The Citizen's Handbook

www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook

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Introduction

Why we need more active citizens

The Citizens Handbook is meant to encourage the emergence of more active citizens - people motivated by an interest in public issues, and a desire to make a difference beyond their own private lives. Active citizens are a great untapped resource, and citizenship is a quality to be nurtured. Here's why.

A way of tackling large public issues

In British Columbia, no less than eight recent task force reports have identified more active citizens as the key to responding more effectively to large scale public issues. The reports include When the Bough Breaks (on child protection); the Ready Or Not! Final Report (on aging); Making Changes (on family services); Closer to Home (on health care); Greenways/Publicways (on the urban landscape); Clouds of Change (on atmospheric change); Report of the Round-table on the Environment and the Economy; and the Safer City Task Force Report.

A way of solving local problems

When people become involved in their neighbourhoods they can become a potent force for dealing with local problems. Through co-ordinated planning, research and action, they can accomplish what individuals working alone could not.

When people decide they are going to be part of the solution, local problems start getting solved. When they actually begin to work with other individuals, schools, associations, businesses, and government service providers, there is no limit to what they can accomplish.

A way of improving liveability

Citizens can make cities work better because they understand their own neighbourhoods better than anyone else. Giving them some responsibility for looking after their part of town is a way of effectively addressing local preferences and priorities. Understandably, boosting citizen participation improves liveability. It is no coincidence that Portland, Oregon - a city with a tradition of working in partnership with neighbourhoods - regularly receives the highest score for liveability of any U.S. city.

Cities are sources of potential conflict, between government and citizens, between different citizens groups, and between citizens and special interests such as real estate developers. Recent studies have shown that greater citizen participation in civic affairs can reduce all of these sources of conflict. In particular it can prevent the firestorms

associated with changes brought about by growth and renewal.

A bridge to strong democracy

When citizens get together at the neighbourhood level, they generate a number of remarkable side effects. One of these is strengthened democracy. In simple terms, democracy means that the people decide. Political scientists describe our system of voting every few years but otherwise leaving everything up to government as weak democracy. In weak democracy, citizens have no role, no real part in decision-making between elections. Experts assume responsibility for deciding how to deal with important public issues.

The great movement of the last decades of the twentieth century has been a drive toward stronger democracy in corporations, institutions and governments. In many cities this has resulted in the formal recognition of neighbourhood groups as a link between people and municipal government, and a venue for citizen participation in decision-making between elections.

A little recognized route to better health

In the late 1980s, following Canada's lead, the World Health Organization broadened its definition of health to account for the fact that health is much more than the absence of disease. The new definition recognizes that only 25% of our health status comes from health care, the rest comes from the effects of an adequate education and income, a clean environment, secure housing and employment, the ability to control stress, and a social support network.

Understandably, public health professionals have become some of the strongest advocates for more active citizens. Health Canada has provided many resources to nurture the grassroots including the recent Community Action Pack, a full crate of material on community organizing.

A way of rekindling community

Active citizens can help to create a sense of community connected to place. We all live somewhere. As such we share a unique collection of problems and prospects in common with our neighbours. Participation in neighbourhood affairs builds on a recognition of here-we-are-together, and a yearning to recapture something of the tight-knit communities of the past. Neighbourhood groups can act as vehicles for making connections between people, forums for resolving local differences, and a means of looking after one another. Most important, they can create a positive social environment that can become one of the best features of a place.

Community Organizing

This section provides a do-it-yourself guide to grassroots organizing. It focuses on

bringing together people who share a common place such as an apartment building, city block, or neighbourhood. Most of the material also applies to organizing around an issue.
Organizing is the process of bringing unconnected people together to to work for a common purpose.

1.1 Before You Begin

Learn it yourself

Before you can do-it-yourself you will have to learn-it-yourself. Learning is actually the easy part; just follow the practices recommended in the Handbook, modifinging them as necessary to fit your particular situation.
The big problem is resources, particularly time. Organizing a block or two to address a local problem is manageable for one or two people. Larger areas and difficult problems can take over the life of a do-it-yourself organizer.

A paid organizer, when you can't do it all yourself

A paid, experienced organizer can help when the task is to pull citizens together quickly or in large numbers. A paid organizer may be the only option when there is no one who is able or willing to take on the task as a volunteer. Paid organizers seem to be needed for low-income neighborhoods and for groups like seniors.
Paid organizers often begin by gathering information on the neighborhood, then proceed by introducing themselves to residents, bringing people together in discussion groups, building self-help skills, and, finally, training new leaders to take over the organizing task. Many organizers will door-knock in order to ask a carefully constructed set of questions aimed at motivating people to get involved. Questions may help people see that something is very wrong. Or they may help people realize they have been mistreated. In the end the organizer has to give people the confidence that they can solve whatever problem they face.
The presence of a professional organizer may lead some volunteers to wonder why they are working for free while someone else is being paid. A few groups have addressed this problem by turning funds for an organizer into honoraria for volunteers.
Finding an organizer might be difficult. In the United States there are many training programs in community organizing. The Industrial Areas Foundation, The Midwest Academy, Antioch, ACORN, and The Highlander Center are some of the better known. In Canada, there are almost none. Canadian's' faith in government has placed decisions about their communities in the hands of politicians and professionals.

Adapt to available resources

Most of the organizing methods described in this chapter will be easy if you have

resources, particularly money for a coordinator. But some of them will not be possible if you have no resources. Most of the literature on community development is far too optimistic about what can be achieved by all-volunteer groups that are not propelled by a hot issue. With no resources you usually need to —

- reduce the amount of time devoted to what seems like work,
- keep the group size small,
- weave actions into everyday life,
- make sure everyone enjoys one another's company, and
- focus on a single short project with concrete results, or on a single long project with good potential for concrete results "along the way."

The best advice is to think like a cook. When trying a new dish, the best cooks don't follow any recipe precisely. Instead, they look at a number of related recipes, then figure out a course of action that makes use of the ingredients and time available. You should treat any recipe for community organizing the same way: as a malleable guide for future action based on past experience.

Beginning

Where do you begin if you want to become more involved in your neighbourhood? Here are some options.

Begin with research

Although professionals often start with research, you don't have to start here. On the other hand, you might be wise to begin with research if you intend to tackle an issue you do not fully understand.

Begin with a community building activity

The "Community Building Activities" section of the Handbook lists seventeen informal opportunities for neighbours to meet one another. The bulk of community building in Vancouver comes from these activities. The most common are Organizing Around an Issue, and Block Watch.

Begin by joining an existing group

Most neighbourhoods have many different kinds of active organizations. Linking up with one of these can be an easy way to get involved. Begin by checking out the community groups listed by city hall.

Begin by starting a new group

If working with an existing group looks difficult, you might have to start a new group.

New neighbourhood organizations usually form around a core of three to five committed people. Putting together a core of first-rate people is worth the effort. Once you have done so consider these questions:

- What are we trying to do?
- What size of area are we going to organize? (The smaller the area, the easier the task.)
- Who will support our efforts?
- What is a good idea for our first action? (It should be simple, local, and increase the group's visibility.)
- How are we going to reach out to others? (Should we organize a general meeting and invite the community?)

Make a special effort to remain friendly with other local groups that have similar goals. Friendliness can replace the common tendency toward competition with the potential of cooperation. Inter-group cooperation is the engine of real progress at the grassroots.

Researching

Cities behave in tricky ways. What may seem an obvious problem, or an obvious solution often seems less so after a little research. Acting before researching can waste time and energy. It can also reinforce the stereotype of active citizens as highly vocal, but largely uninformed. The stereotype is the most often-cited excuse for dismissing calls for greater citizen participation in local decision-making.

