counties experienced 9% less growth in per capita income than their non-prison counterparts. That means people's salaries increased more in counties that decided not to build prisons. What's worse, public prisons don't pay property taxes. This means that communities miss out on tax revenue when they build a prison instead of a productive industry.

Critics often dismiss these points. After all, they say, you have to take into consideration the increased number of prisoners and their families. They drive up the unemployment rate. These critics miss two important points. First: prisoners are not counted in official unemployment statistics, so the number of prisoners has no effect on a town's unemployment rate. And second, prisoners' families rarely move to the communities where their loved ones are in custody. So while it is true that most prisoners are poor people, **it isn't the prisoners, or their families, who cause prisons to have negative effects on host communities.**

LOCAL ECONOMIC GROWTH

Claim: Outsiders hired at the prison live, shop, and pay taxes locally.

Truth: Almost all new prison employees will commute from a larger town, or a

better-off county, where most of their paychecks will be spent.

Very few of the payroll dollars from a prison will "stick" in your town. Most of the people hired at a prison are hired from a statewide or regional applicant pool, rather than from the local labor force. That's why prisons don't reduce unemployment.

The further problem is that most of those new employees who relocate from elsewhere do not move to the town that hosts the prison, but to a larger town in the region — a town with more retail stores, theaters, other amenities, and perhaps better funded schools. Consider the fact that despite the glut of cheap real estate in prison towns, prison guards in California choose, on average, to commute more than 30 miles to get to work.

Since local residents don't get the jobs and those who do get them don't live locally, businesses in prison towns don't see the promised increases in sales. Prison employees do most shopping at regional shopping centers, often buying only gasoline, fast food and uniforms in the host town. As an illustration, let's do a little math: say Joe Prisonguard makes \$35,000 working at the prison but, like most of his co-workers, he lives two towns over, where the local amenities and services are much better.

In a year Joe Prisonguard will spend:

\$1,800 on gas (that's a 20 gallon tank filled once a week — the other fill-ups will be in his hometown).

\$1,800 on food (\$7 per meal, for 250 work days — he gets two weeks off for vacation).

\$100 on a new uniform.

Grand Total: \$3,700 spent in the hosting town.

Now \$3,700 over a year might not seem so bad. But consider, if Uncle Sam takes \$6,000 at tax time, then of his \$29,000 take-home pay, your town sees \$3,700, and the other \$25,300 goes somewhere else. And this is before we consider where in your town he will spend his money. Because if he buys his lunch at big chain fast food joints half the week, then \$900 will leave your town for the corporate offices of Carl's Jr., McDonald's, and Burger King. A chunk of the gas station money will flow back to Exxon and Mobil. And even when he gets a raise and has a little more cash in his pocket, he may eat better, but he won't eat more often or buy more gas every week. In other words, as his pay goes up, his spending in your town won't.

Example

Corcoran, California is host city to two prisons. The town has 8,500 "free-world" residents and 11,000 prisoners. Corcoran residents got only about 7.5% of the jobs at their first prison. After the second prison opened and both were fully staffed,

the Department of Corrections advertised for another two clerical positions, starting pay \$17,000. More than 800 people lined up in the rain waiting for the hiring office to open so they could get applications for the two jobs. What other big business would provide so few local jobs?

Since ground was broken on Corcoran I in 1986, California has spent over \$1 billion building and operating the two megaprisons. Before the state had spent the money, about 1,000 of the town's 8,900 residents lived below the federal poverty line. After the prisons were built and \$1 billion spent, nearly 2,000 Corcoran residents were in poverty. If, instead of spending the \$1 billion on a new prison, the state had invested the money in the county, it could have provided 1,000 good jobs with benefits for twenty-five years.

So much for economic revitalization.

Claim: Your town's businesses will get some ongoing contracts with the prison for goods and services.

Truth: Most prison expenses are not local purchases.

Most purchases for the prison are done through a regional or statewide purchasing office, where administrators work to get low prices by bidding out contracts to supply the entire system.

Instead of buying food or computers or furniture from businesses in your town, the prison will buy these from a big company that already has a contract with other prisons, maybe even across the state. Prison administrators will purchase very little of what they need to maintain their facility from local merchants. Other than salaries, the biggest expense is for utilities (light and power), and these are also usually owned by a large company outside of the community.

Example

In Delano, California, the only contract given to a local business is for stationery supplies to the prison. That contract also supplies five other prisons in the region, which means that means in five other towns, stationers who thought they'd get prison business didn't get anything at all.

One way to measure the general health of local businesses is to look at the year-to-year change in local sales tax per resident compared with the same figure for the state as a whole. (There's more on this in the "Research" Chapter.)

Example

In the seven years prior to the opening of Avenal, California's 6,000 bed prison in 1987, the town generally did better than the state as a whole in taxable sales per capita. But shortly after the prison opened, Avenal's tax revenue dropped drastically, never to recov-

er. In the state as a whole, meanwhile, revenues dropped during the recession of the early 1990s and then rebounded to pre-recession levels. In 2000, Avenal's taxable sales per capita was only 35% of what it had been before the State of California sited the prison there. In other words, local businesses have been selling fewer goods and services after the prison opened than they had sold before it was built, even though it was originally billed as a great boost to the local economy.

Claim: National retail chains will follow prisons, creating jobs and tax revenues for the local economy.

Truth: While the chains often follow the prisons, the promised benefits don't move in with the chains.

Although a new box store on the edge of your town will generate new jobs, it is worth pointing out that big chains pay the majority of their workers poorly, hire mostly part-time staff, and offer few or no benefits. We realize that a few no-benefit, 25-hour-a-week jobs beats no work at all. Be that as it may, jobs such as these are far too weak to produce the economic recovery or revitalization that prison boosters claim. As recently as 2001, the children of full-time employees of one big-box retailer, Wal-Mart, qualified for subsidized school lunches because their parents' take home pay was below the federal poverty line.

More to the point, the problem with big chains is that, contrary to the arguments you'll hear from their representatives, their stores don't really help the local economy. Why?

The arrival of chain stores often means the end for small, locally owned establishments—for instance, a small restaurant that is put out of business by the arrival of a new Burger King. Thus, many of the jobs that prisons “create” are actually replacement jobs for the ones lost in locally owned businesses. And since it takes time for a local business to go under, these effects will not be seen immediately, but will, instead, develop over several years. So be wary of prison boosters whose economic projections only show the first year or two after the opening of a prison. Most of the local businesses that eventually go under last a few years before the chains push them off Main Street.

Let's say that after a prison goes up in your town, a new McDonald's opens up on Main Street to serve the thousands of new employees in town. Well, the fast food chain hires a crew of 40 part-time employees, mostly high school students, to do the work of 20 full-time workers. It will draw business away from the three locally owned restaurants — two will watch their clientele dwindle and one will go out of business. The two that lose customers will reduce their staff by three each (for a total of six jobs lost), and the nine former employees of the place that closes for good will be on the streets without a job. Six plus nine = fifteen lost jobs. Statistically it may look like the

town is better off because even though fifteen jobs were lost, McDonald's created 20, for an overall gain of five jobs. But there's more to consider than the raw numbers. Why?

Locally owned businesses keep money circulating locally. National chains siphon their profits out of town. More than 90 cents on the dollar of the money flowing through a locally owned business is re-spent locally. But for every dollar spent at a national chain, 60 cents leaves your town for good.

Big-box retailers like to build outside the town boundaries to avoid paying local taxes, something which is easy to do in towns surrounded by cheap land. As they compete with locally owned businesses inside the city limits, they actually reduce municipal tax incomes by driving local businesses under.

Big-box stores change a town's culture. They impact the rural landscape and affect historic commercial centers that are important to a town's identity and history.

Example

In the late 1980s California's Tehachapi prison was expanded. The expansion brought a host of national retailers and food chains that built on the edge of town. A decade later more than 780 locally owned businesses had been forced out of business.



**WE DON'T OPPOSE PRISONS IN SPITE OF OUR
DESIRE TO LIVE IN A SAFE AND FAIR WORLD.**

**WE OPPOSE PRISONS BECAUSE
WE WANT TO LIVE IN A WORLD
THAT IS SAFE AND FAIR TO ALL.**

PROPERTY VALUES

Claim: The prison will increase residential property values.

Truth: In the short run, yes. But soon after the prison opens, values tend to fall, sometimes below where they were before the project was first announced.

Many towns see a flurry of real estate activity (sales, new construction) as the prison project is first approved. Believing that prison employees will be moving to town and that local residents will get some of the better paying jobs, developers build or refurbish houses and apartments. Local businesses and owners of commercial real estate often borrow money to expand or spruce up their holdings.

During the prison's construction, work crews spend substantial money in the town and many become temporary residents who rent housing. This flurry of business activity makes the investments in both residential and commercial real estate look good. Businesses refurbish their buildings, and developers plan and build homes and retail areas. But the honeymoon ends when construction ends. The construction crews leave, employees of the new prison do not live in town, and things turn sour. Local businesses don't see increases in their trade and many have outstanding loans to repay for the improvements they've just completed.

Residential real estate prices tend to increase during the prison construction phase, but when the new buyers don't

appear, prices fall. Sometimes they fall below the level they were when the prison was first announced. Why? If new housing has been built for the new employees to buy, and if new employees never move to town (because, as we have said, most better-paid prison employees live far away from prison towns), there will be more empty houses on the local housing market. More vacant property for sale means lower prices for real estate, which can have two lasting effects. First, real estate developers, homebuilders and their bankers will lose substantial amounts of money. Less visible but more devastating is the second effect: the decline in house prices threatens the security of long-time homeowners, often low income or elderly residents. Most Americans who have any wealth at all only have home equity. When the value of their house declines, so does their nest egg. This will impact their ability to send their kids to college, to pay for their own retirement, or plan for long range financial stability.

Making matters worse, just because real estate prices go down doesn't mean that rental prices will also decline. Rental housing prices rise during construction partly because of the demand from the crews and partly because owners of rental housing borrow to spruce up or expand their rental units in anticipation of new well-paid prison-employee tenants. Landlords who have invested in their units generally must charge higher rents to cover the cost of the improvements. So even if average residential real estate prices go down, rental prices do not. As a result, the dollars of town

residents who live in rental housing are stretched even thinner.

Example

In Crescent City, California, the host city's low income workers found themselves poorer after a new prison opened in 1989 because rents increased 25%-35% during construction and did not go down after the building crews left town. In fact, when the prison was 70% completed, the residents held a referendum on the prison, and found that nearly half the voters regretted approving the prison and wanted the project permanently cancelled. (It wasn't.)

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: EXPANDED INFRASTRUCTURE WITH NO GROWTH

Claim: A prison benefits a community because it will pay for and maintain infrastructure improvements that the city can use to attract other industries.

Truth: Communities often foot the bill for improvements, and the ongoing cost of maintaining and staffing them, without attracting new industrial development.

A prison is a city, and every city needs extensive infrastructure: roads, sewers, wastewater treatment plans, schools, streetlights, traffic cops, folks who handle the immense paperwork that any government demands. Two things make a prison a most unusual city. First, nothing naturally gravitates toward a

prison – there is no related industry that will set up shop at the edge of a prison the way that various kinds of experts, such as tax advisors, or machinists, or printers, or other specialists cluster around other kinds of industries.

At the same time, the prison-city makes great demands on infrastructure, but does not necessarily pay for them. The city and county maintain the roads commuting employees drive on. While the prison treats some wastewater and sewage, the host community often gets stuck with the ongoing expense. The non-prison city and county absorb the additional burden on already overextended government offices and services. The drain on resources is immense. And while a prison may produce a few hours of donated prisoners' labor, those donated labor hours are likely to displace a low-wage resident from a job.

Example

California's Del Norte County had a million dollar reserve fund before the Pelican Bay Prison was sited in Crescent City in 1987. By the time the prison opened, the County had spent all that money and borrowed \$1.2 million to pay for new roads, expanded schools, a landfill, and inspectors. In addition to repaying the \$1.2 million infrastructure debt, the county of fewer than 40,000 people must both pay a prorated share of the prison's quarter-billion dollar loan, and tax itself to maintain these improvements. At the same time, only 20% of prison jobs

went to county residents. Many of the prison's best paid employees live across the border in Oregon, where they spend the bulk of their income and pay none of the taxes needed to pay off the prison-related debt.

To sum up the economics: in the end, prisons do little to reduce unemployment, do even less for a town's taxable sales revenues, and artificially drive up real estate prices for a brief period of time before causing them to fall. Bob Puls, who raises citrus and cattle in Tulare County, California and has helped to fight back five proposed prisons in his county in the last 15 years, said this about the "benefits" that prison industry backers promise: "Prisons produce nothing, and they buy very little from the local economy. Most prison guards don't live in prison towns. Who are they benefiting?" Not the residents of the host community.

But prisons affect more than just the local economy. They also have other effects – ones which aren't advertised by prison boosters, but which have lasting impacts on the host cities where prisons are built. One organizer from Tehachapi, California asked: "If these prisons are so great, how come Beverly Hills doesn't want one?" The reasons extend beyond jobs, growth, and real estate: prison construction has negative social and environmental consequences that no wealthy community would tolerate.

PRISON DROUGHT

Prisons use water ... lots of it. In the agricultural West and other regions where water is difficult to come by, the water that prisons use is that much more valuable because of what else it could be used for. As freelance wedding photographer Nikki Edwards of Porterville, California puts it, "You put water on a cotton field, you get cotton. You put water on a field of vines, you get grapes. You put water in a prison, you get sewage."

Example

In Avenal, California, prison officials planned to sink wells in order to develop the prison's water supply. Local farmers sued the state to prevent the prison from depleting the local aquifer, which would have increased their costs to deliver water to their crops. As a result, the court ordered the Department of Corrections to use water from a canal ("surface water") rather than groundwater. But the story doesn't end here: the prison expanded without local permission or consultation and soon held twice as many prisoners as originally planned. Because of the prison's excessive demands on surface water, the town of Avenal is left without enough water to do any new productive, commercial, industrial, agricultural or residential development. In other words, not only did the prison in Avenal seriously deplete the local water supply, the problem is so severe that it prevents the kind of economic development that

might lead to real revitalization.

SOCIAL DISORDERS

Prisons also bring with them less visible, but no less devastating, increases in domestic violence, violence in schools, and alcoholism. The increase in social disorder in prison towns can't be blamed on prisoners or their families. The prisoners are locked up and their families rarely move to the towns where their loved ones are locked up.

Example

After the High Desert Prison opened in Susanville, California, Linda McAndrews, director of Lassen Family Services, a domestic abuse and rape service provider, reported that she got 3,000 crisis calls from women in a single year. Susanville has a free-world population of 6,900. In Susanville, unlike many other prison towns, some guards do live in town.

Colleen McGrath (New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence) told Tracy Huling: "Domestic violence in law enforcement families is a subject that up until recently nobody wanted to touch....Based on self-reports [...] the rate of incidence would seem to be higher—not dramatically higher, but markedly higher."

