

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:

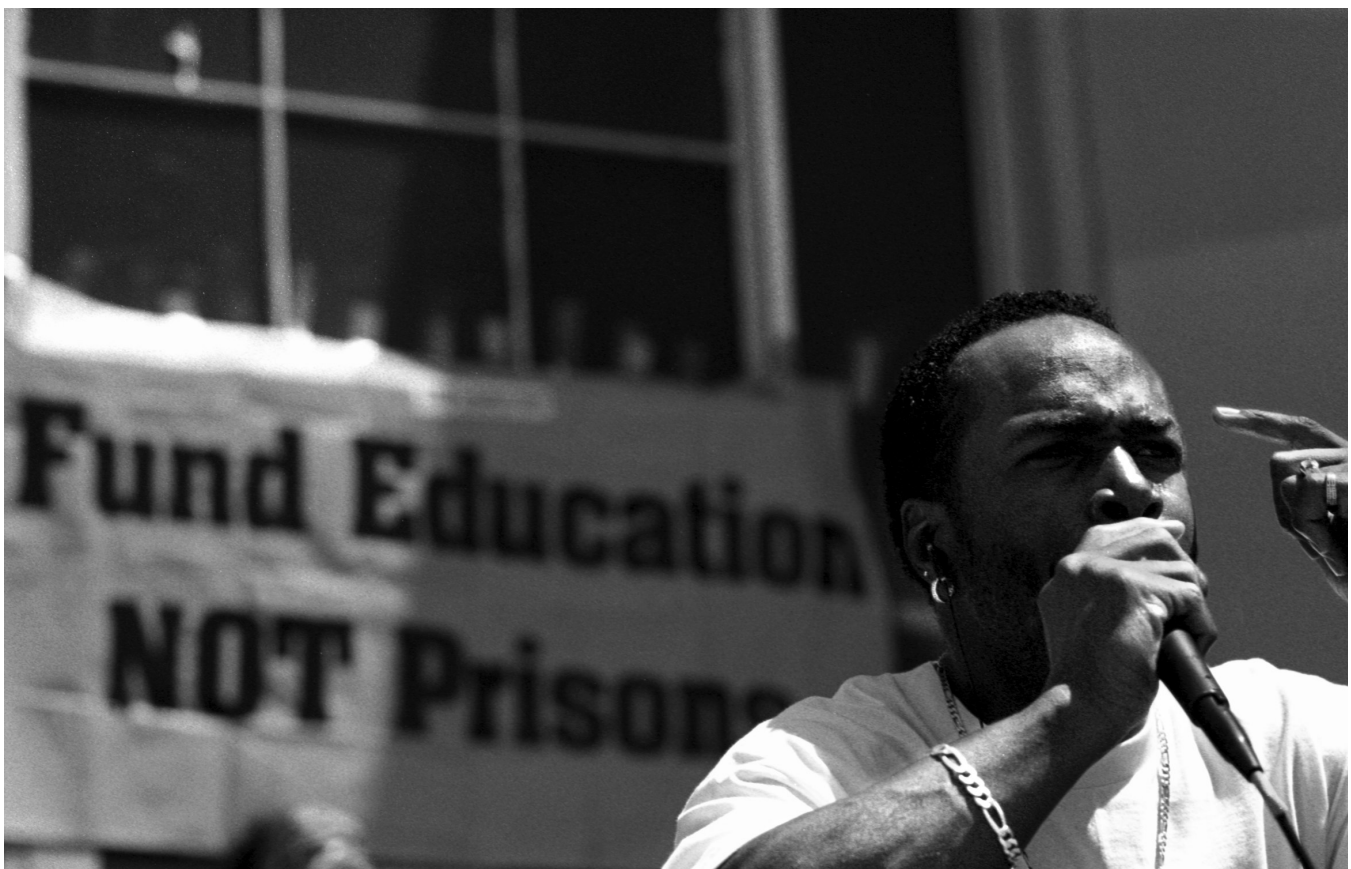
Studies show that local residents won't get most jobs at the prison, and that most of the people who get them won't live here.

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 on 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."

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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."