Here is a typical story of what can happen for lack of a little research. People living in a quiet neighbourhood receive notice of a proposal to use a nearby residence as a psychiatric half-way house. Fears of "crazy people" running amok prompt them to form an ad hoc citizens group, which moves swiftly into action to combat the proposal. Having skipped research, they don't discover that most special needs residential facilities (or snrfs) do not create problems, or reduce property values. They don't discover that most snrfs are not even known to local residents. Without these facts, the group goes to battle. Over nothing.

Gather existing information on your neighbourhood

Information on your part of town already exists. The municipal planning department has community profiles, traffic studies, zoning and other maps, aerial photos, and possibly an official community plan. Local health authorities or service agencies may have a needs assessment or more focused studies of your area. Back copies of community newsletters and local newspapers will contain the recent history of many local issues. Your branch of the public library will have copies of many local reports, studies and newsletters.

Discover your human resources

To really understand your neighborhood, you need to research its capacity to act. Start by answering these questions:

- Who can help?
- What resources does the community have: churches, hospitals, schools, business groups, religious organizations, citizen associations, clubs, ethnic groups, sports and recreational groups, cultural associations, service groups, major property owners, businesses, individuals? For a practical guide to tapping local capacity by working in partnership with other organizations see John Kretzmann and John McKnight's book Building Communities from the Inside Out.
- How, why, and where do people get together?
- How do people find out what is going on?
- Who has a stake in the neighborhood?
- Who most influences local decisions, local funding, and local investment?

Find out what people want

In the absence of a single over-riding concern, your group will have to identify neighbourhood issues. In many cases you will try to answer the following questions:

- What do residents like about the neighbourhood, and what do they want to change?
- What are the opportunities for making the neighbourhood more interesting, identifiable, understandable, helpful, friendly.
- What is the highest priority problem? Who is affected?
- Where is it located? What has been done? What can be done? Who can help?

Give this research some time. A question such as, "What do you like about the neighbourhood, and what do you want to change?", can take a group a couple of evenings to itemize, condense and prioritize.

Consider a survey of residents

Any survey requiring face-to-face interaction not only provides information but helps build community. For details on conducting a listening survey see The Listening Project.

Go to those in the know

Interview those who know what is going on in the community, and those who know how to deal with an issue. Often they are people with first-hand experience. A small focus-group discussion with six teens can reveal more about teens in the community than a survey of 500 adults. Other sources of information are community activists, and people listed as contact persons for community organizations.

Research solutions from other places

A problem in your neighbourhood probably exists in other neighbourhoods and other cities. Find out how citizens in other places are solving the problem. Many cities provide contact information for lneighbourhood and other associations on their web sites. You can also ask citizens in other cities for help; if you have a computer and Internet access, post requests on the communitynets of other cities.

Finally, check out the books and periodicals in "The Citizen's Library".

Planning

Planning is necessary if you want to avoid wasted activity, and make your collective efforts count. It should move from the general to the specific, from the big picture to the small, from the long term to the short, from "what" to "how". Planning entails:

- Setting a goal
- Devising objectives (or strategies) to achieve the goal
- Devising actions to achieve the objectives.

Look beyond the obvious to find good objectives
In trying to deal with a problem like growing juvenile crime your group might decide on the obvious objective of getting more police. If you looked beyond symptoms, at causes, you might decide to try to open local schools during evenings. Research can help you look beyond the obvious.

How do your objectives score?

Generate ideas for objectives that will lead to your goal, and then decide which to pursue. Test alternative objectives by asking:

- Will it improve people’s lives or confer a public good?
- Is it easy to understand?
- Is it specific? Will you know when you’ve reached your objective?
- Will it have a immediate impact?
- Will it contribute to reaching long-term goals?
- Will other citizens want to help?
- Will it establish healthy connections between people?
- Is it attainable?
- Is it attainable with available resources?

For projects that face opposition, add the following questions:

- Is there a clear decision maker who can deliver the goods?
- Is it attractive enough to raise money?
- Is it deeply felt?

- Will it help to build organizing skills?
- Will it give citizens a sense of their own power?
- Is there a basic principle involved?

One objective at a time

To be effective, your group should pursue only one objective at a time. New groups should begin with small projects that have a high probability of success over the short term. One good way to identify a group's priorities is to ask people to write their own view of what the priorities are. Each person writes his or her priorities on large post-it notes, one priority per note, and then sticks them to a board or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them. A facilitator helps the group arrange the notes into clusters with similar characteristics. The top priority soon becomes apparent.

Map the landscape of support and opposition

One of the most important recurring decisions for any group is what their strategy will be in the face of opposition. Given the situation at hand, what is going to be most effective: cooperation, negotiation, or confrontation? Smart groups do not have a single style; they constantly respond to shifting circumstances by deciding what is most appropriate at the moment. Generally they make every attempt to succeed through cooperation and negotiation, reserving confrontation for clear and continuing intransigence.

As you think about strategy, you will need to answer the following questions:

> Where can you find the resources you need? Who will support your initiative? What concerns will they have? How can you take advantage of their support?
>
> Who will oppose your initiative? What concerns will they have? What form will their opposition take?

To be effective, your group should pursue no more than one or two objectives at any given time. New groups should begin with small projects having a high probability of success over the short term.

Plan the action

Generate ideas that will lead to your objective, then decide which to carry forward. Once your group agrees on an action, create an action plan. It should include a time-frame; an ordered list of tasks to complete; persons responsible for each task; a list of resources required including materials; facilities and funds. Keep action plans flexible so you can respond to the unexpected. One good way to identify a group's priorities is to ask people to write their views with thick markers on large post-it notes. Each person sticks their notes to a board or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them. A facilitator then helps the group arrange the notes into clusters with similar characteristics.

Acting

Once you've completed the necessary groundwork, you need to act. Surprisingly, many groups never get around to acting. John Gardiner says, "Many talk about action but are essentially organized for study, discussion or education. Still others keep members busy with organizational housekeeping, committee chores, internal politics and passing of resolutions."

While many interest groups get together just for discussion, community groups tend to work best when acting accompanies talking. Otherwise, they tend to shrink to a few diehards for whom meeting attendance has become a way of life.

Getting Noticed

If you want to expand the number of people who know what you are doing, you need to get noticed. And that usually means working with the media. Publicity has the added power of buoying up participants, bringing in more volunteers, nudging bureaucrats, unhinging politicians, and adding momentum to a grassroots initiative.

According to David Engwicht in Reclaiming Our Cities and Towns, empowerment comes from simple exposure. “Group members say, ‘Did you see we were in the news again. Isn’t it great? We are really starting to get places now.’”

When you understand the media, you can also raise public issues that are being ignored and reframe issues from a citizen’s perspective. For more framing and reframing see the pdf article Framing the News.

Be careful if you are not used to dealing with the media. Many journalists look for stories rooted in conflict, error, and injustice. They may impose a confrontational agenda that can actually make it more difficult for you to resolve your issue.

Assemble a list of sympathetic journalists.

If you have a positive community story, you may have trouble getting a reporter interested. One way around this is to cultivate a list of journalists who care about community building. Note their deadlines so you can call when the pressure is off.

Find the media professionals in your community.

Seek help from the people in your community who work for newspapers, radio, and television stations. They can provide advice on what is newsworthy, how to get attention, and who to call. Most will not want to appear in the foreground, but in the background they will be invaluable.

Define your messages, then create your quotes.

Don’t rush off to the media without a clear idea of what you want to accomplish. Create one or two messages — this is what you want people to remember. If you intend to air a problem, one of your messages should be a reasonable solution. Once you have your messages figured out, you need to turn them into quotable quotes.

Make actions newsworthy.

To get media attention you need to tell a good story, with a human focus, about something that is happening now. The more creative, colorful, and humorous the story, the better coverage will be. Getting noticed is largely a matter of dramatizing issues.