Crescent City, California saw a substantial increase in burglaries of unoccupied homes after Pelican Bay State Prison opened. They dis-

covered that a group of guards' teenage children were responsible for the burglaries. As a juvenile probation officer in Susanville explains, "These kids [guards' kids] live in a para-military household. But they really don't have much supervision. They've got nothing to do."

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG PRISON

One of the most contentious issues about prisons in rural towns is lighting. Residents of small rural towns revel in the natural beauty of their region and most enjoy seeing the star-filled skies long forgotten in urban or suburban neighborhoods. Yet, one Wasco, California resident told us, "One of the worst things about the prison is that we lost our beautiful sunsets to the glare of the prison lights." Why? Because prisons use intensely bright lights and they burn them all night, every night.

A Susanville resident described her town before the prison and after: "I drove over Highway 36 and saw the town below us like a little constellation of stars. It was so dark all around and the town seemed to hang there in mid-air, like some fairy village. Now you see this tremendous area rimmed with horrible yellow lights — and it's all you can see."

Even as residents in Susanville and other prison towns continue to fight (so far unsuccessfully) to get back their night skies, the harm done by such powerful lighting goes well beyond ruining picturesque sunsets and postcard vistas. All living creatures, includ-

ing humans, have daily rhythms that depend on light and darkness. Migratory birds and a variety of other local species are killed or have their mating and feeding patterns seriously disrupted by the mega-bright prison lights. Agriculture suffers because 24-hour lighting interferes with the relationship between darkness and plant growth and pest control. And people who cannot get a proper night's sleep literally go crazy.

PRISON RACEWAYS, PRISON GRIDLOCK

Since it's common for prison employees to live dozens of miles away from the prison, traffic during the three shift changes is often intense by local standards. Let's say a prison has 1,000 employees (typical for California's prisons), with 80% of employees working every day. That's 800 daily trips to and from the prison. Commuters, rushing to get home, regularly speed along narrow country roads used by local cars, school buses, and agricultural equipment in prison towns. In places where air pollution is a problem, the tens of thousands of additional commuter miles ever year can make air quality even worse, increasing health risks to residents. Air pollution makes a region less attractive to productive industries that might otherwise be interested in locating in your town.

PRIVATE PRISONS: JUST AS BAD AS PUBLIC ONES

One issue we have not addressed outright until now is the question of private vs. public prisons. From what

we've heard from people like you, in prison towns or towns that have fought prisons, we've found that the differences between public and private prisons are very small. In terms of impacts on employment, impacts on the environment and impacts on local infrastructure, they are largely the same. Private prisons may have to pay property taxes, whereas public prisons do not. But many private prisons pay less in taxes than you might think. As the Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy: Good Jobs First found in their report Jail Breaks: Economic Development Subsidies Given to Private Prisons (see appendix), over 70% of private prisons received some kind of subsidy from federal, state or local governments. One third of these prisons received tax breaks. We will discuss these issues more in the handbook and also have references for resources on private and public prisons in the appendix.

RECAP

We've now gone through some of the most common claims that boosters make when they want to build a new prison, and we've given you some ideas about the arguments you can use to fight their questionable claims. But it still remains for you to provide some proof for your arguments to give them the strength to stand up to scrutiny by your opponents. You can't assume that you'll be able to convince people that you're right by giving arguments that are critical of your opponents, no matter how well you argue.



The proof, as they say, remains in the pudding. In the next chapter, we'll show you how to do some basic research to prove the arguments in this chapter — and to shape them more directly to your town's situation.

If you need help understanding any of the material in this chapter or the rest of the manual, or if you're coming up against arguments for which you don't have a good reply, give us a call or drop us an email.

**PROFITING OFF
SOMEONE ELSE'S
MISERY IS NO
KIND OF BUSINESS
FOR A HEALTHY
COMMUNITY TO
DEPEND ON.**

Communities Fight Back:

Farmersville is a small town in eastern Tulare County, California. Established in the 1860s, Farmersville, like many towns in “the valley,” is primarily an agricultural town that produces dairy, citrus, grapes, walnuts, cotton, tree fruit and alfalfa. Much smaller than its closest neighbors Visalia and Exeter, Farmersville has remained a quiet place to live and grow up. Leaving the chain stores and movie theaters to much larger and busier areas, Farmersville is a town with three main streets, one night-club, one high school, and a small volunteer library. The town has a many churches as restaurants, and you can still get a 3-bedroom/2-bath home for under \$100,000 there.

Like many of the smaller agricultural towns in the Central Valley, Farmersville has fallen on hard times over the past twenty years. With unemployment higher than 20% and an average (median) family income of about \$17,000 per year, the city watched the so-called “boom economy” of the 1990s sweep across the state from the sidelines. Because the economy has struggled here, prison officials, prison bureaucrats and pro-prison politicians have been able to turn the region into “prison alley” by persuading the city managers of many small towns like Farmersville that prisons are the best (and perhaps the only) way to bring “economic revitalization” to their towns.

But in spite of its similarities to other towns in the Central Valley, Farmersville stands out because its residents said “no.” When the City Council was considering a proposal to bring the prison industry into their town, the residents of Farmersville saw past the prison boosters’ promises of shiny new chain stores, increased employment, and more tax dollars, and recognized that these promises were largely empty. **They successfully argued that while they were for economic revitalization, they were strongly opposed to building a prison as the way to do it.** They brought together a wide cross-section of the community to oppose the proposed prison plan. And they were able to do all of this in four days.

On Thursday, September 9, 1999 a local United Farm Workers (UFW) employee learned that the following Monday the City Council was meeting to approve construction of a 550-bed prison by the Wackenhut Corporation. Wackenhut is a self-described “provider of security-related and diversified human resource services to business, industry and government agencies” whose main business is to build, staff, and run prisons. Although they are a private corporation, this story would be the same even if the prison were public, as most prisons are. After talking to the local UFW union office, the UFW organizer found the Prison Moratorium Project’s contact information on our website, and contacted us. They also began alerting local community members of the Monday meeting, who hadn’t heard about the prison proposal. By Saturday, residents were organizing with the help of sympathetic neighbors from nearby towns who had fought against prisons in the past. They spent most of Sunday in a meeting to plan who would say what to the City Council come Monday evening. One of the things they did was divide up the information from the California Prison Moratorium Project handbook “What Good Is a Prison?” so that each person could make a separate but related point about why the proposed prison would not benefit Farmersville.

On Monday night, more than 20 UFW members showed up at City Hall to oppose the prison. There, they were joined by students from Farmersville high school, who had staged a march from their school to the city offices to challenge the proposal. They all testified, in Spanish and in English, about how a prison would create problems and damage the quality of life in their town without reducing unemployment. At the same time local ranchers, led by Bob Puls, a cattle rancher from nearby Lindsey who has been fighting to keep prisons out of Tulare County for over a decade, argued that the prison would consume too much of one of the area’s most precious resources – its water. After hearing the testimony of more than 40 residents who came out to oppose the building of a prison, the City Council made two decisions, according to the local paper.

The Story of Farmersville

First, it denied Wackenhut a permit; and second, the council went on record stating that it would never approve a prison of any sort in Farmersville. Much celebration followed.

The Farmersville story shows how people saw through the prison lies and illustrates some key ideas that are important to this handbook as a whole:

Lots of different people don't want a prison in their town and are willing to fight to keep one out.

Where else are you going to find Republican ranchers and landowners standing side by side with migrant farmworkers? Or high school students with small business owners? Strange though it may seem, these are powerful coalitions precisely because the alliances are so unlikely.

When people work together to organize themselves, they have a tremendous amount of power over important decisions in the places where they live.

In only one weekend, community members of Farmersville were able to stop the prison plan dead in its tracks. Your actions (or inactions) count.

It's never too late to act.

The Farmersville story shows that no matter where your town is in its decision-making process, you still have time to start organizing.

If you oppose a prison in your town, you're not alone.

Residents who opposed prisons from nearby towns, the UFW, and Prison Moratorium Project provided their organizing support and publicity materials to help the people in Farmersville win their struggle. And more and more people are coming to the same conclusion about prisons: profiting off someone else's misery is no kind of business for a healthy community to be dependent upon.

RESEARCH



This section is an overview on how to find out the actual effects of prison siting in communities like your own. Half the work is being sure you ask the best questions. In fact, sometimes good questions alone can change the outcome of a potential prison siting.

Example

The City Manager of Mendota, a small town in California's Central Valley, approached his County's Rural Economic Development Department to ask for a \$4 million grant to improve the city's infrastructure. The town was trying to win approval to be a site for a new federal prison, and the prison boosters believed that the Federal Bureau of Prisons would give them the prison if the town could promise to build new roads, sewers, and so forth. The Director of Rural Development for the County knew that communities in the Central Valley were not prospering from state or federal prisons, and she reached out to grassroots people against the prison to find out what she should know. As a result of her inquiry, she asked the City Manager one question: How many unemployed residents of his town could expect to get the new prison jobs. The answer was ZERO. The County Rural Development Board refused to give the city a grant until the City Manager presented a real development plan that would truly benefit the town's residents.

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Research is four things everyone already does every day.

Ask good questions;

Figure out what people or source can answer your questions and patiently follow up;

Put all of the answers together to get an overview of the problem you're trying to solve;

Keep a record of how you have gathered your information so that somebody else who follows the same steps will arrive at the same answers.

You've already done research to buy a car or a television, to figure out where to get the best sandwich in town, or to find the quickest route from your house to the nearest post office. When you see research for what it really is — going through steps to arrive at the answer— then you see you do it all the time. Talking to neighbors about how they get to the post office is research. Comparing sandwiches from your two favorite restaurants is research. And telling a friend how you figured out that the TV you bought is the best deal is also part of research.

Doing research makes you an expert. It may be that your town's elected officials don't want to see you as an "expert," or that the guy who lives down the street doesn't think you're an "expert." But if you follow the four steps, it won't matter what others think. You will be an expert.

The most important quality any researcher must have is patience. That is because the people and offices with the answers to your questions are scattered far and wide. Generally they're overworked and understaffed. It takes patience to figure out where to get the things that you need. You might have to make a few phone calls to get a single answer — but that's something everyone experiences, whether questioning a utilities bill, getting information about their kid's school, or setting up a group activity for people they work with. The point is, patient researchers get the job done.

Now we're ready to move on to the step-by-step guide. And if the guidance you need is not in the pages of this handbook, please call or email us and we will help you.

DON'T ASSUME THEY'RE RIGHT AND YOU'RE WRONG.

The way to start researching to stop a prison in your town is to question each of the claimed benefits of prisons one at a time. In the previous chapter we reviewed a number of the most popular claims about prison benefits, and showed how the truth is quite different from the promises. We suggest you use those claims as a guide for your research.

You should begin your research by finding out who is for the prison and why. Don't be discouraged by big words and fancy talk. Ask boosters to say what they mean — in detail. Don't accept words like "recovery" and "revitaliza-

tion” or “economic stimulus.” Instead, ask them to say, in plain language, what they mean by these fancy words. Do they mean jobs? How many jobs? What kind of jobs? Do they mean increased sales for local businesses? How much? Over what period of time? Ask for specifics, and ask for them in writing. Never, ever take an “expert’s” view at face value. And most importantly, **always ask the person who’s making the claim how they arrived at that conclusion!**

Once you’ve identified the claims, you’ll evaluate them, one by one. How do you do this? In three easy steps:

Think through the claims to figure out what they actually mean.

Make a list of your own questions about each claim.

Find the answers to your questions.

THINK THROUGH THE CLAIMS TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY ACTUALLY MEAN.

When a booster claims a benefit, he or she believes the benefit will appear in one or more forms. For example, “economic growth” can mean lots of different things: new jobs, or new business for old or new companies, new residents who will need new housing, roads, schools, sewers, wastewater treatment, and health care. To get to the bottom of a claim, you should first **ask boosters to spell out what they mean.** Remember, though, that they won’t

necessarily give you all their reasons — they might want to save some “benefits” for a time and place when they think they can catch you unprepared. In other words, some boosters act in good faith, and some don’t. Don’t be surprised to encounter both kinds of folks.

Once you’ve gotten prison supporters to explain what they mean by each claim, figure out which of the proposed benefits is likely to seem important to other residents of your town. You might find this out by reading the newspaper, or writing a letter to the editor to see who responds, or just talking with a group of neighbors, or coworkers, or people from your house of worship about the problem as you see it. Talking things over in some way will help you figure out which research to do first. It will also help you gather a research team — which is to say people like you who want to know what is really likely to happen if a prison gets built in your hometown.

Once you figure out what boosters actually mean by their claims move on to step two.

MAKE A LIST OF YOUR OWN QUESTIONS ABOUT EACH CLAIM.

A prison is a city. What are the effects of putting a small city (a prison) next to another small city (your home town)? The federal and state governments have built so many prisons during the past twenty years that there is now a lot of information out there you

can use to find out just what the effects of a second city right next to yours will be. This research boils down to two tasks: figure out *who* to ask and *what* to ask them.

To begin, make a worksheet for each question to guide your research (see the sample worksheet at the back of this handbook). A worksheet helps you get organized by helping you figure out what you already know, what you still need to find out, and where you learned what you know (whether the source was reliable or not). Also, when people ask how they can get involved, you can give them research worksheets and ask them to answer particular questions.

In thinking of the questions to ask, you should be creative. Remember, you **will** find the answers to the questions you ask. Therefore, you should ask the questions that make a difference to you and your fellow residents as you consider what a prison will do to the place where you make your home. For example, you might decide that most residents think that any new development in town should include better child- or elder-care. Or you might want to know whether a town with a new prison has more activities and work opportunities for teenagers to take advantage of.

As with much of this work, it helps to do it collectively. One really smart person trying to come up with all the questions after a full day’s work is going to be less effective than 10 tired people focused on the same task. More heads means more ideas, more input, more

possibility to cover all your bases. Take advantage of the group.

We have provided a list of questions to get you started. Doubtless you'll be coming up with many more topics and questions that apply more specifically to your town. Remember to involve your friends and neighbors. Keep up on other people's thoughts and concerns about the prison. The more people you talk to, the more chances you'll have to hear about what issues are important to your community. Add these issues to your research list. If you can't think of original questions do two things: begin with the ones we've provided, and use them as a base to come up with new questions. If you still can't figure out what else to ask about, give us a call.

Remember, find out from the people you ask how they arrived at their answers. A good researcher will never just rely on the word of a so-called "expert," no matter how qualified she/he seems to be.

When you've challenged each prison booster's claim by coming up with good questions, you can push forward to step three.

FIND ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS YOU ASK.

The level of detail you get for the questions you ask depends on how patient you are, how much time you have, and what you want to do with the information. Sometimes, a good, focused question, and a general answer, will lead you to all the information you need.

Here are some questions to ask about the most common issues that concern residents about a proposed prison. Because building a new prison is really just like building a new city next to yours, many parts of your town will be affected.

Jobs

- What kind of jobs are they?
- What are the average qualifications of people who get such jobs?
- Are the average qualifications higher than the minimum requirements for the jobs?
- How many jobs are being promised to local residents?
- Can a town demand that jobs be reserved for current residents?
- Can a town or prison require non-resident employees to move to the town?

Businesses

- What kinds of business activity do prisons support?
- Does the prison itself spend money locally?
- How much? And on what? (If they don't put utilities at the top of the list, somebody isn't telling the truth).
- What goods/services are purchased outside the local area?
- Do employees spend money locally? On what?

New business activity

- Do new businesses work side-by-side with existing ones, like mom and pop restaurants, grocers, auto parts stores, and so on?
- Or, do small, local businesses close up because of new chain stores?
- Do chains leave as much money in the local community as locally owned businesses do?
- How much? What percentage?

Residential growth

- Will the prison increase the town's population?
- How?
- And by how much?

Environment

The environment is where we live, work, learn, and play. A new prison will produce air pollution and affect the environment in other ways. What is the current status of your environment?

- Is your current environment important for what already happens in your area – such as recreation, agriculture, or the ordinary enjoyment you take from living where you live?
- What will adding a small city to your town do to the environment?
- How will you benefit from, or be harmed by, the changes?

Health Care

- Are the existing doctors, nurses, therapists, hospitals, and clinics adequate for your community?
- Will the prison increase the health care capacity of your town, or dilute the health care for folks both inside and outside of the prison?

Roads

New houses and businesses and, especially, the prison itself, will automatically create a great strain on current infrastructure.

- How many more roads will be required?
- Where will they run?
- Who pays to build them?
- Who pays to maintain them?
- Will roads have to be widened or new traffic signals added to accommodate more cars on the road?

Traffic

- If more people live in your town, or if new employees work in your town but live elsewhere, what happens in terms of road congestion?
- What does increased traffic mean for the safety of children going to and from school and activities?
- Air pollution?
- Traffic control? Will a new prison require new police officers to ensure safe roads at rush hour/shift change?

Schools

- Are your schools currently adequate?
- Will the prison increase enrollments if the children of the prison staff enroll?
- If so, by how much?
- Who pays to increase school size?
- How will these increases be implemented without a drop in educational quality?

Sewers

- How much more sewage will be produced by the prison?
- By new businesses?
- Who pays to develop more capacity?
- Who pays to maintain it?

Water

- How much of an increase in water use will the prison cause?
- Is there enough good water to support a swelling in the population?
- What is the timeframe they're using to make their calculations and forecasts?
- If the water supply got strained, what other options would people have?
- Will wastewater be recycled?
- Who will pay?

Example

In El Centro, California, concerned community members challenged

the claim that skilled nurses would move to their town to work in the proposed prison. By contacting the state Department of Health and Human Services, community members learned that the entire state suffers from an acute shortage of nurses. So it was unlikely that a new prison would lead to a significant increase in qualified health care professionals when such individuals were so scarce throughout the state. As a result, many others joined in opposition to the prison because they did not want to jeopardize the health of school children and elderly retirement home residents.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

You can begin to seek out the answers to your questions by making contact with communities that have prisons that were built in the past twenty years (prisons constructed before 1984 were built under very different conditions). We have met community groups that sent small delegations to towns with a prison to see and hear with their own eyes and ears. This is a great way to begin your research. Likewise, it is also a good idea to contact folks who have kept prisons out of their town. How do you find such communities? The easiest way is to contact us at Prison Moratorium Project.

Touring a Prison Town

Once you've found a town to visit, put your question worksheets on a clipboard and take a tour. Look at the



**RESEARCHING
HOW TO STOP A PRISON
BEGINS WITH QUESTIONING
EACH OF THE CLAIMED BENEFITS OF PRISONS,
ONE AT A TIME.**

downtown, travel the streets, visit the prison, ask all your questions. For example, ask the guards where they live. Ask the business people along Main Street what benefit they think they've gotten from the prison. Also ask them how the businesses in town have changed over time. Are there more? Fewer? And over how many years did these changes take place? Make a note of the answers you get on your worksheets. Also, take along some blank worksheets to use in case new questions come up.

If the town you decide to visit has a newspaper, the editor will generally be an excellent source of information. The editor will be able to recall what the arguments for and against the prison were, and will know about the current opportunities and problems in the town. She or he will probably know who led both the support and opposition to the prison and might even have an idea about how to contact these individuals.

Still, you'll want more sources of information, since with more information you will get a more complete picture of what has happened in that town since the prison was built. If the town has a senior center, you might want to start there. Often, retired people pay the closest attention to what is going on around them. The high school principal will have a sense about changes in the size of the local schools, as well as about changes in employment opportunities for teenagers and recent graduates. Go to service at local places of worship. If the opportunity arises, talk

to people on the street. A random citizen of the town may have ideas that no other organization or individual you have plans to meet with would ever tell you. And the Chamber of Commerce, generally a pro-prison organization, will be able to tell you of the comings and goings of businesses since the prison was sited.

When asking questions about jobs, businesses, poverty, and other indicators of changing prosperity, **you have to get at least two answers to each question:**

What was the situation two years before the prison opened (it takes about two years from when a prison site is approved to when the prison opens)

What is the situation today?

MEASURING CHANGES IN PRISON TOWNS

Alright, you know what kinds of things you want to find out about (jobs, sales, population, etc.). But how do you find a trustworthy method for finding these things out, short of relying on somebody else's (perhaps questionable) expertise? And how do you do it in such a way that your answers will stand up to the inevitable scrutiny from the prison's boosters? A general rule of thumb is to compare information from two years before the prison was built to two years after, as well as the present. That way you are evaluating a period of time that would be long enough to show any significant changes that

occurred since the prison was built.

We'll take on some of the most common measures of change one at a time.

Jobs

How do you measure jobs? A few ways. A good question to begin asking is always: what was the unemployment rate in the town two years before the prison opened? What is the current unemployment rate? You can get those numbers from city hall, or the county employment development office, or the state labor department. The information is a few short phone calls away.

But you will also want to know who got jobs at the prison and whether or not prison workers live in the local community. Sometimes the prison human resources office will give you a zip-code list of employees, which will simply show you who lives locally. In California, fewer than one out of five prison jobs of any kind goes to people who already lived in the host community. And the people who get the remaining 80% of jobs don't move to the town. They make their homes elsewhere.

Businesses

Again, a town's local Chamber of Commerce can tell you about the comings and goings of member businesses. That won't be everybody, but it will give you a general idea of change over time. It is always important to ask people to describe the differences between new and old businesses in terms of ownership (Independent, Chain, or

Franchise?) so you can get an idea of how much of the revenue that circulates through the place is likely to benefit the town as a whole rather than a remote owner.

Business activity

There are different ways to measure business activity, and the way you do it depends on where you live. If you live in a place with sales tax, then your job is relatively straightforward:

You will first want to ask whether the host community's per capita sales tax totals have risen or fallen, and whether that change has been the same as or different from the county or state as a whole. Remember the general rule, and compare two years before the prison is built to two years after, as well as the present.

The state office in charge of sales tax revenues can usually provide you with the answers to these questions, though it will likely take a while to get a report. Try to be patient. And push this to the top of your list of answers to get, to give yourselves plenty of lead-time.

In addition, you can often find students or faculty at local colleges or universities, especially in departments of planning, economics, or rural sociology, who have access to this kind of information and who will probably figure out the answers for you at no charge. We can try to help you find somebody to do this if you ask.

Whether you have sales tax or not, another question to ask is what the total size of local payroll is. This is also a question that a nearby planning, economics, or rural sociology department could help you answer.

Poverty

This is actually a hard one. In recent years, the definition and eligibility criteria for family assistance has changed so dramatically that the answer to a question about poverty can be quite misleading. How so? Well, it's very likely that the way they counted poverty in 1995 was very different than how they count it now. So comparing 1995 poverty rates to current ones won't give you an accurate picture of poverty in the host community.

It might be the case that the number of welfare caseloads in a particular town has dropped since the prison opened, but that drop might be because people lost their eligibility for benefits rather than because they got jobs at, or related to, the prison. With the Federal government's push to move people off of welfare, such declines in official poverty numbers are not uncommon. You can, however, find out how many children in the school district are eligible for subsidized lunches, and how that number has changed over time. Also, you can look at the changes in the percentage of folks who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The answer won't be perfect, but it will give you a sense of how well or poorly low-income households are doing in the community.

Residential and Commercial Construction

By driving around a town you can see if new construction is happening. You can also ask realtors in the area how housing and other real property stock and prices have changed over the time period you're wondering about. Realtors can also give you a sense of how rents have changed over time. Be sure to ask whether rising rents have kept pace with, lagged behind, or outstripped the change in sale prices for comparable real estate. If rents are higher, but house prices have fallen, that means low-income people in the community are worse-off than they were, while elderly and retired people who own homes might be in worse condition as well (see the previous chapter's discussion about real estate values). You should also look at building permits, to see how many of the projects that filed permits were actually completed.

Infrastructure

Since a prison is a city, it needs all the stuff every city needs: roads, sewers, wastewater treatment plants, power plants, etc. New facilities will have to be built. Local resources (especially water) may not support the huge increases in utilities that prisons demand. And someone will always have to pay for such increases. For this reason, your worksheets should *always* include questions about who paid for the infrastructural development, who has paid to maintain it since it was developed, how they paid for it, and what the repayment plan is on any loans.

Environment

Everything we've covered so far, plus more, can reasonably fit into this category. In a sense, "environment" means pretty much everything — what your town looks like, how it operates, what impact it has on the surrounding region, and how it supports the lives of those who live in it. When you ask questions about the environment, what you're trying to get at is how a prison will enhance or degrade life for all living things in your town — which means not just the human residents of your town, but your town's representatives from the animal and plant kingdoms as well. Insofar as one of the important benefits of living in a small, rural area lies in your proximity to and connection with the natural surroundings, questions about the environment are neither unimportant nor secondary.

Example

Concerned community members from Hartford County, Maryland decided to visit a prison town to find out what the future might hold for them. At the prison, they noticed that at sunset all the prison's guards put on their sunglasses — to shield their eyes from the glare of the prison's bright lights, which burn throughout the night, each night. What a way to learn that prisons are never dark, and that communities where prisons are sited lose the night sky! And yet, if you don't ask these questions about the environment, you might never know of such consequences until it's too late, and your new,

280-acre neighbor steals your night sky from you.

Besides talking to local residents and using your own eyes, ears, and noses, you should try to get copies of environmental impact reports, if any exist, for any prison host-city. These reports are written before a prison is built, and they predict what the effect of a prison will be on the environment, and sometimes the economy too. You can compare the **estimated** impact to what has actually happened since the prison was built. Beware that these reports are long and complex, mostly written for "specialists" in the field. We can help you sort through them if you need it. To track down these reports, try contacting local libraries, newspapers, city councils, or the state or federal bureau of prisons.

RECAP

All right, so now you're ready to go off and turn yourself into an expert on your town's possible future. Next, we'll turn from the subject of research to the meat and potatoes of your campaign to stop the prison in your town organizing fellow residents to stop it. It's no good to have spectacular research if you have no way of getting the word out to your neighbors and convincing them that you're not just a busy-body trying to make trouble for your town's elected officials.

Guidelines for research

We have filled in some example questions to give you an idea of how to use this sort of worksheet. The worksheet is only a guide for you to develop a helpful way for you to organize the information you find. All examples are fictitious. The worksheet answers the basic questions:

- What you need to know about about a claim
- Where you'll get the answers
- What you found, including sources and dates
- Additional information you need to find

CLAIM I AM INVESTIGATING

The prison is a cost effective industry for the City of Mendota.

QUESTION

What are the associated costs to building a prison in Mendota?

WHERE I WILL FIND THE ANSWER:

Mendota city planners, the Environmental Impact Report for the project, City Manager, public utility and service officials, city officials in Delano who have already built a prison and are building another.

WHAT I FOUND

The EIR says that Mendota will need more power than the city has capacity for right now, and it does not say those costs will be covered by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

WHERE AND WHEN I GOT THE ANSWER

Draft Environmental Impact Report, page 60.

NEW PIECES OF INFORMATION I NEED TO FIND

How much power does Mendota have capacity to supply right now, how much power a typical prison use, and how much maintenance and construction costs of such a power supply run.

WHAT I FOUND

The city planner I interviewed said there would significant impacts on traffic because of all the commuters who will work on the prison and be driving through town. This makes new roads out to the prison necessary

WHERE AND WHEN I GOT THE ANSWER

Interview with City Planner, 5/28/04.

NEW PIECES OF INFORMATION I NEED TO FIND

How much does it cost to build new roads.

ORGANIZING *the opposition*



WHAT IS ORGANIZING AND HOW DO I DO IT?

Having the facts and knowing your allies are a couple of very important steps in the fight against a new prison. Now you've got to figure out how to use these tools to do a few other important things: spread the word so that more people in your town will be informed, increase the number of people who agree with you and are willing to help out, create and carry out a strategy to keep the prison out, and use the local and regional news media to cover your side of the issue. When put together and done well, these four things are "organizing". We can't guarantee that organizing will keep a prison out of your town, but we can guarantee that if you don't do it, you will lose your opportunity to influence the decision.

Just as with research, what you might lack in experience, you can make up for with commitment and perseverance. At bottom, organizing is really about only two things — communication and persuasion — with a good dose of creativity thrown in. In this chapter, we've laid out many of the basics for organizing. As you begin to organize, you'll find that some of what we've suggested doesn't apply to your situation or that it doesn't work in your town, and you will develop your own strategies that weren't mentioned in this handbook. We hope that you will let us know what did and didn't work for you, so that we can make future versions of this handbook better. With that, let's talk about the pieces of organizing. A lot of what's in this chapter comes from

Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s by the Midwest Academy.

CALLING AND HOLDING MEETINGS

Meetings are the basic building-block of any organizing campaign. Meetings are the place where community members come together to meet one another, make plans for a campaign, make decisions on goals, and determine how they can achieve those goals. They are the places where people new to the issue find out what you're all about. And, they are the place where people begin to see the power that they have simply by coming together in common cause and letting others know about it. This may seem a little on the touchy-feely side for some of you, but you'll have to keep in mind that one of the most common reasons for inaction is isolation. Your job as an organizer is to make sure that no one in your town feels isolated from the debate around the new prison.

Having said that, many examples of successful organizing against prison construction in California have started with just one or two people, meeting over coffee and talking about why they do and do not want a prison in their community. These informal discussions can develop into campaigns and meetings that bring the force of the community together to fight for common goals and a common vision for their town. Because meetings are so important, we thought we'd talk a little about how to hold one, how to get things accom-

plished once you've gathered, and some logistical stuff for making them run smoothly.

Goals

First, **every meeting should have a goal**. It is important for participants to feel like they are accomplishing something toward their overall goals. For instance, an initial meeting to stop a prison might have the goal of developing a plan for the campaign to stop the prison, finding ways for community members to express their opposition, finding avenues for directing that opposition, and making a timeline for implementing those actions. Or a meeting might focus on the subject of how to bring more people in the community into the campaign. Keep your goals simple at first. While you all, ultimately, want the same thing (no prison), you'll get there through the many small steps you take as a group. There's no sense rushing ahead if the group isn't ready, since your greatest strength is in the group itself.

- Have you set concrete, realistic goals?
- Have you made sure that your goals allow everyone to participate?