Look for timing opportunities.

Try to link your issue to breaking news or to a government report, an anniversary, or a special holiday. Linking helps to make old issues current. Good timing is the key to getting access to the media. Books that focus on ways of getting noticed usually devote a lot of space to ways of quickly repackaging important messages so they incorporate or connect to news "hooks".

Write letters to the editor.

Writing letters to the editors of community newspapers is an easy way to get publicity. Small papers will publish any reasonable letter that does not require a lot of fact checking. Draft and redraft letters so they are punchy and short. Check the length so your letter is at least as short as the average published letter. Common Cause, the largest citizens group in the US, did a study which showed that a letter to the editor was one of the most effective ways of influencing politicians.

Issue media advisories.

Send out a media advisory on your group’s letterhead if you have an upcoming event you wish to publicize.

At the top left put “Media Advisory” and the date. Next, create a strong newspaper-style headline that will interest an editor who has to shuffle through hundreds of media advisories and news releases every day. The first sentence of the copy should contain the most important or most interesting fact in your story.

The rest of the advisory should cover the essentials of who, what, where, when, and why. At the bottom put “For more information” and a contact name and phone number. Keep it to one page in length. You can also email media advisories, but avoid attachments ; emails with attachments may be junked automatically to avoid viruses.

For big events, send out a media advisory two days prior. Direct fax the assignment desk for TV, to the city desk for newspapers, and to the newsroom for radio. But be aware

that faxes usually end up in the garbage. Faxing an advisory without any personal contact is usually a waste of time, unless you are sending it to small community papers. The best way to get the press to an event is to phone assignment editors, producers, and reporters one or two days in advance. If no one comes to cover your event, phone around and offer an interview after it is over.

Aim at TV.

Some of the most effective citizens groups get TV coverage by staging events that provide action and good pictures. Greenpeace, for instance, gets attention by sending little rubber boats out to buzz around huge aircraft carriers.

Consider interviews at the location of the story. Use large colorful graphs and maps, or arrange to provide graphic evidence. Some groups also shoot their own broadcast-quality video or create video news releases to help control what is broadcast. Try to schedule actions before noon to allow reporters enough time to process material for the five o'clock news. Choose a spokesperson who comes across well on TV. Remember 70% of what is communicated on TV is communicated non-verbally through tone of voice, facial expression, body gestures, grooming and clothing. Activists who look sloppy or freaky will be dismissed by the audiences they want to sway.

Practice your blurb.

TV and radio news editors often cut quotes so they take only 10 seconds. Make sure you have one or two short sentences ready for reporters that carry your message. Don't say anything that would misrepresent your message if it was taken out of context. Practice what you want to say before the event. Your statement or a minor variation can be used in response to any question asked. No one will know the difference.

Reframe stories on live radio.

If you can get on a live radio show, you can actually shape the news because you won't be edited as you would be on TV or in the newspaper. To sound good, prepare a collection of quotable quotes that convey your message, and write them out to take with you to the interview. Offer an interview by cell phone from a location where something is happening. Radio reporters like to do interviews with "actuals" — background sounds that provide texture, immediacy, and the feeling of being there

Don't rely on the media to educate.

The mass media are good at entertaining and good at raising issues, but poor at providing detailed information that would help people understand issues. If you want to circulate detailed information, you will probably have to do it through newsletters, op-ed page features, projects with schools, conferences, workshops, and websites.

Consider other media.

Promote your event or issue in a leaflet delivered by volunteers by ad mail, or by direct mail. Leafleting can be combined with fundraising that will pay for the leaflet, the distribution, and project administration. You can also display messages on printed T-shirts, window signs, roof-rack car signs, stick-on car signs, posters,, notices in apartment building laundries, or church orders of service, email newsletters linked to web pages and the print or email newsletters of other groups.

Try the direct approach first.

Before going to the media, consider phoning or writing those who have the power to put things right. If you have a city-related problem you are trying to address, contact city staff. If you get nowhere, call a city councilor.

For more a much larger guide to working with the media checkout the Green Media Toolshed.

Evaluating

Your group will need to evaluate both projects and processes if you wish to improve your effectiveness and stay on track. Unfortunately, many grassroots groups rarely evaluate either.

Don't evaluate when trying to create

Avoid evaluating and criticizing when trying to generate ideas. If you are facilitating a meeting, prohibit criticism when the group is brainstorming.

Make honest evaluation part of your group's culture

Make a habit of asking what worked and what could be better for both actions, and projects. Consider a round to evaluate group process at the end of meetings.

If you don't ask for honest feedback, you won't get it. Unhappy people will simply drop out. To get the most honest feedback, make responses anonymous, and obtain responses from people outside your immediate group.

Check on benefits to members

At the end of actions ask participants about benefits. Did you learn anything? Did you have too little or too much to do? Did you have any fun? Did you feel part of the group?

Compare results with objectives

Is there a gap between what is happening and what you want to happen? If there is a persistent gap, you might consider getting help from a professional organizer. Another

way of dealing with a persistent gap is
to revise your objectives.

Getting People

One of the main on-going activities of any grassroots organization is getting more people involved. This is not easy; most people don't like the idea of being "roped into" doing community work in their spare time. The heavy emphasis on the individual by modern commercial culture has driven participation rates below 5% for most community activities. If that sounds low, remember a few people committed to a single course of action can achieve amazing results.

Ask members to invite others

Eighty per cent of volunteers doing community work said they began because they were asked by a friend, a family member, or a neighbour.

Go to where people are

Instead of trying to get people to come to you, try going to them. Go to the meetings of other groups, and to places and events where people gather. This is particularly important for involving ethnic groups, youth groups, seniors, and others who may not come to you.

Look for ways to collect names, addresses, phone numbers

Have sign-in sheets at your meetings and events. At events organized by others, ask people to add their name, address, email addresss and phone number to petitions and requests-for-information. In return, hand out an issue sheet, or an explanation of how your group is attempting to address an issue.

Try to include those who are under-represented

Minority language groups, low-income residents, the disabled, the elderly and youth all tend to be under-represented in neighbourhood groups. In some cases not participating is a matter of choice - most transient youth choose not to take part. In other cases, English language competence poses a formidable barrier to participation. In still other cases, people get overlooked. This can happen to the disabled and the elderly, even though they have proven invaluable as active citizens. Here are some ways to include the under-represented:

- Go to people in the group you are trying to reach and ask how they would like to be approached.
- Address their issues.
- Think about who you know who knows someone in the group you are trying to reach. Use your connections.
- Identify a group as people you want to work with, not as a target group you want

to bring "on side". Treat people as people first.

- Organize projects that focus on kids. Parents of different ethnic backgrounds, and income levels will meet one another while accompanying their children.

Do surveys

Surveys are a good way to stay in touch, increase participation, and bring in new members. They show your group is willing to respond to a broad base of others, not just those who tend to participate in community activities.

Door-knock

Door-knocking is the oldest and best outreach method. For a how-to description see Door-knocking.

Create detailed membership lists

Create membership lists with places for entering name, address, day and evening phone and fax numbers, priorities for local improvement, occupation, personal interests, special skills, times available, what the person would be willing to do, and what the person would not be willing to do. Consider using a computer to update lists and sort people by address, priority, and interests. With such a computer database you can easily bring together people who belong together. Membership lists can also form the basis of a telephone tree, a system for getting messages out to large numbers of people. For suggestions on setting up a telephone tree see Information Sharing.

Generate newsletters and leaflets

Newsletters keep group members in touch. Because most neighbourhood groups deliver to all residents whether members or not, a newsletter helps attract new people. For tips on newsletters see Information Sharing, and How to do Leaflets, Newsletters & Newspapers by Nancy Brigham.