Logistics

Meetings should be held in places that are comfortable and familiar to the folks you want in attendance. It doesn't work to hold a meeting at a spacious community center if it's not a convenient distance for the majority of the residents in your town or for the groups

you hope to draw to a particular meeting. Here are some other things to consider:

- Newsprint and markers
- Easel and chalkboard
- Outlets for audio-visual equipment
- Sign-in sheets and table
- Refreshments
- Microphone set-ups
- Have you arranged for childcare?
- Do you have transportation for those who need it?
- Do you have a plan to increase your turnout and enough people making calls to insure a good turnout?
- Do you have a system for comparing those who said they would come with those who actually come?

As you plan your meeting, it can help to determine roles for people already involved in the campaign. For instance, every meeting should have a chairperson — someone who helps to develop the agenda of the meeting, encourages everyone to participate in the meeting, and directs discussion towards making decisions or accomplishing particular goals.

Though it may not always be convenient, it's best to change the chairperson from meeting to meeting. Chairing a meeting is a leadership opportunity, and by giving many members of your group the opportunity to be the chairperson, you will build your group's

capacity to lead. This leadership experience will be important as your group grows. For instance, if a single person has always chaired your meetings, when your group becomes sufficiently large to split into two subgroups, there will be no other person with chairing experience to take over with the new subgroup. Chairing a meeting is also an opportunity to practice public speaking — something you'll want many of your members to have some experience with. In the end, each aspect of the work you do to stop the prison is some kind of opportunity to increase your group's ability to act and organize. The stronger the skills of the entire group are (as opposed to the skills of a single or select few individuals), the stronger are your chances for success. Have you asked people to serve as the:

- Chairperson/facilitator?
- Note-taker?
- Timekeeper?
- Presenters?
- Tone-setters — to open and close meetings?
- Greeters — to welcome people and get names, phone numbers, addresses and e-mails?

Many of the small towns in California that have faced a prison have a significant population of non-English speakers (and English-only elected officials). By holding meetings exclusively in English or forgetting to accommodate other languages, you may be cutting yourself off from a potentially rich source of support for your campaign. In doing so, you'd be repeating exactly

what prison officials and their supporters do in virtually every attempt to build a new prison. They figure, the fewer people involved in the debate, the easier to control the debate — and they're right. More people joining your group will increase your chances for success.

Other considerations

- Is the site familiar, accessible, representative and adequate?
- Are the date and time good for those you want to attend?
- Do you have a chairperson for the meeting? Has the chairperson been involved in preparing the agenda or been fully briefed?
- Do you have adequate translation for non-English speakers?

Agendas

You can think of an agenda as something like a script. Try to imagine how much you'd get done as the director of a multi-million dollar movie without a script. Not very much. Similarly, meetings need agendas to make them efficient. When you create an agenda, consider beginning the meeting by presenting a particular proposal for the group to act on. It is a good way to make your meeting move toward concrete goals, to generate discussion, and to keep large gatherings manageable. Imagine a small community group that has made headway in its effort to convince a city council member that a new prison will not bring any of the promised benefits to their community. The group sponsors a meeting and invites the council member. Because a large

number of people attend and there is no clear agenda, the meeting deteriorates into a shouting match and the opportunity to gain an elected official's support is lost. Score one for the prison supporters.

- Does the agenda:
 - Accomplish your agreed-upon goals?*
 - Encourage commitment and involvement?*
 - Provide visible leadership roles?*
- Do you need:
 - Printed agendas?*
 - Background materials?*
 - Proposals?*
 - Assignments*

A key component to a meeting is determining what steps need to be taken next and who will do what. This can be done either by assigning and/or asking for volunteers for particular tasks or by creating "workgroups" to handle various aspects of a campaign. If your group is large enough, you might have workgroups for research, fundraising, outreach and canvassing, media, and many others. However you organize your tasks, be sure to leave plenty of time at meetings to go over actions and split up responsibilities for tasks. When you end your meetings, make sure everyone is crystal clear about:

- Who will do what tasks?
- How long will each task take?
- Who else will help?

SETTING A STRATEGY

A strategy is a plan to getting to your goal. It is about understanding who can help you achieve your goal, and who will be opposed to what you are doing. It is also the "how" part of the organizing equation — How will you win? What will you need to do in order to win? Will you pressure city council and other local government agencies to cancel the hosting of the prison through media work and attending hearings? Will you hold a demonstration? Who will get in your way and what kind of power do they have? How can you win opponents to your side, and with what arguments?

More than any other part of the anti-prison work you will do, strategies depend upon the specifics of your situation. While the details of organizing change from community to community, there are some general guidelines that we can refer to for meetings, outreach, fundraising and media that we can be reasonably sure you will use in your community. But strategy is a little trickier — it always depends upon the specifics of a situation. The fact that someone in your group is a good friend with one of the city council members might play an important role in your strategy. Or maybe your kid punched the City Manager's kid in the mouth a couple years ago, so she/he won't be your ally. The point is that strategizing

is hard to teach and almost impossible to learn by memorizing a set of rules.

Having said that, we don't want to leave you without any advice. Here are some things you can do to make sure your strategizing is effective:

- Assume everything will take longer than you think.
- Murphy's Law is, as usual, in full effect: Anything that could possibly go wrong will go wrong. Always have a backup plan.
- Never over-commit yourself to any one particular strategy. When circumstances change, you should be able to change your strategy along with them...
- ... Which means you should strategize and re-strategize. Make a habit of re-examining your campaign strategy at regular intervals.
- With changes in goals will come changes in strategy.
- In general, strategies that rely upon the strengths of the group will be more sound than strategies that depend upon the work of individuals.

As with everything else in a campaign that has a definite end-point, timing is always important. So make sure to ask yourselves these key questions when putting together a campaign strategy:

What is the schedule for implementing the plan to build the prison?

How and when will you intervene in the plan?

What tasks will need to happen and in what order?

FINDING AND DEVELOPING ALLIES

While it may be obvious, the importance of allies bears repeating in the organizing context. The more people you have on your side, the more likely you are to stop a prison from being built in your town. Broad support for keeping a prison out of town translates into real political power. While there are many different kinds of allies, we're going to focus on the two most likely to be the bread and butter of your group — residents just like yourselves and other organizations.

Outreach

Outreach is basically talking to people, over and over and over. While it is a crucial part of any effective campaign, it is often the most time-consuming and basic part of your organizing efforts. To get a lot of people to hear your message and agree with you, you have to start at the beginning — letting them know what is going on. As you

get people interested, you can let them know what they can do to help out. Be creative in finding different ways for people to become involved in the campaign. There will be people who cannot be involved in everyday planning but would come to a protest. Those people will be important when it comes time to show city officials how much support you have, and they need to be kept in the loop about your actions.

A general plan for outreach often starts by getting basic information to as many people as possible, and following up with those people. As more people become involved, your network will expand, and you will start to build a circle of organizers and a circle of supporters. Always use the connections the members of your group have to conduct outreach in new places. If some of you work at the local high school, have those people make announcements at staff meetings. If some of you are in the Parent-Teacher Association for the elementary school, make announcements there.

When building a mental picture of the various connections the members of your group have to other groups, it is important to think about who you are trying to reach and what the best way is to reach them. You may have to use different strategies for different audiences. Making announcements at meetings may be effective for one community, but going door-to-door may be necessary to get another community on board. Maybe everyone attends church, and by getting the support of the churches you will get the support of

everyone involved. Maybe a lot of people in your town work for one employer, and getting the workers there to support you would be really important. Do a lot of people speak another language besides English? Try to find leaders in communities of all language groups, so that you can reach out to all of your potential supporters.

Doing outreach is like offering an opportunity to everyone you talk to — it's about making people excited, mad, curious, and giving them a place to focus these emotions. Always leave your contact information and the date, time and location of the next meeting so people feel like there is some action to be taken. Here are a few first steps to doing outreach that you may be able to use or modify in your town:

- **Develop a flier that sets out your basic reasons why a prison is a bad idea:**

Are the points short and easy to read? Do they let people know why they should care about the prison? Is it visually striking....will your flier catch people's eye? Do you have contact numbers in an obvious place so people know who to call if they want more information? Does your flier suggest a next step, like attending one of your meetings or a town hall meeting?

- **Distribute your flier:**

Everywhere. Hand out fliers at places that receive a lot of foot traffic — popular stores, local shows or fairs. Put them up on bulletin boards, in schools, at City Hall, in

the library – anywhere that you can pin it up, pin it.

- **Sign everyone up:**

At every meeting and every time you talk to someone, get contact information so you can let them know about other things you are organizing. Keep a master list of all the phone numbers or emails you have.

- **Call everyone on your list:**

Call them when you have a meeting or when you have a large event taking place. Send out a mass email. Remember, however, that although emails are a good way to let a lot of people know what is going on quickly, many people do not have email access.

Coalitions

Another way that you can strengthen the influence of your group is to join with other groups engaged in common or overlapping causes. When two groups come together in common cause we call this a coalition. Why form them? Because two groups are better than one. Because building a coalition might effectively increase your group's membership. And because coalitions have the power to reach many more individuals with their message than do individual groups.

The state of New York was developing plans to build a new youth prison in upstate New York. Youth and adult activists from New York City, who were

trying to curb the incarceration of youth (the vast majority of whom came from a few neighborhoods throughout New York City) began to look at intervening in order to force the state to fund youth programs rather than youth prisons. At the same time, residents of Bainbridge, one of the upstate towns targeted for the siting of the prison, began organizing against the prison. Soon thereafter, urban youth activists and the rural residents of Bainbridge joined forces, demanding that the \$75 million that the prison would have cost be spent on real economic development in rural New York and real programs, jobs and housing. In May of 2002, under the pressure of the coalition and their organizing work, New York State removed the prison from the budget.

This alliance may seem unlikely, but remember: prisons benefit no one, so potential allies are everywhere. As the Farmersville story demonstrates, it is important to think about what you have in common with other people that you can use to unite people for a common good.

Just as with strategizing, there are no hard and fast rules for building coalitions. You take them where you can find them and use them to further your goals. The important thing to keep in mind here is that you should always be looking to form coalitions. With so many potential negatives involved with a prison, there will be any number of potential groups that might want to join in coalition with you — organizations of parents worried about increased traffic, farmers concerned

Here is an example of a petition local organizers put together as part of an on-going campaign against a federal prison in the small town of Mendota, California.

We, the residents of Mendota, demand that the City Council and Mayor cease all proposal negotiations with the Federal Bureau of Prison to build a federal prison in our community. We demand that the City Council and Mayor immediately run front-page advertisements in the Mendota Newspaper and all other Fresno county Spanish and English media notifying all residents of the March 8, 2004 deadline for comments to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

We, the residents of Mendota and Fresno County demand that new hearings be held regarding the proposed prison in Mendota, after the publication of a new environmental impact report fully in Spanish. We demand that these and all hearings concerning prison construction in and around Fresno County be conducted in at least both Spanish and English. We challenge all levels of government, Local, State and Federal elected officials, to extend fair and timely notification to all the residents of Fresno County and Mendota so that concerned citizens can plan to address environmental justice issues concerning the building of excessive prisons in Fresno County and the surrounding Central Valley.

with the loss of groundwater, environmentalists who want to prevent the loss of native habitat for wildlife, etc.

Because the prison will help almost no one and will harm many, almost everyone is a potential ally and the possibilities for creating new coalition partners is unlimited.

Publicity

A major factor in your success will be how well you get the word out to as many people as you can. You can think of this as educating your neighbors, as publicity, as public relations, or as selling your ideas. However you imagine it, you must inform more people about the real effects of the proposed prison and convince them to take action.

It is useful to think of every part of the campaign in terms of publicity or education value. **When you're stuck about what to do next or how to choose among a list too long to finish, ask which actions will get the word out most effectively.** When planning any sort of activity, think about how to use it to publicize the campaign.

There are dozens of creative ways to get out the word: putting up signs in people's yards and businesses; printing up T-shirts with slogans; hanging banners across the fronts of buildings; and holding parties, concerts, and speeches. But before we talk about any of the means of getting your message out, let's spend a minute talking about your message.

First, who are you? It is fine to speak for yourself, but it's also useful to have an organizational identity. A name should catch people's eye and imagina-

tion and tell them a little about you and/or the campaign. Stop This Outrageous Prison (STOP) is one example from a group in rural California.

Second, spend a little time defining your group. Who are you? The Education not Incarceration Coalition defines itself like this:

Education Not Incarceration is a group of teachers, parents, students, and community members who are outraged by the current cuts in education funding. We believe that the state budget needs to prioritize education funding, as well as funding for other important social services, over increased spending on prisons.

Try to express a positive message in your group's definition. You're not just against a prison. You are residents who want to see development with real benefit to the community.

Third, you need to develop your coalition's key talking point. A talking point is a simple, one or two sentence statement which summarizes the arguments against the prison in as straightforward a manner as possible. Here are a couple of examples:

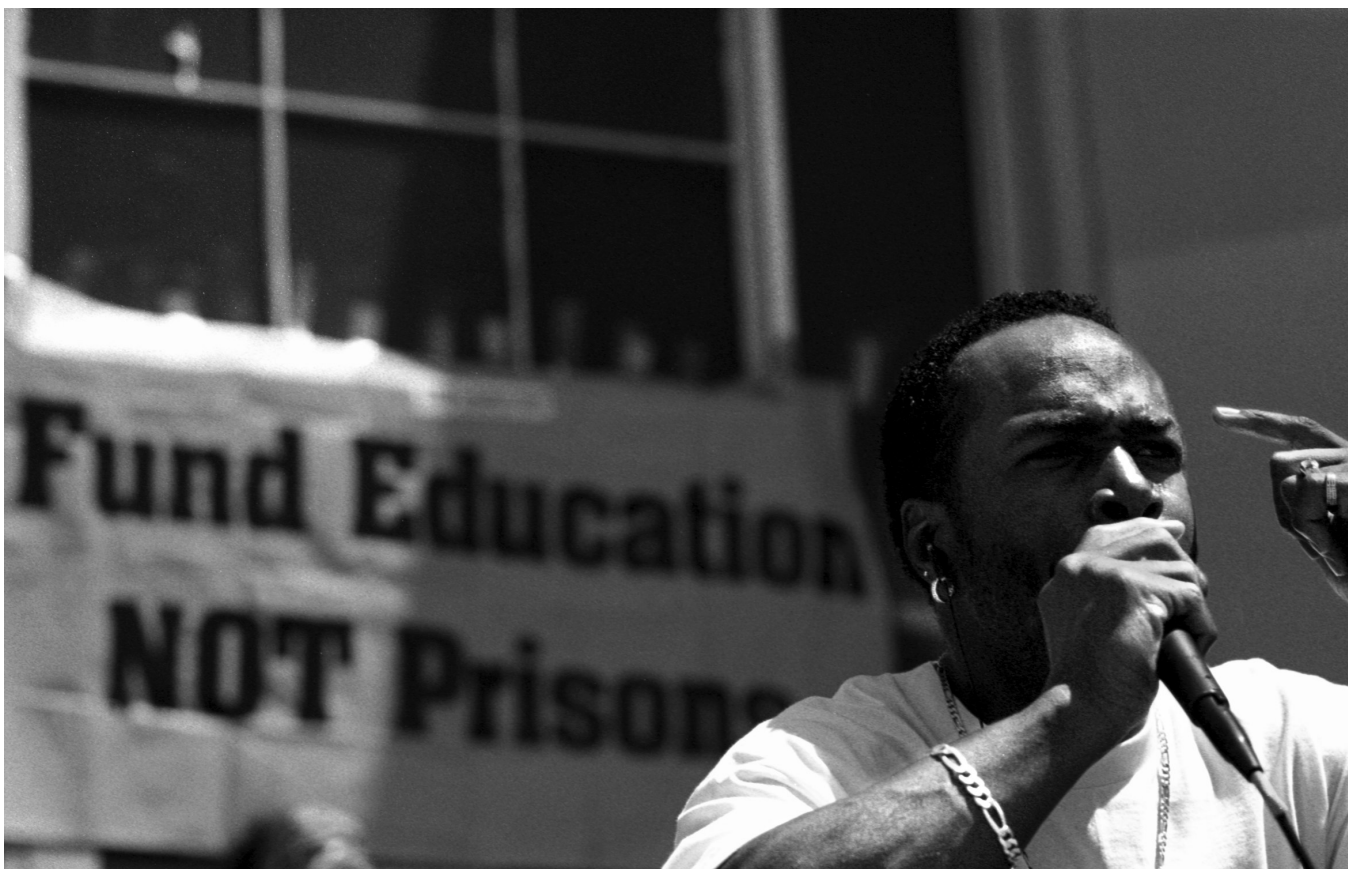
Studies show that local residents won't get most jobs at the prison, and that most of the people who get them won't live here.

The proposed prison will cost the city/county \$X million in infrastructure improvements, which won't benefit any local residents.

You should put together a list of talking points and pass them out to members of your group.

Now that you have a name, an identity, and a message, you're ready to blast that message out. Some of your outreach, especially in the early stages, will be one-on-one or in small groups that you invite to lunch or coffee, to the park, or to your home. That's how you pull together your initial organizing group. Later in the campaign, you'll still do one-on-one outreach, especially to individuals who you've identified as potentially very useful to have as part of the coalition — perhaps your group doesn't yet include a local farmer or rancher and you think other ranchers would hear the message more readily from one of their own. Or maybe you don't have any Spanish speakers to do outreach to residents who are not comfortable speaking in English.

As important as those small-scale encounters are, you also have to reach out to larger groups. One of the most effective ways to do that is to use local and regional media. Get TV or radio to report on the proposed prison. Get newspapers to write stories about your group. Use public meetings to raise your views in front of the media. Go on talk radio and local TV interview shows to talk about the proposed prison.



***A PRISON WILL HELP ALMOST NO ONE AND
WILL HARM MANY...***

***...ALMOST EVERYONE IS A POTENTIAL
ALLY IN YOUR FIGHT.***

The media is a powerful tool both in local campaigns to stop specific prisons, as well as in the long-term work of changing the “terms of debate” about prisons in this country. Often times, the myths about prisons and the “benefits” of prisons are the prevailing message in the media, whether in local papers and radio or in the national media. In your efforts to gain publicity, you can move the issue in a direction you would like it to go. For instance, if a prison is presented as a solution to hard economic times and a quick solution for jobs, you can move the debate to the issue of what *kind* of jobs will be generated. Activists all across the country have effectively used the media to educate the public about the real effects of prisons on rural and urban communities. Rather than thinking of the media as friend or enemy, you might consider how you can best use it to further your goals. Therefore, an organizer’s job is not just to make the media cover her or his issue, but to create and implement a plan for using the media.

It’s helpful to think about all of your organizing work as a publicity campaign. In a way, what you’re doing is trying to convince people of your point of view. Every time you call a friend, potential ally, or elected official, pass out a flyer at a meeting, or make a sign, you’re doing publicity. In other words, you’re presenting your views to other people, and making a case for why they should agree with you. So every time you communicate with people, it’s important that your information is easy to understand. It’s also important that the information and arguments you

make are consistent with your final goals

GETTING THE MEDIA ONBOARD

In order to get the local media to even cover your story in the first place, you have to convince them that your campaign is newsworthy. It’s not helpful to just call the local newspaper and say, “There is a meeting where the City Council is going to discuss whether or not to build a prison.” They’ll think to themselves: “So? Why should someone come for that? Don’t those kinds of meetings happen all the time?” Instead, you need to present whatever newsworthy event is taking place from a certain angle – a “hook” – something that would catch the media’s interest.

What sorts of things make a good “hook”? One way is to connect your local story to a larger problem, that is, show how something happening right in your own community is an example of a national issue. For instance, you can focus on how prisons get sited just like hazardous waste facilities — in poor, rural, and seemingly “powerless” communities, underneath the public’s radar. Or, if a local politician, who supports the prison, has some kind of conflict of interest (for example, he owns a construction company that would likely get a contract to help build the prison), that could be a potential hook for talking about the lack of accountability and lack of democratic decision-making that happens in the process of siting a prison. Those sorts of hooks can help your story have “legs,” bringing the media back to it over and over. For

many local papers, the fact that a group of local residents is opposing a project can be enough, especially if they know there will be multiple people speaking

in public. If you want to draw TV coverage, give them something visual to shoot — banners, posters, signs, T-shirts, puppets. At any public event to which you’ve invited the press, make sure to have some of your group members easily identifiable as “press contacts.” These are people who the media can approach and interview. Remember your talking points and repeat them. Are there other short term goals for any particular event? Can you use the press to announce your next meeting?

It will be worth your while to spend some time putting together a media list — newspapers, radio and TV stations, local, county-wide, regional and so on. What papers do people in your town read? People in the county seat? National media can be helpful too. When *The Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* wrote major stories about the Delano II prison, the campaign got a big boost.

However, reporters are just like everyone else in this world. You need to have a relationship with your local media if you want to get really complete, consistent coverage. This requires a little background work. First, identify what reporters and editors cover the kinds of stories you will be pitching. If your strategy is to highlight the backroom politics of the prison deal, look through the papers for a few weeks and identify writers who cover similar stories.

Second, cultivate a relationship with these reporters and editors. If you tell them you have a great "human interest" story and they should cover the town meeting next week on the prison siting, call them afterwards and follow up with them. Call them and thank them if they came, and ask them if they have any other questions. Just like you build a relationship with the allies in your struggle, build a relationship with specific members of the press.

Press Releases

One of the most important forms of getting the media's attention is by issuing a press release. You should put out a release around a newsworthy event, like a big meeting, or a demonstration. You need to think carefully about what kind of event you are hoping to draw the press to, and if you realistically expect reporters to come. The release should pitch your issue, incorporating all your hooks and strategies as reasons why this particular event is a great news story. Here are some quick tips to guide your press release.

- Is the release on organizational letterhead? Since you've given your organization a name, it is easy with today's computers to create simple letterhead, with your group's name, address, phone number, etc.
- Is the release dated and marked either 1) "for immediate release" or 2) to be released at a later, specific day and time?
- Is the contact person's name and phone number (day and evening) listed at the top of the release? If

you have a cell phone, list it, along with the name of the person who will be carrying it at the event/press conference.

- Do you have a bilingual or multilingual contact person, especially if your community is bilingual? Have you done outreach to media in languages other than English?
- Is the headline short and to the point? (Don't struggle too hard in coming up with a headline. The media probably won't use yours anyway.)
- Is the copy double-spaced?
 - Does the first paragraph explain who, what, why, when and where?
 - Have you quoted key leaders in the second and third paragraphs?
 - Have you cleared the quotes with them first? (Remember that who you quote is an organizational decision. Often, the quotes will come from members of your group you have become local experts on the proposed prison. You are the experts.)
- Have you listed your organization's name several times?
- Are all names, titles, and organizations spelled correctly?
- Is each sheet marked with an abbreviated headline? (Try to keep your release to two pages. One is better.)
- Is a PHOTO OPPORTUNITY mentioned if there is one? (If so, send a copy of the release to the photo editor.)
- Did you put "-30-" or "#####" at the end of the press release? (Why?

It's just the way press releases are supposed to end, and it makes your press release look official.)

Another great thing about having a press release is that it's easy to transform into an opinion piece for a paper, or a short article for any organization's newsletter. Make each point from the press release into a short paragraph. That way, when organizations need something to print quickly, they can use the expanded press release and take the points that are most suitable for their issues. This also allows plenty of room to tailor your article to a specific organization. For instance, if a teachers' association wants to publish an article on why a prison would not help the town's youth in their newsletter, you can pick the points from the article that work the best. Maybe you have already written that a prison doesn't address the needs of people in your town, and you could simply add onto this statement so that it specifically emphasizes the needs of your schools and children.

The Press Conference

Press conferences are great ways to follow up on a release and to create a stir. They make you highly visible and get your point of view out in public. Think of press conferences as mini demonstrations – they need to be very public and open, with articulate, concise speakers who can present your talking points in a way that is easy for everybody to digest. Press conferences usually consist of a few speakers who briefly address different aspects of your issue and represent your organization. They need to be located in a place that is easily accessible. You also need to have press pack-

Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release: June 14, 2001

Contact: Stephen Raher, (719) 475-8059 or stephen@epimethian.org

NEWS RELEASE

Community group charges State with cutting corners in Fort Lyon prison planning process

COLORADO SPRINGS: The Colorado Prison Moratorium Coalition (CPMC) has announced a challenge to the state's plans to convert the Fort Lyon Veteran's Hospital into a prison. Today the CPMC sent a letter to the state Department of Corrections (DOC) requesting a more thorough study of the potential impacts that the new Fort Lyon correctional facility (FLCF) could have on the people of Bent County.

Before the hospital can be converted into a prison, a federally-mandated environmental review must be completed. The DOC released a Draft Environmental Assessment in May concluding that the conversion would have little impact on the environment, but the CPMC asserts that the document does not contain a sufficiently thorough discussion of the possible social and economic effects.

According to Stephen Raher, the Co-Coordinator of the Coalition (and author of the letter), "rural towns in Colorado all too often view a prison as a wonderful way to spark economic development. Unfortunately the reality is that prison towns are burdened with many long-term collateral costs in return for a handful of jobs."

Raher explains that the most severe effects could be on local medical agencies. "the whole state and southeastern Colorado in particular is experiencing a severe nursing shortage, and DOC wants to hire 110 nurses to work at Fort Lyon. If they are going to meet their goal, it almost certainly will be at the expense of local hospitals and health care facilities, which can't offer wages and benefits that compete with the state's compensation plan."

In addition to outlining areas for further study, the CPMC's letter asks the DOC to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, which goes into greater detail than the Environmental Assessment that the Department has already completed. "My primary concern," said Raher, "is that the people of Bent County are not getting a full and fair

explanation of what might happen. The environmental review process is supposed to be about gathering public input, but it's a meaningless activity if people aren't given a balanced presentation of the facts."

After Governor Owens expressed strong public support for the jobs that FLCF would bring to southeastern Colorado, the legislature approved the prison over the objections of Senator Penfield Tate (D-Denver) who warned his colleagues that "if we continue to look at prison construction as a form of economic development in our state, we're lost."

The Rural Prisons Initiative was created at the CPMC when Coalition members saw that prisons are being marketed to rural towns as economic development tools. The Coalition is a network of over 80 organizations and faith communities from across the state who have come together to call for an end to further prison expansion in order to redirect funding and policy priorities to crime prevention, drug, alcohol and mental health treatment, and alternatives to incarceration.

Coalition Co-Coordinator Christie Donner explains that Fort Lyon is just one of several new prison projects which are currently underway. "The Department of Corrections is the fastest growing department in the state government," commented Donner, "and it is growing at the expense of education, health care, transportation, and other areas the Coloradans are concerned about." In fact, the DOC received a 13.4% increase in General Fund dollars for Fiscal Year 2001-02, the second largest increase of any department.

Donner warns that "for the long term health of Colorado, we must begin to follow the lead of other western states and reevaluate our use of prisons as a panacea for social problems."

###

ets on hand. These are folders of information that provide reporters with background material on your issue, your organization, and contact information.

When organizing a press conference, here are some things to think about.

- Have the date, time, and place been cleared with all the speakers?
- Are there other media conflicts (e.g. another major event or press conference)?
- Do you need to reserve the space days in advance?
- Is the room large enough?
- Will you need a public address system?
- Have volunteers been recruited to set up and clean up the room before and after the press conference?
- Who is sending the press releases?
- Do you have a good list of local and regional press contacts? Newspaper, radio & TV?
- Can you do outreach to media in languages other than English? Do you have press contacts who speak other languages? Can you produce materials in other languages? Most Spanish language radio and TV will respond to an English language press release if it lists a Spanish speaking contact.
- Who is making follow-up phone calls to the media?
- Is there a script and/or talking points available for those making

follow-up calls to the media?

- Are there visuals, charts, or graphs needed at the press conference?
- Who is writing each person's presentation? Are there good, quotable sound bites?
- Is someone drafting a question and answer sheet for anticipated questions at the press conference?
- Is a time set for speakers to rehearse their presentations and answers to the anticipated questions?
- Are materials being prepared for the press kit?
Press release
Background information on speakers
Fact sheet
Organizational background
Copies of speakers' state ments
- Will your organization's name be projected well through signs, posters, buttons and so forth?
- Is there someone to greet the media?
- Is someone in your group going to take photographs?
- Are volunteers assigned to watch for stories in various media?

BEYOND THE MEDIA

As we said in the beginning of this section, a lot of the organizing work you do doubles as publicity. Don't think that getting your message in papers and on television is the only way to get the word out. While having a strategy for attracting media is important, outreach

is just as important. Many of the strategies we listed in the outreach section are also other ways you have to spread the word. Here are a few other things we have seen towns do that you can use to help get your message out:

- Sponsor an event with a local artist
- Hold a community forum to discuss the prison and related issues. Invite both sides to a forum in which you've determined the agenda, the questions to be discussed etc. This will keep the meeting open to everyone, but also allow you to keep some control over the meeting.
- Hand out fliers at popular events in town
- Set up a table with a few informational fliers at fairs, outside of supermarkets, other foot-traffic friendly place and staff it so you can talk to people who express interest
- Make announcements at other meetings
- Hold a house party

How to have a house party

Since organizing often begins among friends who share a common cause, hosting a house party can be a good way to draw all of you together, raise awareness and enthusiasm, and get new people involved. It also shows your campaign is people-friendly, which can win a lot of points when you are fighting a bureaucratic, impersonal arm of the government. If you have ever thrown a party before, which many people have, you'll know it requires a little more planning than you think it will, but it always ends up being worthwhile.