Keeping People

People join community groups to meet people, to have fun, to learn new skills, to pursue an interest, and to link their lives to some higher purpose. They leave if they don't find what they are looking for. Citizens groups need to ask themselves more often: What benefits do we provide? At what cost to members? How can we increase the benefits and decrease the costs? Here are a some ideas on where to begin.

Stay in touch with one another.

Regular contact is vital. Face to face is best. If you have to meet, getting together in someone's house is better than meeting in a hall.

Welcome newcomers.

Introduce them to members of your group. Consider appointing greeters for large meetings and events. Call new contacts to invite them to events, or to pass on information.
Help people find a place in the organization. The most appealing approach is to say, "Tell us the things you like to do and do well and we will find a way to use those talents." The next most appealing is to say: "Here are the jobs we have, but how you get them done is up to you."
Invite newcomers to assume leadership roles. If the same people run everything, newcomers feel excluded.

Pay attention to group process

Most volunteer groups do not give adequate attention to how they work together. Decision-making methods are not determined explicitly nor are roles, or healthy behaviours. Some groups make process a topic of discussion by appointing a process watcher.

Discuss the group contract

Set aside occasions when members describe what they expect of the group and what the group can expect of them in terms of time and responsibilities. This information should become part of your membership lists.

Act more, meet less

The great majority of people detest meetings; too many are the Black Death of community groups. By comparison, activities like tree-planting draw large numbers of people of all ages.

Keep time demands modest

Most people lead busy lives. Don't ask them to come to meetings if they don't need to be there. Keep expanding the number of active members to ensure everyone does a little, and no one does too much. Work out realistic time commitments for projects.

Do it in twos

Following a practice from Holland, we suggest working in pairs. It improves the quality of communication, makes work less lonely, and ensures tasks get done. Ethnically mixed pairs (such as English and Chinese) can maintain links to different cultures. Gender mixed pairs can take advantage of differences in ways of relating to men and women.

Provide social time and activities

Endless work drives people away. Schedule social time at the beginning and end of meetings. Turn routine tasks into social events; for example, stuff envelopes while

sharing pizza. Some groups form a social committee to plan parties, dinners, and trips.

Provide skills training

Provide skill-building workshops and on-the-job training. Simply pairing experienced and inexperienced people will improve the skills of new members. Training in leadership, group facilitating and conflict resolution are important enough to warrant special weekend workshops.

Leading

Good leaders are the key to large-scale community organizing. They do not tell other people what to do, but help others to take charge. They do not grab center stage, but nudge others into the limelight. They are not interested in being The Leader, but in trying to create more leaders. They recognize that only by creating more leaders can an organizing effort expand. For more on leaders see IAF organizing.

Lead by creating an example to follow

Some leaders are larger-than-life heroes. Some deliver inspirational speeches. Others are excellent organizers. But many leaders inspire others to follow by setting an example. When Rosa Parks refused to give up a bus seat reserved for white people, others followed her example in such numbers that it blossomed into the civil rights movement.

Divide-up and delegate work

Divide tasks into bite-sized chunks, then discuss who will do each chunk. Make sure everyone has the ability to carry out their task, then let them carry it out in their own way. Have someone check on progress. People do not feel good about doing a job if nobody cares whether it gets done.
Appreciate all contributions, no matter how small Recognize people’s efforts in conversations, at meetings, in newsletters, and with tokens of appreciation: thank-you notes, certificates, and awards for special efforts.

Welcome criticism

Accepting criticism may be difficult for some leaders, but members need to feel they can be critical without being attacked.

Help people to believe in themselves

A leader builds people’s confidence that they can accomplish what they have never accomplished before. The unflagging optimism of a good leader energizes everyone.

Inspire trust. People will not follow those they do not trust. Always maintain the highest standards of honesty. Good leaders reveal their potential conflicts of interest and air doubts about their own personal limitations.

Herald a higher purpose

People often volunteer to serve some higher purpose. A leader should be able to articulate this purpose, to hold it up as a glowing beacon whenever the occasion demands. A good leader will celebrate every grassroots victory as an example of what can happen when people work together for a common good.
Heralding a higher purpose may require some practice at heralding. Recognized leaders are usually good at public speaking. In Canada, a surprising number of activist leaders belong to Toastmasters!

Avoid doing most of the work

Don’t try to run the whole show or do most of the work. Others will become less involved. And you will burn out.

Meeting

Meetings are necessary for planning, and decision making. How well they work influences whether people remain in a group. All meetings should be as lively and as much fun as possible.

The basics of meeting

Fix a convenient time, date and place to meet. You can find free meeting places in libraries, community centres, some churches, neighbourhood houses, and schools. Some groups meet in a favourite restaurant or cafe. To keep a group together, decide on a regular monthly meeting time, or think of another way of staying in touch. Agree on an agenda beforehand. A good agenda states meeting place; starting time, time for each item, ending time; objectives of the meeting; and items to be discussed.
Start the meeting by choosing a facilitator, a recorder, and a timekeeper. Begin with a round of introductions if necessary. Next, review the agreements of the previous meeting. Ask for amendments or additions to the agenda, then begin working through the agenda. If you have trouble reaching agreement, refer to "Decision Making" below. Record actions required, who will carry them out, and how much will be accomplished before the next meeting. Finally, set a time, place and an agenda for the next meeting.

Display everyone's contribution

Consider using a flip chart, overhead projector or a blackboard.

Follow a set of discussion guidelines

Regular meetings work better if everyone agrees on a set of discussion guidelines. Some groups post their guidelines as a large sign:

- Listen to others
- Do not interrupt

- Ask clarifying questions
- Welcome new ideas
- Do not allow personal attacks
- Treat every contribution as valuable

Develop a friendly culture

Encourage humour. Provide food and drink, or meet in a restaurant. Allow for social time.

Decision Making

Your group should discuss, agree on, then post guidelines for reaching decisions.

Straw polling

Straw polling entails asking for a show of hands to see how the group feels about a particular issue. It is a quick check that can save a great deal of time. To make straw polling continuous, agree on a set of hand signals everyone will use throughout the meeting. These silent signals enable people to gauge how others are reacting moment by moment. They can also provide invaluable feedback for a speaker who is trying to work with a large group.

Voting

Voting is a decision making method that seems best suited to large groups. To avoid alienating large minorities, you might decide a motion will only succeed with a two-thirds majority. Alternatively, you might decide to combine voting with consensus. Small groups usually follow informal consensus procedures. Large groups, on the other hand, often try to follow Robert's Rules of Order without anyone really understanding how to Amend a Motion, or the number of people needed to Move the Question. If rules are used, they should be simple and understood by everyone.

Some community groups limit the privilege of voting to people who have come to three or more consecutive meetings to prevent stacked meetings, and to encourage familiarity with the issues being decided. Voting usually means deciding between X or Y. But not always. Some issues will admit a proportional solution, part X and part Y. In such a cases the ratio of X to Y in the solution usually reflects the ratio of people voting for each alternative.

Consensus

A consensus process aims at bringing the group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. It does not require unanimity. Consensus can take longer than other processes, but fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions. Here is a sample outline:

1. A presenter states the proposal. Ideally, a written draft has been distributed prior

to the meeting.

2. The group discusses and clarifies the proposal. No one presents concerns until clarification is complete.
3. The facilitator asks for legitimate concerns. If there are none the facilitator asks the group if it has reached consensus. If there are concerns:
4. The recorder lists concerns where everyone can see them. The group then tries to resolve the concerns. The presenter has first option to:
    - Clarify the proposal.
    - Change the proposal.
    - Explain why it is not in conflict with the group's values.
    - Ask those with concerns to stand aside.
5. By "standing aside" a person indicates a willingness to live with a proposal. By "crossing off a concern" a person indicates satisfaction with clarifications or changes.
6. If concerns remain unresolved and concerned members are unwilling to stand aside, the facilitator asks everyone to examine these concerns in relation to the group's purpose and values. The group may need to go through a special session to examine its purpose or resolve value conflicts.
7. The facilitator checks again to see if those with concerns are willing to stand aside or cross off their concerns. If not, the facilitator keeps asking for suggestions to resolve the concerns, until everyone finds the proposal acceptable or stands aside. Often the solution is a "third way", something between either/or, black and white.
8. If time runs out and concerns persist the facilitator may:
    - Conduct a straw poll.
    - Ask those with concerns if they will stand aside.
    - Ask the presenter to withdraw the proposal.
    - Contract with the group for more time.
    - Send the proposal to a sub-group.
    - Conduct a vote, requiring a 75% to 90% majority.

At the end, the facilitator states the outcome clearly. For consensus to work properly everyone must understand the meaning of "legitimate concerns". They are possible consequences of the proposal that might adversely affect the organization or the common good, or that are in conflict with the purpose or values of the group. Consensus will not work properly if concerns come from ego or vested interests, or derive from unstated tensions around authority, rights, personality conflicts, competition or lack of trust. Trust is a prerequisite for consensus.

If your group adopts consensus as a decision making method you do not have to use consensus of the whole group to decide everything. You can (and should) empower individuals, committees, or task forces to make certain decisions.

Live with disagreements

Get agreement on the big picture, then turn to action. Don't exhaust yourself trying to achieve consensus on details. On a contentious issue, embracing a variety of positions will make you more difficult to attack.

Facilitating

The facilitator's role is to help a group to its best thinking. A good facilitator is helpful when a group is trying to deal with new or difficult issues. In the main, a facilitator helps people persevere as they confront the inevitable confusion and frustration associated with trying to integrate different views and approaches with their own. The more people who learn to facilitate, the better. If you accept the role of facilitator you must be neutral. You should also use the following techniques.

Watch group vibes

If people seem bored or inattentive, you may have to speed up the pace of the meeting. If people seem tense because of unvoiced disagreements, you may have to bring concerns out into the open.

Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak

Invite quiet people to speak. If necessary, use the clock: "We have fifteen minutes left. I think we should hear from people who haven't spoken for a while." Another way to get quiet people to speak is to initiate a round, in which you move around the table, with everyone getting a few minutes to present their views.

Encourage open discussion

Try to encourage people to speak up if they seem reluctant to disagree with a speaker: "On difficult issues, people disagree. Does anyone have a different point of view?" Another way to encourage open discussion is to ask participants to avoid using critical language for a period of time.

Draw people out with open-ended questions

Open-ended questions require more than a yes / no answer. Some examples:
"We seem to be having trouble here. What do you think we should do?"
"Could you say more about that?"
"What do you mean when you say . . . ?"

Inject humor

Humor is one of the best ways of improving the tone of meetings. It makes meetings seem like friendly get-togethers.

Paraphrase

When you paraphrase, you try to restate briefly the point that someone has just made: “Let me see if I’m understanding you . . .” If paraphrasing doesn’t convince a person that he or she has been heard, you may have to repeat what was said verbatim.

Learn to deal with difficult behavior.

Flare-ups: When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize the points made by each and then turn the discussion back to the group.

Grandstanding: Interrupt the one-person show with a statement that gives credit for his or her contribution, but ask the person to reserve other points for later.

Broken recording: Paraphrase the contribution of someone who repeats the same point over and over. This lets the person know they have been heard.

Interrupting: Step in immediately. “Hold on, let Margaret finish what she has to say.”
Continual criticizing: Legitimize negative feelings on difficult issues. You might say, “Yes, it will be tough to reduce traffic congestion on Main Street, but there are successful models we can look at.”

Identify areas of common ground.

Summarize differences in points of view, then note where there is common ground. For instance, you might begin, “It seems we agree that . . . ”

Follow a procedure to reach closure.
One procedure for large groups is to ask the group to vote. A better procedure for small groups is for the person in charge to —

1. close the discussion,
2. clarify the proposal,
3. poll the group, then
4. decide to a) make the decision or b) continue the discussion.

Suggest options when time runs out.

Identify areas of partial consensus, suggest tabling the question, or create a small subcommittee to deal with the matter at its convenience.

Consider a round at the end of the meeting.

Going quickly around the whole group at the end of the meeting gives people a chance to bring up matters not on the agenda. You can also use a round to evaluate the meeting. With more than ten people, though, a round can become tedious.

Learn more about facilitating.

Good facilitating is something to behold, but it is not magic. Learn more about facilitating by getting a good how-to book on the subject, such as Sam Kaner's Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making.

Fundraising

If you must raise money:

Ask frequently. Churches are some of the best fundraisers because they ask every week. Good fundraisers ask at every opportunity.

Ask publicly. Social pressure helps people part with their money. Again, the churches provide a model.

Ask personally. It is easier to toss a piece of direct mail than it is to refuse a real person.

Ask volunteers. They have already shown they want to help. Contributing financially strengthens their commitment.

Ask for amounts that will make a difference. Citizens groups have a habit of asking for far too little. They might charge $2 for membership rather than a useful $20. When raising money for a campaign, they aim for $1,000 instead of an effective $10,000.

Avoid events needing a lot of up-front cash. Events that require expensive prizes can lose money. Raise more money then you intend to spend. Extra money lets you address unforeseen difficulties, and exploit unforeseen opportunities.

Spend money to raise money.
Consider hiring an experienced fundraiser, or a staff person who can raise money if there is no one in your group willing and able to raise money as a volunteer.

Fundraising sources

Individual contributions.

Asking for contributions from local people turns fundraising into community building. People become more attached to groups, projects, and places they feel they own. Money can come from memberships, voluntary subscriptions to newsletters, collections at meetings, door-to-door canvassing, planned giving, memorial giving, and direct mail. There are many how-to books that cover these approaches.

In-kind donations,

Seek in-kind or non-monetary contributions. This includes donations of printing, equipment, furniture, space, services, food, and time. Local businesses respond well to requests for in-kind donations.

Auctions.

Elizabeth Amer recommends a dream auction in her book Taking Action. “Neighbors can donate overnight babysitting for two children, a local landmark embroidered on your jacket, cheesecake for eight, four hours of house repairs. At a big community party your auctioneer sells every treasure to the highest bidder.”

Contests.

The way to make money on a contest is to sell votes — one for 50 cents, a booklet for five dollars. Purchasers can use them to vote for their favorite entry in, for example, a garden contest or a contest for the best Christmas light display or the best-decorated Christmas tree. Contests can raise a lot of money as people try to stack the vote for their favorite. Winners usually get a prize.

Fundraising dinners.

This standby succeeds if you charge a lot more than the dinner costs. It helps to be able to keep what is earned on the bar. People come to fundraising dinners to help the cause and schmooze with other like-minded people.

Food tastings in local restaurants. This works well in places with lots of ethnic restaurants. People can purchase small tastes of many different kinds of food.

Casinos and bingos.

In many places a registered non-profit society can make several thousand dollars a night by running a casino or a bingo. Typically a group will provide people to help staff the casino over several nights. Provincial and state gaming commissions provide applications and rules for gaming licenses.

Charging fees

Consider charging fees for services or products.

Time tithing.

In When Everyone’s a Volunteer, Ivan Sheier recommends a system in which supporters contribute quality services as a way of producing a steady flow of cash. A group might advertise such member services as conducting a workshop, painting signs, or providing some form of professional assistance. When supporters perform a service, they do not keep the money they are paid, but have the amount, minus expenses, sent directly to their group.

Bonding with rich elites.