- What are your goals for the party? More volunteers? Fund raising? Persuading certain people that the prison is a bad idea? Make sure that everyone working on the party is clear about the goals.
- Make sure you pick a good date to have your party. Check if there is another big event people will want to go to, or maybe host it on a long weekend.
- Tell people far in advance - that way the date will stick in their heads. Call and remind people close to the date.
- Do you have some sort of entertainment? Make sure you have music - whether it is a big pile of CD's or a great DJ.
- Be certain you collect people's names and contact information with a sign-in sheet.
- Who will speak? It is good to have some time for everyone as a group to ask you - the experts - questions, as well as to have unstructured time for one-on-one conversations.
- Pick a good location.
- Do you want to have food? If so, will there be a buffet or will there just be some snacks? Do you have plates, forks, knives, cups, etc?
- Do you have some sort of decorations? Remember why you are hosting the party - any fliers, banners, or signs you have against the prison can be set out.
- Make fun fliers that also draw attention to why you are hosting the party.
- Leave yourself plenty of time the day of the party to get ready. The worst feeling is to be rushing around with a million odds and ends to finish up.
- Do you have someone to help you set up and clean up? A little moral support is always welcome.
- Anyone who has had a party also knows they cost money. You could also have a box for donations, pass the hat at the party, or charge a cover at the door.

Using the Internet



Some of us don't have access to computers, and some seem unable to live without them. But these days, a lot of people learn news and get involved politically through initial contact through the Internet.

There are a couple ways you can use e-mail and the internet to help organize. At every event you hold, you'll have a sign-in sheet. Make sure that you collect people's email addresses along with their phone numbers. It's a good idea to have a checkbox for people to mark whether they prefer to be contacted via email or phone. Set up at least two lists (or groups) of email addresses. One should include the organizers, those who have been attending coalition meetings and who are working actively on the campaign. The second should include the sign-ins who aren't active in the day-to-day but who might be turn out for a meeting at city hall, a march to the high school, or a demonstration. As you set up subcommittees, those groups might also have their own email lists.

If you have an Internet savvy high school student or small business owner or teacher among you, you probably have the skills to set up a simple web site. At first it might contain only your organization name, contact phone and email and the next meeting date. As you develop press releases and other written material, you can post them on your website, along with photos of your activities. Many Internet providers offer space for a simple website to their email subscribers for little or no cost. As an example, take a look at the Education not Incarceration site at: <http://www.ednotinc.org>

PUBLIC SPEAKING

You'll notice that many of these ideas require speaking in front of many people, unafraid to argue for your cause. Many people dread public speaking because they think they "just aren't good at it," but all it requires is a little practice. A good way to get the necessary practice is by using a standard speech at all your public speaking opportunities – that way you get plenty of practice saying it!

Start by spending some time on your speech. Write it in advance and practice it with everyone you know. Write it using statements you are very comfortable making, the ones that you say over and over to people when trying to prove your point.

Your standard speech should have a few opening paragraphs that lay out your key talking points. First, list the reasons the proposed prison is bad for the town and the region. Explain why the prison-supporters miss the bigger picture. But you can then insert a few paragraphs that tweak the speech for the audience. Using these guidelines, you can take a basic speech that you develop on why you don't want a prison and simply adjust the way you dress it up.

Write versions of different lengths. Sometimes you'll have 5 minutes to speak at an event. Other times you'll have 15 or 30. Once basic talks of different lengths are written, all members of the group can use them. Using this plan will make you comfortable with

the material and help you to be a better public speaker....and save you tons of time by not writing a new speech every time!

Public speaking is all about finding the best way to approach people, similar to when you find allies. Think about who you are addressing. What is your audience's main concern? What do they care about and how does it relate to a prison being built? What tone is most appropriate for them – are they younger, older, more conservative, more grass-roots? Will they be most swayed by big words or a strong plan of action?

Once you have a basic speech that covers your reasons for why a prison is a bad idea, you can use it for many different occasions. Much like adjusting your press release, you will have to adjust your speech for different audiences.

Remember, public speaking doesn't have to be at official meetings or in official halls. Any place you think of to conduct outreach, you could also give a modified version of your speech. Try to set up an opportunity to make a brief presentation on why your town doesn't need a prison at organizational meetings or conferences.

FUNDRAISING

Organizing costs money, though not necessarily very much. Those who do it over the long-haul have a variety of fairly sophisticated methods for raising money for their causes. But because most campaigns to stop prisons are on

a very tight timeline, you might find that you are not able to develop a full strategy for raising funds for your campaign. Therefore we're giving suggestions for only a few, very specific ideas and resources for short-term and last-minute fundraising.

First, call us, the California Prison Moratorium Project. We have a small nest egg for just this kind of thing, so please don't hesitate to ask. If we don't have it, we may have specific ideas about emergency grants and other organizations, like the National Resource Center for Prisons and Communities, that may be able to provide emergency funding support to prison moratorium campaigns.

Second, many social justice foundations have what they call Emergency Funds. They are relatively easy to apply for and you can get a response pretty quickly. For ideas about funds such as these you can begin by asking us at PMP, as well as other organizations that you begin working with.

Third, look to your own members, and see if they have networks of people to approach for money. As you'll quickly find out, every dollar counts and money can come from unlikely places. The only sure bet is that if you don't ask, you won't get any.

And lastly, think of all the ways in which you've raised money for your other community groups, churches, mosques, etc. Bake sales, dinners, concerts, ads in programs, garage sales, and

in-kind donations (such as the use of space, a car, a sound system, etc.) – all of these are ways to raise funds for your group. There are individuals and organizations in your town who can and will contribute financially who might not be able to help in other ways. Don't be shy about asking for financial help. The point here is to try to be as creative as possible and to remember that these efforts, though they may seem relatively unimportant, are, again, opportunities to learn leadership and organizing skills.

RECAP

We've really only scratched the surface of organizing. Many of the most useful lessons you'll learn by diving in and trying it yourself. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Each mistake is a chance to learn from it so that you don't make it again. As we said earlier, organizing is about communicating — communicating with your neighbors, communicating with city officials, with the media, and with other organizations. The more you do it, the better you'll get. From here we'll be giving you a more comprehensive look at the siting process and the opportunities for intervening and gaining leverage to stop it.

Advice from Brian Sponsler and Debbie Hand, two activists who successfully fought off a prison in Tehachapi, California.

'...work the local press as much as you can. You need to present it as 'we have a hot story for you.'"

'We needed a good agenda at the meetings to keep everyone from straying off because emotions were high...'"

At the city council meeting: "We arranged for people to speak on ten areas...that the prison would affect us."

"If anything did it for us in the organizing it was the phone tree."

"You basically have to show a good show of force."

"You have to jump on it right away."

"It is important you keep your main points clear and stress these points over and over."

SITING and intervention



It is very daunting visualizing the exact points where your organization can actually stop a prison construction project. But, in reality, both federal and state governments are required by law to jump through a series of hoops before actually starting to build a prison. This means there are actually many opportunities for you to intervene—and it may only take one victory to put an end to the prison

The “siting” process are the bureaucratic procedures that state, regional, and local officials must follow in order to decide exactly where a new prison will be built. Siting begins when officials announce their plans to build a prison, and it doesn’t end until construction begins. It might be possible to stop a prison even after ground is broken, but the siting process is your group’s best bet to stop a prison from being built in your town.

While common sense says that the earlier you intervene in the process the better your chances for success, we’ve also learned through experience that it is never too late to try. For an example, let’s jump back a few years to 1995 in the state of Oregon.

In that year, the Governor of the Beaver State, John Kitzhaber, persuaded the legislature to give him exclusive power to site and build prisons wherever he wished. Two of the communities picked under this “fast track” process protested that they did not want prisons, but the Oregon Department of Corrections ignored them and began preparing to build anyway, acquiring

land, designing the buildings, and developing infrastructure.

The communities, however, did not give up. In Madras, Oregon, the community ran an ad in the local paper showing how poor children and the elderly would be harmed by rising rents. Community members brought in their own “experts” to discuss the impact of a prison on the local farm economy. In the sixth year of struggle, the prisons were cancelled, thanks in large part to the efforts of community members. Oregon’s recent decision to close several prisons in the state proves that there was no need for more prisons in the first place. Imagine if the money wasted on prison planning and siting had instead been used to improve local schools, farm-product market access, and other investments to enhance the well-being of local residents!

The bottom line is that in spite of a state governor’s plan and a prison bureaucracy’s action to build new prisons, no new prisons were built. The reason why? Because local residents of small towns were able to intervene in the siting process.

The Oregon example is somewhat unusual: it is more likely for a town to request a prison than to have one forced onto its city limits. For most industries of last resort (the kinds of industries that locate in a town when no others will, like incinerators, waste and recycling facilities, prisons, or animal processing plants), the people who make initial siting decisions are more likely to cut backroom deals when resi-

dents aren’t looking or can’t see.

Decision-makers try to attract a prison by sweetening up the deal through agreements such as land sales, zoning changes, and promises of locally-paid infrastructural development. Prison supporters then present the bargain to community members as “done deals.”

However, the actual process for creating a mini-city (which a prison really is) is quite complicated, and there are lots of chances to break into the process and keep it from moving forward. In this chapter we list a number of such openings according to two criteria: **what you can do** and **who you need to see in order to do it**.

It is important to understand the siting process. For this handbook we have focused on the parts that you will be able to most influence. First, either the state or federal government or a private corporation (like Wackenhut) decides to build a prison. Once a possible site is identified, the land owner is contacted, and the proposed site is studied to make sure the prison, if built, would meet all state and federal zoning, safety and environmental regulations. Often the government will hire a private corporation to make these assessments, write up a report, and submit it to local decision-makers. Usually at this point the City Council will vote on whether or not to approve the project. It is only after the prison is approved by all the various regulating agencies—City Council, Water Quality Board, County Board of Supervisors, and so on—that the land will be bought and the construction will begin.

In order to make this information easier to use, we have put it into table format. We have listed out each opportunity for intervention (WHAT); who you need to talk to intervene - the office, institution, department or individual official that has the power to stop a prison from being built — as well as why they have such power. (WHO); and some strategies to go about doing it (HOW). We have also put in italics the type of strategy we are listing: *Legal* remedies include getting laws passed or repealed, or going to court to challenge a prison's actual site or siting process. *Political* remedies include building local opposition to siting amongst the residents so that the decision-makers in your town will have to cancel the project (like the Farmersville story). *Economic* remedies include stopping the flow of money being used to build or to start up the prison, preventing the side deals such as extra highway construction from going through, or finding a different buyer for the land a prison was supposed to be built on. For example, a local community could start up a community farming cooperative to buy the land and use it for farming, rather than for warehousing prisoners.

The words "legal," "political" and "economic" at the top of each description refer to the type of strategy it is. Don't be confused if you see more than one letter after one of the descriptions in the left-hand column — often times a particular opening will require a mix of strategies to get the job done.

DECONSTRUCTING 'NEED'

Political, Economic

What

Challenge the prison department's claim that it "needs" to build a particular prison.

Who

State Legislatures, Governors or other Chief Executives.

How

You can argue that the money spent on the prison would be better spent on preventing imprisonment if it was used for things like education, job training, economic development, and other things that your town probably *really* needs.

Your group can schedule a meeting with decision-makers or their representatives. If denied or disappointed, you can hold a rally outside the capitol or appropriate local office. Gather signed petitions from people who live in a particular elected official's district protesting the prison siting. Most importantly, don't be intimidated by fancy titles or offices. These guys are people just like everyone else — and it's good for people like you to remind them every once in a while.

YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS

Political, Economic

What

Argue that the prison siting is a civil rights violation. Federal and state Civil Rights Acts prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, class and national origin. The federal act also requires that if a program is receiving federal money and is found to be discriminating against people or communities, that their funding will be withdrawn.

Who

Depends upon the project, but the federal and state Departments of Justice and the funding agencies behind the prison, such as the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

How

Since so many prisons are located in poor towns of predominantly people of color, often discrimination is an integral part prison siting is a civil rights violation. Federal and state Civil Rights Acts prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, class and national origin. The federal act also requires that if a program is receiving federal money and is found to be discriminating against people or communities, that their funding will be withdrawn.

You can file a complaint with the agency that is heading up the siting process, under the US Civil Rights Act. You could also file a lawsuit. This sort of strategy requires a lot of research and pouring over site plans, environmental impact reports, and even interviewing decision makers involved in the process. You need a "smoking gun" that shows how race or class influenced the siting decision.

REPRESENT!

Political

What

Influence local politics – as your representatives, they should represent your views. Make your voices heard.

Who

You and your community of voters.

How

Generally, local governments, such as councils and boards of supervisors, vote to approve prison siting. If they've already voted, If you can target pro-prison officials, either to recall them or prevent them from winning the next elections. If there hasn't been a vote, you can lobby the City Council, showing representatives how clearly your community does not support the prison. Use petitions, rallies and events to specifically demand that the Council members vote NO on the prison. Attend Council meetings and testify. Organize as many people as possible to call local representative offices, or draft a letter for people to send in, and gather signatures at your rallies.

Community organizer Debbie Hand gained a strong sense of how local politics worked fighting off a prison and hospital in Tehachapi, California. She identified "smart-growth" coalitions and together she learned there was local political support for well-planned, community based economic growth. Like Debbie Hand, you can identify decision makers who are your direct representatives and hold them accountable for their actions. You can also find out what issues they have campaigned around to see if they have broken promises to support community-based development by voting for a prison. Be sure to attend all City Council meetings that have prison issues on the agenda and testify. Don't forget, these are your elected officials making claims about what is best for you – you can demand to be part of the process.

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

Legal

What

Track down documents with information that prison boosters aren't sharing. The Freedom of Information allows any person to request a copy of federal documents. Of course, there are some things that you won't be able to get, but many of the documents that pertain to the prison siting process are ones that you are entitled to see by law. States have similar laws you can use to get state documents.

Who

The Federal Department of Justice or your state's Department of Justice.

How

Gaining access to the paper trail will give you insights into the strategies that the government itself is using to get the prison built in your hometown. Having this information will make you aware of more opportunities for you to intervene. It also shows officials that you are aware of your rights and able to act accordingly.

Submit a written statement requesting to see documents under the Freedom of Information Act or the Public Records Act, depending on whether it is state or federal records you are after. If you have internet access there are many websites that can show you how to do this. Be sure to include a detailed description of the documents you would like to see, because the government office won't give you anything more than what you ask for.

CAUSING TROUBLE

Political

What

Make the siting process a long and unpleasant one, with mounting costs for the prison developers and supporters

Who

Corrections Agency Siting Office; local landowners; local and county government; local, regional, and statewide legislators.

How

Fight the landowners who hope to profit off the sale; the state, private or contracted officials who have to deal with your town; legislators who think guiding the prison into your town was an easy siting solution; or anybody else planning to get political or economic profits from the project. Make sure you generate a lot of publicity on the motivations of these decision-makers, and highlight all the ways in which the community has been excluded from the process – lack of notices, poor translation, or lack of public meetings. Bad publicity can generate a lot of change.

The strategies used in this situation can be as basic as generating a lot of bad publicity for someone who wants to sell their land so that cages can be built on it. They can be more complicated, like tactics opposing the legal legitimacy of different aspects of the prison. For example, in Los Angeles, a group of six housewives and one husband formed a group called the Mothers of East Los Angeles (Las Madres del Este de Los Angeles) to stop a prison that the state had *already* designated for their neighborhood. They fought for nine years to shut down the project. Eight years into the fight, the tide turned in their favor when the landowner grew tired of waiting to seal the deal with the state and found someone else to buy his property.

A PUBLIC PROCESS

Legal

What

Force officials to hold a truly open siting process. Force prison officials to publish and translate clear and detailed information about the impact of the prison. Many but not all states have “sunshine laws” requiring that ordinary people have adequate notice of meetings and proposals that will affect their lives. Prison officials often obey the letter of the law, but not its spirit. They fail to give truly adequate notice of meetings to working people, or hold the meetings at times or in locations that are hard for folks to make. In addition, “sunshine laws” require that public records be freely available for public inspection.

Who

Any governmental body holding hearings or having the power to grant a permit for a prison development project. State or federal courts.

How

Challenge slipshod notices, or notices written in language that townsfolk cannot understand (for example, English-only notices in bi- or multilingual communities). Challenge fancy or jargon-loaded notices that make the meetings sound technical and only for specialists. Challenge prison officials’ attempts to make it difficult to either get your hands on or to read important reports and studies relating to the proposed prison.

You can use public pressure to hold the government bodies accountable to the law and ensure your participation in processes like these. Use some of the strategies already discussed, such as testifying in city hall, petitions, and demonstrations will empower you and the other members of your community and show that the united voices of ordinary folks have a lot of power. You can also look into suing different agencies for violating sunshine laws, on the grounds that their actions prevented meaningful public participation.

WHAT’S THE ENVIRONMENT GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Legal

What

Demand prison projects meet all environmental laws, regulations, and requirements for public participation. The Environmental Protection Act requires that projects using federal money meet all standards for protecting the air, water, natural, cultural, and historical place where projects are built and is required to produce an ‘environmental impact report’ assessing the impact of the project on the environment. It also requires a “no-project alternative,” which is a fancy way of saying that they have to explain truthfully what would happen if the project were not built.

Who

Federal Court, Environmental Protection Agency, Regional Air Quality Management District, Regional Water Quality Management District, and/or regional Transportation District, depending on which environmental resource might be harmed by the prison; local environmental organizations.

How

Under the law, ordinary folks can demand public hearings on the project and submit comments. Get as many people as possible to write in comments. You can also file complaints that the length of public comment time was too short, and there was not proper notification of the Environmental Impact Report and its comment period. If not satisfied with the outcome of these interventions, community groups can file suit in courts.

Attend all of the meetings that are related to the potential impacts of the prison. Request copies of all Environmental Impact Statements and Reports that are produced, and request translations in the most common language spoken in your town – these are all public documents you have a right to ask for. Make sure you meet all their deadlines—and organize other people to do it too. Keep a copy of everything you submit so you can prove you did it.



**EVEN WITHOUT TIME AND MONEY ON YOUR
SIDE, YOU SHOULDN'T HESITATE TO TAKE UP THE
STRUGGLE.**

**WHY? BECAUSE WE'VE SEEN FOLKS COME OUT
WINNING, AGAIN AND AGAIN.**

TAX BREAKS FOR PRISONS? *Economic, Political*

What

Show that the prison might not pay its share of the tax bill and make other tax revenue disappear. Economic development zones define certain places as special districts eligible for tax breaks, development grants, and other economic incentives, provided that those places generate a workable development plan.

Who

Depending on who defines and pays for the development zone, the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development; or state, county, and city redevelopment agencies.

How

Make the people in charge of creating the plans explain how they calculated the economic benefits of the prison. Demand that other factors be taken into consideration – like whether or not prison employees actually live in the town, if the majority are transferred from other prisons, etc. These employees won't be paying taxes in your town. If a prison wasn't part of the original economic development plan, make sure officials explain why it is now being proposed as a solution. Ask if there was a development plan for the prison.

Is the prison in the plan and is its role in economic development represented truthfully? One report, "Good Jobs First" by Philip Matera and Mafruz Khan, showed that the majority of private prisons built received public subsidies and development incentives from local, state and federal funding sources without public oversight or involvement. It is these kinds of financial deals that make your town bear the costs of a project you may never have even wanted.

PLANNING A BETTER COMMUNITY *Legal, Political, Economic*

What

Use zoning laws to argue that the prison should not be built. Cities, counties, and states have bodies that regulate changes in land use and oversee zoning. Many places have local or regional planning bodies that map out a future for the region based on what should be the best use of land and other resources.

Who

City government, county government, and regional districts that govern air, water, transportation, tourism and recreation, and other particularly fragile relationships of land-use to community well-being.

How

Planning for prisons is usually very poor. Prisons are usually crammed into already-existing plans. Sometimes no plan is ever drawn up even though it is required by local or state law! Someone else's attempt to cut corners could be your golden opportunity. You can use poor planning in two different ways: 1) Demand local planning and zoning laws and procedures be followed exactly. 2) Argue that the planning and zoning laws are meant to ensure a prosperous future for everyone in your town, and that building a prison is a contradiction of these agencies' missions. Demand more public input into the planning process.

Contact the offices and ask to see what sort of planning attempts have been made regarding the prison. Ask to review the city planning documents and examine how the prison fits into other guidelines for land use and resource allocation. Contacting the planning and zoning offices may also reveal some of the associated costs of the prison that fall on the city's shoulders. This information will help you show that the prison-boosters are hiding the real costs of the prison.

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS TO USE

There are several other environmental laws that provide similar opportunities for intervention. Look at some of the listed laws to see if the proposed prison is likely to violate any of the laws and regulations covered by each agency.

Federal Clean Water Act

This sets limits for dumping of pollutants, and makes it illegal to violate pollution control programs. It also sets water quality standards for surface waters. Under the act, an EPA permit is needed either if there is direct run off from a building (such as a pipe that empties into a body of water) or if dumping flows into city sewage systems. These permits are usually obtained through the state.

Agency responsible for implementation

Federal Court, Environmental Protection Agency, Regional Air Quality Management District, Regional Water Quality Management District, Regional Transportation District.

Federal Clean Air Act

This act has set national guidelines to reduce toxic emissions, urban air pollution and acid rain. It creates a permit system, issued by the states and overseen by the EPA, which requires people and agencies to follow emission limits and reduction plans. It also allows the EPA to penalize people and agencies that fail to reduce their emissions, mostly through fines and economic sanctions.

Agency responsible for implementation

Federal Court; Environmental Protection Agency; Regional Air Quality Management District; Regional Water Quality Management District; Regional Transportation District.

State environmental laws

State-level (as opposed to federal) environmental protection acts such as the California Environmental Quality Act. In addition to federal laws, most states have their own environmental protection acts. The rules vary in each state. In general, these acts require that projects meet certain standards for protecting air, water, and natural, cultural, and historical sites. They also require everyone who proposes a project to list a "no-project alternative" which means stating TRUTHFULLY what would happen if the project were not built. Under the law, ordinary folks can demand public hearings on the project, and submit written and oral comments. If not satisfied with the outcome of these interventions, community groups can file suit in courts to stop projects that fail to follow the law.

Agency responsible for implementation

State courts; Regional Air Quality Management District; regional Water Quality Management District; regional Transportation District.

Strategic Allies

If you can get their support, local environmental organizations can be a big help. They can act as "experts," and add their presence and voices. You can also identify which of the agencies that have a stake in the EPA's evaluation might be an ally. Local air quality boards, for example, can use their influence during public hearings and lawsuits. Be willing to figure out how the prison will be bad for all districts—like air quality, water quality, transportation and any other board or district with power over the proposed prison site. Often the "no project alternative" is given little attention, even though it is obviously the best environmental option....but don't let decision makers get away with that.

RECAP

Finally: challenge the other side's claims and counter-claims. Communities can be divided in many ways. Don't be fooled by the "divide and conquer" strategy where prison supporters hope to get everyone in town bickering with each other while they quietly go about their business of pushing the paper-work through while no one is looking. Your town is everybody's home, as the Farmersville story indicates. Save your real battles for when you have to fight directly. We guarantee that it will be more difficult to win your struggle if the other side can accuse you of things like: not wanting jobs for poor folks in your town, or wanting to keep financially troubled farmers from selling their land and getting out of debt, or not wanting local mom and pop shops to succeed.

You can best fight a prison by figuring out what prison supporters are likely to claim. Figure out what tactics they're likely to use to divide people in your town, and before that happens, work to bring people in your town together in common cause. You can fight prison backers by refuting their claims first, and then moving on to build a coalition with your potential allies. If you do so, that coalition will become an organization.

Remember, your organization will not be fighting a fair fight: your opposition will have more resources, capacity, and time, while many members of anti-prison groups like yours are people who have many other responsibilities, like jobs and families. But you will need such an organization to fight back the prison because that's what the other side is, first and foremost: organized. Even without time and money on your side, you shouldn't hesitate to take up the struggle. Why? Because we've seen folks come out winning, again and again.

CONCLUSION



What we'd like to leave you with are the four points that we began with:

1 *Lots of different people don't want a prison in their town and are willing to fight to keep one out.*

2 *You can influence the important decisions that will affect your life.* A small number of ordinary people have a tremendous amount of power when they work together to organize themselves. What you do, or don't do, makes a difference.

3 *It's never too late.*

4 *If you oppose a prison in your town, you're not alone.* **El Centro Speech**

This isn't really an end. It isn't a place for us to leave you, since we're only a quick phone call or email away. This is just where we stop talking and you start organizing. We hope that after reading all of the stories, advice, and ideas that we have shared, you'll agree with us that a prison isn't the best (or even a good) thing for your town. We hope that the idea of stopping a prison from going up in your town won't seem so impossible. And we hope that you feel a little more comfortable about doing it. But even if you don't, take our word for it: all the things we've said about your abilities are true! You don't have to become a different person to stop prison boosters. You just have to organize and do it patiently.

And of course, what would a conclusion be without something new to leave you with? To our list of four main ideas, we'd like to add one final truth: **there's absolutely nothing that we've talked about in this handbook that you don't already have the skills to accomplish.** If you've ever made it through a year of school with a bad teacher, given birth to a child, or dealt with a Health Maintenance Organization, you'll be fine. Nothing in this handbook requires you to be an expert or a professional, or to have a college degree or lots of money on your side. All you'll need is the patience, passion, and the good sense that you were born with — though a sense of humor also wouldn't hurt. And as we keep saying, if you run into trouble, contact us. We'd love to hear from you and to help out in any way we can.

APPENDIX: Public speaking in your town

This speech was delivered in various forms throughout Imperial County when residents of El Centro fought off a a prison in their town (see Introduction). Many different people used it for many different audiences. Hopefully it will give you some ideas on how to write a speech to deliver your town.

So, it seems that we meet the needs of the State once again, a place to put another portion of societies ills. The question remains, does this fit OUR needs?

When I was on the PIC council 10 - 13 years ago, the decision was made to accept the prisons, and I remember the director being very happy telling us that "from now on folks, we are on easy street. We can just sit back and watch it all fall in, Walmarts, others State Institutions, they'll all come and we, the economic developers, don't have to do a thing."

That's exactly what has happened. Little did we know at that point that what would "fall into our laps"(ten years later) would be a facility for the rehabilitation of the violent sexual predator, and that the "big boxes" (mega-businesses whose profits leave the area) would put many of our local businesses out of business, and stress the ones remaining to the point of thinking that the same type of institution, this one a state hospital for the sexual predator, would be the solution to our problems.

Our unemployed in 1989 are the same ones unemployed today, we remain at 22%. The same local businesses are still crying that we need more sales tax rev-

enue. Social Services agencies are saying: We never realized that we would be facing the sorts of social problems brought on by the correctional officers that we have, the rise in spousal abuse and child abuse is more than the county staff can handle. Our County social

services lost 10 employees to the prisons and qualified help is hard to find. Many of those positions are still not filled. The courts did not foresee the tremendous load caused by crimes committed by those "visiting" the prisoners, or the prisoners writs.

We were told at those community informational meetings for the prisons that the only effect seen on the community would be an increase in property values, more sales revenue, that this is a clean industry, much like the military, and it would solve our employment problems with good paying year round jobs. It hasn't happened.

In 1987, the trend in economic development was to go anyway that wasn't agriculturally related. Our economic woes were blamed on the farmer and the agricultural industry. Please understand that we do need to diversify, as many in agriculture have been forced to, but also understand that we need "compatible" diversity. Professionals working at the PIC office in those days

thought it was important to change the image of who we are. I believe that here lies the problem. We have no economic plan to follow, we have not identified our needs, other than "we need jobs".

We need to identify our resources and plan accordingly and realistically. There have been no serious studies conducted on the local economic and social effects of the two prisons in our community.

Jobs are important, but it takes a lot more than jobs to sustain a community. It takes business. State institutions such as our prisons, and a rehabilitation facility for violent sexual predators are closed businesses. This means that they do not contribute financially to the community through taxes or by supporting the economy by producing goods or by even purchasing from the local community. As State Institutions, they pay no property tax and or business tax. This type of facility drains the community in the long run because the vast majority of employees will come from the outside, creating a stress on our already stressed infrastructure. By infrastructure I am referring to schools, public services, transportation and roads, medical services, water and sewer, etc. Some people have said - "oh, that's ridiculous, when you build a house, costs are included to cover

those expense: Not true, in fact, housing is a net drain on the municipal community. The cost of housing expansion needs to be subsidized by business development. In fact, our local business are threatened by this type of facility because large influxes of people encourage the location of megabusiness, which the local business can't compete with, and puts them at risk, or out of business. We must keep in mind that our local business give 60 cents to each dollar back to the community, while the large megabusiness, which are not locally owned, only give six cents of each dollar back to the local economy. This is what is referred to as the "strangling effect" of the state institutions on the local community, not to mention loss of local identity and opportunity.

There are many concerns with a project such as this, and one is the lack of strategic design for our growth, and that by continuing in the direction of prisons and rehabilitation centers, we will attract more of the same. And if we want to go in the direction of more guards and criminals, predators and therapy centers, we are headed in the right direction.

Some people feel that because we are a border community to begin with, we already have an over abundance of law enforcement in the community. We have the INS, DEA, BP, Customs, FBI, Immigration, the list doesn't end, and one of the issues discussed in the Border Communities Association is that the local community really can't support an imbalance of this sort. Too many law enforcement employees don't

make for a well-balanced community emotionally, and the effect of the pay infrastructure on social services and medical facilities is stressful.

In this case, some of the big questions are who will be the employed, at what pay level, and from where will they come? We know that Seeley is a preferred choice because of the freeway. Drawing professionals from San Diego and Los Angeles will be a necessity. Not only do we not have professionals to fill the positions, but with our severe nursing shortage in our local medical fields we can't afford to lose anyone.

Our hospitals are dangerously understaffed, San Diego complains of the same shortage. How will we keep our hospitals and medical services afloat if we if we experience this drain from Southern California to the State Facility for The Sexual Predator? How many professionals will be coming from the temporary designated treatment center in Atascadero if fill these positions?