A collection of foundations financed by a tiny group of wealthy funders supplied the bulk of support for the environmental movement. If rich do-gooders find your objectives attractive, you might take the time to develop relationships with the foundations that dispense their philanthropy.

Direct mail and telephone solicitation.

Direct mail and telephone solicitation are such effective fundraising tools that most large social movement organizations use one or both. Small organizations should also consider these techniques because many communications companies that operate phone banks and churn out direct mail only charge a percentage of what they bring in.

Grants from govemments and foundations

If you have a particular project in mind, look for government programs that will provide funds. Many citizens groups are short of project money because they don't take the time to find out about hundreds of existing government and foundation programs. After identifying a possibility, find out about application procedures. Getting some grants requires writing a good proposal, but others only require filling in an application. Because there are so many programs from different governments and foundations, you can often fund a project with multiple grants.

How to get foundation funding.

Robert Bothwell, director and president of the National Committee of Responsive Philanthropy, conducted a study of 21 foundations and 26 grassroots organizations in the U.S. to identify why foundation funding wasn't reaching grassroots organizations. He followed the study with a series of recommendations. In summary:

- Grassroots groups should market themselves more effectively. They need to use the media, tell their stories, and become publicly known for something important. This was the number one recommendation from foundations. Many grassroots groups ignore marketing, naively thinking they will become known by their good works alone.
- Grassroots organizations need to commit more resources to fundraising and increase their fundraising savvy.
- Grassroots groups should identify more foundation funding possibilities and submit more proposals. In the U.S., grassroots groups have a 63 percent success rate for proposals. The rule of thumb for professional fundraisers is a 10 to 17 percent success rate.
- Grassroots organizations should contact the foundations they identify as possible funders, do follow-up telephone calls and office visits, and generally seek to build relationships with foundation staff and trustees who seem interested in their work.
- Grassroots organizations should work in consortia and coalitions to amplify their

work, visibility, and attractiveness to funders. Bothwell's study found that grassroots organizations with paid staff, or with mixed paid and volunteer staff, are much more likely to obtain foundation grants than organizations with just volunteer staff, or with no staff and a volunteer board of directors.

Grassroots Structure

Citizens groups should have as little structure as possible. The right amount is just enough to address their goals. In an attempt to become legitimate, many small groups decide they need more structure. Unfortunately, this can lead to spending more time on the needs of the organization than on the reason for getting together.

Networks, Cooperatives, Collectives

Grassroots organizations seem to work better with a flat structure as free as possible of boards, directors, and chairs. Flatness, or the absence of an organizational hierarchy, does not mean the elimination of individual roles or responsibilities. It does mean the end of people with over-riding authority over other people's work. Citizen's groups must avoid the common mistake of involving small numbers of people heavily. They should strive to involve large numbers of people lightly. Flat organizations, which emphasize horizontal connections, seem to be the best bet for involving large numbers of people lightly.

Traditional structure

Traditional organizational structure seems to dry out the grassroots. Nevertheless it continues to be recommended by many citizens umbrella groups in North America. The most successful traditional organizations have:

- An elected leadership
- Some groups elect a set of officers - a president, one or two vice presidents, a secretary and a treasurer. In order to include people doing important work, some expand the leadership group into a steering committee that includes the chairperson of each committee. Leaders should be elected on a regular basis at well-publicized membership meetings. One or two people should not try to run the organization. When that happens others become less involved.
- Regular meetings
- A newsletter
- A means of delegating tasks and responsibilities
- Training for new members
- Social time together
- A planning process
- Working relationships with power players and resource organizations. Power players are people with the ability to make things happen: politicians, owners of key businesses, media people, heads of key government departments, heads of agencies, major landlords.

Provincial non-profit societies

Traditional organizations frequently wind up as provincially registered non-profit societies. The advantages of non-profit status are few, beyond less circuitous access to certain sources of funds. On the other hand, non-profit status means having to follow the rules and organizational structure required by the Societies Act. If you wish to become a non-profit regardless, get a copy of Flora MacLeod's Forming and Managing a Non-profit Organization in Canada, published by Self-Council Press.

Committees & Task Forces

Committees and task forces are the main way jobs are shared. They make it possible to get a lot done without anyone getting worn out. Standing committees look after a continuing group function; task forces carry out a specific task, then disband. Both provide members with a way of getting involved in projects that interest them. A large, action-oriented group might have the following standing committees: coordinating, publicity, membership, outreach, newsletter, fundraising, and research. Many people prefer the short-term projects of task forces, to the work of committees. Ideally, members of committees and task forces are made up of people selected by the whole group rather than by people who are self-selected. If the whole group is confident in a task force or committee it should empower the subgroup to make most decisions on its own. To keep everyone working together, committees and task forces should regularly report back to the whole group. For more on the effective distribution of work see Ivan Sheier's book When Everyone's a Volunteer, reviewed in the "Citizen's Library".

Coalitions

If you intend to tackle a large issue you will need allies. Approach other organizations by asking to speak on a matter of community importance at their next executive or general meeting. After you have presented, distribute material outlining your objectives, program and budget. A good way of getting agreement is to ask someone from the group you are approaching to help prepare your presentation. A coalition requires that all participants have a clear set of expectations and get together regularly to develop a friendly working relationship. A coalition works best when established for a specific project, and then allowed to lapse when the project ends. Because coalitions can be tricky you might check out the advice in the latest edition of the Midwest Academy's book Organizing for Social Change.

Door-knocking

Door-knocking is the most effective way of making face-to-face community contact, but it has become a lost art. With commercial culture’s bias for privacy, door-knocking seems like an intrusion into other people’s lives. But those who try it for the first time are usually surprised by the pleasant reception they receive. Here are some pointers that will help when you go door-knocking.

Before you go out

Begin with a door-hanger

If you can afford it, leave a door-hanger two days before you go door-knocking. It will prepare people for a visit, and it can introduce an unusual project. The door-hanger should briefly describe the project and say that someone will be around in person. Make the door-hanger with light cardstock, cut about 5.5 by 8.5 inches, with a 1.5 inch hole cut in the top and a slit on the side of the hole. A less expensive but less effective alternative is a notice put through the letter-slot.

Wear an official name tag

Door-knockers should wear name tags with the logo of their organization. The logo should match the logo on any door-hanger. The best name tags will also include a color photo and the name of the canvasser. Name tags are especially important in neighborhoods where people might be suspicious of someone knocking on the door.

Have people knock their own blocks

The easiest way to do door-knocking is to do your own block. This allows door-knockers to introduce themselves with something like: “My name is Jill Smith and I live in the green house three doors down from you.” Being a neighbor creates an immediate bond with the person answering the door; after that, everything else is easy. Arranging for people to knock their own block is the basis of a lot of grassroots organizing.

A survey is a good excuse to door-knock

If you simply want to connect to people, consider preparing a short survey about local concerns, a current project, or your group’s goals.
Figure out responses for various situations. What if no one is home? What if the person who answers the door cannot speak English? What if a child answers the door? Figuring out responses ahead of time will make door-knocking easier.

When you go out

When to go and what to do first

The best times to knock are usually Saturdays, and other days between dinner and darkness. When someone answers the door, smile and introduce yourself; say you are a volunteer and, if it helps, tell where you live. Give the name of your organization and, briefly, the reason for the visit. Ask if the person might have a minute to talk. If the answer is yes, state the reason for your visit in more detail. For additional suggestions on door-knocking, see the comprehensive Community Toolbox created by the University of Kansas and available on-line at http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/.

Bring out commonalities between yourself and the other person

Mention where you live if you live on the same block. Otherwise, bring up something that links the two of you to your project. For instance, a person knocking to obtain support for better child protection might begin: “Do you remember when they found that small boy who had been left alone for four days . . . ?”