It's clear that the professional position will be the higher paid, we have many highly paid individuals working here and commuting to San Diego where their families live. Many times this is because the spouse is equally educated and unwilling to leave his or her secure career, and the children are in a preferred school setting. This drain does not help our situation any. The flip side is what is called the 2 x 1 theory. Educated professional moves in for the position and brings educated spouse. Spouse displaces local person in one of

few well paying position already in place. So, one new position brings two people, and creates one more unemployed person. We have to remember that for everyone who does move here, there is often a spouse and children who will enter the work force, become part of the community whose needs must then be met.

For the 20% of entry level positions, approximately 300 jobs, in support services, kitchen, janitor, gardener, will they make enough to buy a home in the community, or will they have to live like the Border Patrol and share bunks? Will they earn enough to make a difference and pay for the social services they require?

I have reported that when our prisons were opened 20% of workforce were hired locally. This figure came from State sources. At one of the meetings someone glared at me and reported that 63% of the prison employees reside locally. So, I have to question, if now, 10 years later, 63 % of all employees are local residents, will we ever get the positions promised us in the first place? and with all those people who transferred in from other state institutions, or moved in from the outside, did our local people even get 20% of the positions offered at that time?

At the public hearing for the draft EIR, there were several young men in attendance who testified as to how wonderful the State jobs are, never addressing

the draft EIR or the possible effects this proposal will have on our community. When I talked to them they told me they worked for the Prison, and want to transfer to the state rehabilitation center for the sexual predator. "Hey" they said, it beats working at the prison, and we get first priority, we work for the State." So, they claim that someone already the State system will take priority over the local unemployed. So again, the people who move in become part of the need.

Another concern is that "like draws like". The State representatives tell us that these psychiatric hospital patients will have "no camp followers" as they are primarily outcasts and have been abandoned by their families in the first place. Reality shows us that there are many others, just as twisted, who are aroused by perversity, and want to

breathe the same air as they -- and that they will come. Actually, this is the first response I hear from the general public. The "patient" in this facility will not be rotated, so friends, family, visitors have reason to stay and live in the community. According to the literature put out by the Mental Health department, an important component to the therapy is counseling for couples and families. How would this be accomplished without the presence of family or significant others?

The proposal to place the State Psychiatric Hospital for the Violent Sexual Predator has been rejected by six communities in California. They are Crescent City, Corcoran, Susanville,

Soledad, Tehachapi and Atascadero. They are all rural agricultural based-communities, each with two prisons. I contacted most of these communities to find out why they rejected the proposal, what were their concerns? I was surprised that safety was not an issue, in fact, it seems that no one I spoke with even considered reading the State law which defined the role of this rehabilitation center for sexual predators and the patients rights. Their concern was largely economics and image. They mostly said that they could not afford to "take another hit" from the State, economically. They complained that their local people didn't get the prison jobs as promised, the 80% of people who moved in over crowded the local schools, and their communities went into debt trying to build the necessary infrastructure. Also, they complained that in many cases the State didn't honor their promises regarding mitigation funds. Del Norte County went from a budget surplus of over one million to a debt of 2 million, building the basic infrastructure required. Tehachapi claims that 781 local businesses went out of business in the first ten years after the first prison was built, due to the arrival of megabusiness which follow prison growth. They also reported that the state does not mitigate for all the local school costs, leaving the district with a 25 million dollar debt which it still struggles with today, a decade later. Also of concern, was the fact that they would be home to the largest concentration of violent sexual predators in the entire world, causing a negative image, and discouraging the relocation of positive tax revenue producing businesses who

might possibly relocate to their area. Even a representative from the City Managers office in Coalinga said "we haven't recovered from the economic blow from the prisons, we can't afford this project".

This law is new, and is currently being challenged at the Supreme Court in Washington DC. The people placed in this program have already completed their criminal prison sentence, and this is a civil commitment, designed to keep the state safer and provide rehabilitation for the sexual predator. The law is being challenged because a patient believes his rights are being violated because he is being held, but not receiving the proper treatment to cure him. So, depending on the outcome of the legal decision, there may be some major changes in what will actually be placed in this community.

A question was posed at our Board of Supervisors meeting two weeks ago regarding the California State law section 6608, which defines outpatient services for this particular program pertaining to the rehabilitation and rights of the Violent Sexual Predator. These patients will be placed in a two year civil commitment for their treatment, with an evaluation every year, and the patient has the right to request and receive outpatient treatment once the two year program is completed and he/she has been deemed safe to place in the community, under supervision. The law states that the individual will be placed where the appropriate treatment and supervision is available. The question is: What would prevent one from arguing that the most appropri-

ate treatment would be found where the one state hospital specifically designed and appointed by law for the treatment and rehabilitation of the violent sexual predator is located? The question was then asked by a reporter to the State representative, who replied, according to the newspaper: "They are wrong, I can assure the people of the Imperial Valley that no one will be placed in that community on an outpatient status. They are returned to their county of commitment."

Court records show that we have persons who were found guilty of murder by reason of insanity by our local court, (one was a correctional officer) and are now released to the community of the hospital treating them on an outpatient basis. They are not released here, which is the county of commitment, because we have no services of this nature. In fact, when one is convicted of a violent crime, especially of the sexual nature, very often the community does not accept them back. They have to go where they are not recognized.

My point is that promises and policies can fly with the political winds. There is nothing in the law which protects our community from having the "cured" sexual predator placed here on an outpatient status, or even unconditionally released and discharged.

The big problem that we are facing as a community is that we don't have a plan of development, we are in denial of who we are, we are ignoring the fact that we remain an agricultural based, border community with the same challenges associated with that. As long as there is agriculture, there will be sea-

sonal employees. Like draws like. For some reason the county government refuse to accept that there is life south of El Centro. There is a tremendous economic push coming from south of the border and it is being ignored. We need to plan accordingly. We don't need to accept whatever the state throws our way just because no one else wants it. This project needs to be placed in a large metropolitan area that can absorb the costs, but Los Angeles refuses this project.

As our water supply becomes even more precious we must become vigilant in who uses it. Although the proposed facility is predicted to use over 210 gallons of water per patient per day, not much in comparison to farming - we must remember that in Avenal, Coalinga, Delano, Porterville, Lindsay, Farmersville and Tehachapi, farmers and other businesses had to go to court over water issues because once in place, State Institutions cannot be controlled with regard to how much water they use, or how they use it. The water wars have yet to begin.

APPENDIX: Resources

Beginning your campaign will involve lots of different folks. Here are some ways to find support along the way.

ORGANIZATIONS

These are groups that are currently active around social justice issues. They might have some advice, or be able to offer support, and/or lead you to it elsewhere.

American Friends Service Committee-National Criminal Justice Program

Based in Philadelphia, this group works in many locations on issues of criminal justice.

Phone: (215) 241-7130
Website: www.afsc.org
e-mail: afscinfo@afsc.org

Arizona Prison Moratorium Coalition

Based in Tucson. This coalition has focused on the effects of prisons in immigrant communities in the cities and on the US/Mexico border.

Phone: (520) 623-9141
Website: www.borderaction.org
e-mail: az_pmc@yahoo.com

California Prison Moratorium Project (CAPMP)

This is the group that put this handbook together. We are based in Oakland and Fresno California, but we have campaigns throughout the state.

Phone: (510) 595-4674
Website: www.prisonactivist.org/pmp
e-mail: califpmp@igc.org

Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN)

A network made up of member organizations from throughout California's Central Valley. The groups involved work on many different environmental justice issues, and support each others' campaigns. California PMP is a member.

Phone: (661) 720-9140
e-mail: in_tules@yahoo.com

Critical Resistance

Started as a conference to bring together people who were affected by prisons or who do prison-related activism, CR is now a national organization based in Oakland.

Phone: (510) 444-0484
Website: www.criticalresistance.org
e-mail: crnational@criticalresistance.org

Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition

A statewide coalition that has worked in the past on legislation to enact a prison-building moratorium in the state.

Phone: (888)298-8059
Website: www.ccjrc.org
e-mail: info@ccjrc.org

New York Prison Moratorium Project (NYPMP)

A youth-focused organization. They were instrumental in successfully stopping the building of a new state prison in upstate New York. Through their work, they have developed ties between urban and rural activists.

Phone: (718) 260-8805
Website: www.nomoreprisons.org
e-mail: info@nomoreprisons.org

Western Prisons Project

Based in Portland, Oregon, this group supports prison activism in OR, WA, ID, MT, UT, NV, and WY.

Phone: (503) 335-8449
Website: www.westernprisonproject.org
e-mail: info@westernprisonproject.org

RESEARCH/DATA

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ)

Focuses on research related to youth in the prison system.

Phone: (415) 621-5661

Website: www.cjcj.org

Data Center

Has researchers on staff who focus on many issues. They are available to fill requests for specific information. Have compiled a large list of current prison-related work.

Phone: (510) 835-4692

Website: www.datacenter.org

e-mail: datacenter@datacenter.org

Justice Policy Institute (JPI)

An independent, Washington D.C.-based research institute. It has released many studies used by activists to debunk the myths of the benefits of incarceration.

Phone: (202) 363-7847

Website: www.justicepolicy.org

e-mail: info@justicepolicy.org

Prison Activist Resource Center

A clearinghouse of information for prison-related issues. It creates a guide that lists organizations from across the country.

Phone: (510) 893-4648

Website: www.prisonactivist.org

e-mail: parc@prisonactivist.org

Prison Reform Advocacy Center

Provides legal support and data to activists throughout the country. Also performs campaign work around prisoners and the census.

Phone: (513) 421-1108

Website: www.prisonreform.com

e-mail: dsingleton@prisonreform.com

Sentencing Project

Publishes studies and books about the effects of imprisonment on society.

Phone: (202) 628-0871

Website: www.sentencingproject.org

BOOKS

The following books provide good background information and examples of organizing:

Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendal, and Steve Max, *Organizing for Social Change: Manual for Activists* (Seven Locks Press, 1991). We utilized this in the Organizing chapter. Very useful examples for any kind of justice work.

Luke Cole (editor), *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. (NYU Press 2000). Essays from everyday people involved in community-based organizing. Edited by the director of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, a member of CCEJN.

Angela Davis. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Seven Stories Press, 2003). Angela Davis makes the case for the end of prisons and “decarceration.”

Marilyn Manilov, *Media How-to Guidebook* (Media Alliance 1999). A short, general guide to getting your message out.

Phil Mattera and Mafruza Khan, with Greg LeRoy and Kate Davis, *Jail Breaks: Economic Development Subsidies Given to Private Prisons* (Good Jobs First, 2001). Focuses on private prisons. Good information for building a case against prison expansion. More information at www.goodjobsfirst.org.

Marc Mauer and Medea Chesney-Lind (editors), *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* (The New Press, 2002). Essays about the effects prisons have on society.

Marilyn McShane and Frank Williams, *Encyclopedia of American Prisons* (Gailand Publishing, 1996). A straightforward A-Z guide to the history, terminology and processes of the U.S. prison system.

Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America* (Verso, 1999). A 20-21st century history of how Americans came to believe that policing and prisons are the only solutions to social problems.

Elihu Rosenblatt (editor), *Criminal Injustice* (South End Press, 1996). Short pieces on individuals' experiences with the criminal justice system.

ARTICLES

These are grouped by category. Please contact CAPMP to request free copies.

Globalization:

"Globalization and U.S. Prison Growth" by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. *Race and Class* 40(2/3): 171-188, 1998.

Delano:

"The Prison Prosperity Myth: Delano's Grand Illusion" by Matthew Heller. *Los Angeles Times Magazine* 9/1/02.

"So Far, Prisons Manage to Duck the Budget Ax" Bee Capitol Bureau. *Fresno Bee* 12/15/02.

"Storm Raised by Plan for California Prison: Need and Economic Benefit Questioned" by Evelyn Nieves. *The New York Times* 8/27/00.

"No Need for Jail, Lawsuit Claims" by Davin McHenry. *Bakersfield Californian* 7/11/00.

Rural/Agriculture:

"The Last Farm Crisis" by William Grieder. *The Nation* 11/20/00.

"Valley Counties Losing Farmland" by Dennis Pollock. *Fresno Bee* 3/16/00.

Prison Siting

"BOP Provides Blueprint for Siting New Facilities" by David Dorworth. *Corrections Today* April 1996.

"Site Selection and Construction of Prisons" by Don Josi. In Marilyn D. McShane and Frank P. Williams, editors, *Encyclopedia of American Prisons* (Gailand Publishing, 1996).

Prison Towns

"Economic Lockdown: With Unemployment Largely Unaffected and Jobs Going to Residents of Larger Cities, the Valley's Prison Boom Hasn't Been the Economic Boon Advertised" by Mike Lewis. *The Fresno Bee* 1/9/00.

"Portrait of a Prison Town" by Jennifer Gonnerman. *The Village Voice* 3/11/97.

VIDEOS

Can be used for public forums and fundraisers, house parties, and available to loan to the public.

Concrete and Sunshine by Nicole Cousino. Film about the history of California's prison system and the development of the Security Housing Unit (SHU). Available by contacting the filmmaker at enzyprod@yahoo.com.

Joining Forces:Footage from the 2001 Conference that brought together groups working for environmental justice and groups fighting against prison expansion. Includes participants' personal testimonial and speeches by experts in both areas. Available through Critical Resistance, (510) 444-0484.

Prison in the Fields by Ashley Hunt. A short film about Delano and the siting of a second prison in this historic union town. Available by calling Critical Resistance, (510) 444-0484.

This Black Soil by Teresa Konechne. The story of a rural community fighting to stop a prison siting in their town. <http://www.vcu.edu/uns/Releases/2001/feb/020501a.html>.

Yes, In My Backyard by Tracy Huling. The filmmaker interviews residents of a small upstate New York town with two state prisons. Email the filmmaker at galgirls@francomm.com.

WEBSITES

Includes those that have not been included in other areas of the resource guide.

(Dis)location and the Ruralization of US Prisons: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~tamamail/location.html>.

Federal freedom of information act requests: http://www.rcfp.org/foi_lett.html

Research on the Prison Industrial Complex: <http://www.prisonsucks.com>

Search for your state's Department of Corrections online

Schools Not Jails: www.schoolsnotjails.co

State open records requests: <http://www.splc.org/foiletter.asp>

Statistics on state and federal prison systems: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/correct.htm>

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1 Rainey, James. "Prison Population Drops for the First Time in Years." *Los Angeles Times*, Tuesday, July 4, 2000

2 "New York State of Mind?: Higher Education vs. Prison Funding in the Empire State, 1988-1998." Available online at <http://www.cjcj.org>.

3 Hooks, Greg, et al. 2004. *The Prison Industry: Carceral Expansion and Employment in U.S. Counties, 1969-1994*. *Social Science Quarterly*, (85:1): 37-57. For other studies, see: Besser, Terry L. & Margaret M. Hanson. 2003. *The Development of Last Resort: The Impact of New State Prisons on Small Town Economies*. Presented at the Rural Sociological Society Meeting in August 2003 at: <http://www.realcostofprisons.org/other.html>; King, Ryan S., Marc Maurer & Tracy Huling. 2003. *Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America*. Washington DC, The Sentencing Project at: http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_06.cfm