State what action the other person should take

Ideally this is an action they can take on the spot.

State the benefits of taking the action.

Tell the person how their actions will benefit themselves and others. If a person hesitates . . . Emphasize benefits you’ve already mentioned and then, if necessary, add further benefits. If the person continues to hesitate, offer a more limited form of action. Lee Staples recommends this approach for door-to-door fundraising in his book on grassroots organizing, Roots to Power. He says start off asking for a lot, then step back to something more modest.
If a person agrees, follow up immediately. If possible, get a donation, a signature, a pledge. For actions that take place at a later date, you should to follow up with a phone call reminder. You could also ask about time commitments and resources or expertise a person might be able to contribute to a project.

Record contact information on the spot

Record names, addresses, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, and responses to questions on the spot. You
won’t remember them later.

Listening Projects

A New York citizens group wanted to identify what issues would motivate people to become involved in addressing the problems of a low-income neighborhood. They decided to use an informal technique called a listening survey to discover what aroused the most emotional energy.

A group of residents agreed to conduct the survey for a small honorarium. In preparation they held several workshops where they talked about the common blocks to listening, how to eavesdrop in public places, how to get permission to insert yourself into a conversation, how to keep people talking without intruding, and how to deal with people who say something you dislike.

After the exercises they wrote down all the places where different people gathered, plus the names of people who everyone talked to, such as hairdressers and bartenders. Then they formed pairs and went out to the places listed to find people. To conduct the

survey, one person encouraged people to talk, while the other acted as recorder. At the end of each week, everyone got together to evaluate the material collected and determine where the strongest feelings lay. Both residents and service providers were surveyed in this way. The results of both surveys were then made available to the whole community.

A close relative of the listening project is the story project. It can focus on gathering the history of an area or capturing the character of an area. Listening and story projects provide good excuses for bringing people together.

Mahatma Gandhi's methods for converting an opponent

Conversion is the process by which an opponent comes around to embrace your objectives.

1. Refrain from violence and hostility.
2. Attempt to obtain your opponent's trust through
    - ...Truthfulness
    - ...Openness about intentions
    - ...Chivalry (kindness if the other side experiences an unrelated difficulty)
    - ...Making behavior inoffensive without compromising the issue at hand
3. Refrain from humiliating an opponent.
4. Make visible sacrifices for one's cause. ...Ideally, make the suffering of the aggrieved visible.
5. Carry on constructive work. Address parts of the problem you can address....Make improvements where you can. Participate in activities regarded by ...everyone as benefitting everyone.
6. Maintain contact with the opponent. ...This is absolutely necessary if conversion is to succeed.
7. Demonstrate trust in the opponent.
8. Develop empathy, good will and patience toward the opponent.

This is the best you can do from your end. External conditions may still prevent conversion.

Strategic Thinking

The smartest and most effective activists think, plan, and act strategically. Inexperienced activists make the mistake of focusing only on stopping things. Their only action is reaction. Duff Conacher of the Democracy Watch says, "All they do is maintain the status quo and they actually lose in the long run, because the rules never change and there are all sorts of things they're not stopping." (Quoted in Tim Falconer's Watchdog's and Gadflies, Activism from marginal to mainstream.)

Strategic action is necessary in situations where an opponent blocks the way to an objective. In such cases, smart activists use strategic thinking to identify where an opponent is vulnerable, and then try to figure out how to exploit that vulnerability. They also use strategic thinking to solve problems before they happen, coolly examining the pros and cons of various moves in order to identify the best course of action.

Creating a Strategy

Creating a strategy for a public interest campaign involves:

- defining goals and intermediate and short-term objectives,
- identifying opponents,
- carrying out a SWOT analysis,
- imagining and playing scenarios,
- identifying primary and secondary targets,
- identifying allies,
- deciding what resources are required (salaries, expenses, other),
- devising tactics, and
- drawing up an action timetable.

Because this is a problem-solving process it is a loopy. In other words, you might define an objective up-front, but realize later that resources are inadequate to achieve this goal or that there is no clear target. This will mean looping back to redefine the objective.

Defining goals and objectives

Your goals are the broad results you wish to achieve over the long term. Objectives are what you want to accomplish more immediately. Your objectives should follow naturally from your goals. They help you reach your goal. If the goal is winning the war, an objective might be winning a particular battle. If you lose sight of your goals and objectives, everything goes haywire. Consider a project to address the problems of global capitalism; it leads to a street protest, which brings about a police attack on protesters. A protracted inquiry into police brutality then sidetracks the whole project, obscuring the message of the protest and trumping its main objective.

Identifying opponents and obstacles

What stands in the way of reaching your objective? Who can make the necessary changes? Who specifically do you need to influence? In many cases you will be trying, in some way, to bring about changes to government policy or legislation. You will want to avoid making incorrect assumptions about how government works, who is responsible, or what is the most effective route for bringing about change.

Carrying out a SWOT analysis

It’s easier to make choices after identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and

threats. A SWOT analysis can be applied to a position, an idea, an individual, or an organization. Do a SWOT analysis for your group as well as for your target.

Imagining and playing scenarios

Strategic thinking is often described as reflective dialogue about the future so that one can avoid pitfalls as well as take advantage of opportunities. One way to do this is by imagining how events will play out, then devising effective responses. Future scenarios may be framed as “what if” questions. Let’s say you are planning to hike up a mountain. The sun is shining, so you may prepare gear and clothing based on a default scenario that assumes an easy hike in fine weather. But your preparations will change if you consider “what if” questions. “What if fog makes it difficult to see?” “What if it snows?” “What if someone sprains their ankle?” Good scenarios require informed imagination. If it’s not informed, you can waste energy on the improbable. If it’s not fueled by imagination, you can be blindsided.

Identifying primary and secondary targets

If your group cannot itself deliver a public good, you must be able to identify a decision maker or primary target who can. Campaigns directed at getting a target to do something usually require negotiation, campaigning, and confrontation. These tactics work best on people who are elected. Hired bureaucrats and appointed officials are more resistant.

You should also identify one or more secondary targets. These are people who will cooperate with you, who have some power over the primary target, Secondary targets might be regulatory officials, important customers, or politicians from a more senior level of government.

Identifying allies

If you can’t influence a decision maker on your own, are there others who can help? When groups with similar interests create strategic alliances, they are much more likely to achieve their goals. The tendency for groups to compete for funds and influence merely serves the opposition.

Allies may also be sympathetic insiders. Citizens need intelligence to make the right moves. The best intelligence comes from inside organizations that can influence the success of your project. Let’s suppose your goal is to change government policy. Reading government reports will provide some useful information. But talking to bureaucrats will provide additional, up-to-date information and a quick rundown on attitudes inside government. A sympathetic senior bureaucrat who understands your project can provide the most help. Finding such a person will help you make all the right moves.

Devising tactics

Tactics are the action part of a strategy. Generating good tactical alternatives requires

creative thinking. Choosing which ones to use requires a knowledge of what works in a particular context. It also requires some consideration of what will be good, interesting, or exciting for the group.

Does the key decision maker agree with your objectives and your solutions? If so, cooperative tactics make sense. Does the decision maker agree with your objectives but not your solutions? If so, consider tactics focused on persuasion and negotiation. Does the decision maker completely disagree with both your objectives and your solutions? Then confrontation may be the only option.

Tactics differ in what they try to accomplish. They can aim to —

- win an objective by giving the other side something it wants (credit, votes, support),
- win an objective by depriving or threatening to deprive the other side of something it wants (credibility, respect, money, labor, employment),
- build public support in the media, or build the support of allies or secondary targets
- show a target the size and concern of your constituency, or
- build the morale of your group.

Most campaigns include many different kinds of tactics. To evaluate potential tactics, try to answer the following questions.

- Is the tactic focused on a primary or secondary target?
- Is it based on a thorough understanding of the target?
- Is the tactic in tune with other things that are happening?
- Does it demand action?
- Is your group comfortable with the tactic?
- If it is confrontational, has your group exhausted all options for cooperation and negotiation? Confrontation should be a last resort.
- If it is confrontational, does it respect Alinsky’s Rules for Radicals?

Drawing up a detailed action timetable

Your timetable should be a multilevel chart with start and completion dates for everything you want to do, as well as start and completion dates for all significant external events such as voter registration. Strategies that involve winning something from a target usually begin with opening a line of communication with the target, and then move on to action meetings.

II Community Building Activities

Child-minding Co-ops

If you have small children, you know how difficult it can be to find, and pay for a baby-sitter. Many families have found a solution to their baby-sitting woes in child-minding co-ops.

In these co-ops, families care for each other's children both in their own homes and in the homes of the children, during the day, evening, or overnight. Most co-ops keep track of baby-sitting hours on a list of debits and credits; one local group keeps track by exchanging poker chips. Hours are not only determined by the clock, but by tardiness, the number of children, lateness of returning, and other considerations.

Most co-ops serve a small area, one that allows for participants to walk between each others homes. A co-op works best with fifteen to twenty families - enough to spread the baby-sitting around. Participants are usually found by talking to friends. This is preferable to posting "vacancies" since most people feel happier leaving their children with "friends of friends".

A selection committee usually visits a candidate's home to look at general safety, neatness, the level of child-proofing, and to see whether people smoke inside, and who might be coming and going. On being accepted, candidates pay a small start-up fee, and register their name with the co-op's secretary (a position rotated on a monthly or quarterly basis). The secretary is the person who takes "orders" for baby-sitting, usually with a minimum 24 hours notice. Baby-sitters are sought on the basis of their availability, and the balance on their baby-sitting account.

One co-op meets every two months for a potluck, an occasion to socialize as well as deal with any concerns. Another uses a similar opportunity to introduce new candidates to their group. It holds a social event three times a year for both kids and parents. These events bring a sense of community to a sometimes isolated group of parents.

Some co-ops have been in operation for as long as 20 years. The longevity of the co-op depends largely on its ease of administration, and the ability to find new families as others outgrow its services. For more information contact your local community centre, neighbourhood house, or family place.

Bullies learning from babies

Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child
Mary Gordon Thomas Allen
Reviewed by Keith Oatley, The Globe & Mail, Books, January 28, 2006

0f all our human characteristics, empathy is among the most important. Adam Smith thought that the set of emotional traits that includes empathy, sympathy and compassion was the glue that holds society together. He called these traits "moral sentiments." A bit more than 200 years after his famous book on the subject was published, his proposals that these traits form the emotional bases for right action in society have been largely substantiated by research in child development.

In The Roots of Empathy, Mary Gordon, who was born and raised in Newfoundland, draws on this research and describes a program to foster empathy that she started in Toronto nearly 10 years ago. It involves having mothers bring their babies into classrooms for an hour a month for nine months of the school year, with a trained instructor present. A week before the visit, the instructor prepares the class, and a week after it, the instructor leads an hour's discussion on the visit. The program is specialized for three age groups, Grades 1 to 3,4 to 6 and 7 to 8. It now runs in eight Canadian provinces and has been taken by 68,000 children.

Gordon: one of the first to teach 'emotional intelligence.'

Nowadays, we hear a good deal about emotional intelligence. Mary Gordon's brilliant idea is one of the first to show how it might be learned. In her impressive book, Gordon describes the program and its effects on the children's engagement with the babies during their visits, their appreciation of the babies' feelings and their concerns for the babies' developmental accomplishments.

Among her examples is a boy she calls Darren, who had a very troubled home life. He lost his mother at the age of 4 and lived subsequently in a succession of foster homes. In Grade 8, he had already been held back for two years, and he dressed to look menacing. At the end of the visit of a baby to Darren's classroom, the mother of the baby asked if anyone wanted to try on the Snugli, the pouch in which a baby can be carried on a parent's chest. Then, Gordon writes, "To everyone's surprise, Darren offered to try it." He asked if the baby could be put in. Although the mother was a bit apprehensive, the baby was put in, and snuggled up to him. Darren walked to a corner and rocked the baby for several minutes, after which he came back to the mother and the Roots of Empathy instructor and asked: "If nobody has ever loved you, do you think you could still be a good father?" Gordon wonders whether perhaps for this boy a seed was sown.

The second section of the book contains chapters on topics in child development, such as temperament, attachment, emotional literacy and social inclusion. In each, she draws on the research literature and keys it to features of her program, to show what the school children learn in relation to each topic.

The book's third section is on the relation of the program to society, with themes of bullying, infant safety, teaching and parenting. Most striking in this third section is the chapter on bullying. Empathy and bullying are opposites. Whereas empathy is identifying with another person, bullying is inflating oneself by attacking the other. The bully is always the more powerful, and the victim is usually seen as being different from others in some way. Throughout history, bullying has been the hallmark of repressive regimes and the rallying call of nations seeking to impose their will on others.

Gordon's describes how, when the small and powerless baby visits the classroom, overwhelmingly it is empathy that is elicited. Many of her anecdotes are of children in the program who, when they see an episode of bullying begin in the corridor or schoolyard, empathically take the side of the potential victim rather than joining the bully or passively looking on.

With any new program, the question is: "Does it work?" In an appendix of this book is a study by Kimberly Schonert Reichl. of the University of British Columbia. She found that samples of children who took the Roots of Empathy program showed decreased tendencies to bully others, as well as increased emotional understanding and cooperation, as compared with children in samples who did not take the program.

Citizenship is typically on the curriculum in democracies. Gordon's Roots of Empathy program is closely in tune with how we Canadians think of ourselves. It's a bold and wonderful idea, part of a movement to put empathetic understanding of other people alongside the academic concerns of education, and close to the centre of our society

Keith Oatley is director of the Cognitive Science Program at the University of Toronto. Last year, he published Emotions: A Brief History, and this year a second edition of his standard textbook, Understanding Emotions, came out, co authored with Dacher Keitner and JenniferJenkins.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are parcels of land divided into small plots for local residents to grow their own flowers, fruit and vegetables. Community gardens owe their existence to the energy of residents. Vancouver residents may remember the debate in the late 1980's over a section of community garden on Prior Street in Strathcona. When City Council finally decided to build housing on the section, gardeners and their friends moved an acre of topsoil to the remaining portion of the garden. Today the Strathcona Community Garden's three acres of reclaimed land is a thriving collection of individual flower and vegetable plots.

Community gardens often sprout on empty lots owned by the city. The Victory Gardens of World War II were created on the empty strips of land next to railway tracks.

Finding a site for the garden can be a long search, but once the garden is in place, there is always a waiting list of people who want to join. The plots are often100 to 120 square feet. A whole plot typically rents for $10.00 a year, a half plot for $5.00. Gardeners share common space, fertilizer, tools, a tool shed, and sometimes the cost of buying plants. Grants usually help to cover other expenses such as the cost of metered water and public liability insurance. Gardeners meet several times over the growing season, once for a formal start-up, then a few times over the summer for informal pot luck dinners and an annual open house.

For more information visit The City Farmer

Community Kitchens

Community kitchens give people the opportunity to get together to share the cost, planning and preparation of healthy meals. At present there are over 50 community kitchens in Vancouver. Members usually meet twice a month, once to plan four or five entrées and to organize the purchase of food, and once to prepare the meals. Since a

licensed kitchen is not required, groups meet in homes as well as church basements, Neighbourhood Houses and community centres.

Some specialty kitchens exist in Vancouver. One "cultural kitchen" provides an opportunity for Vietnamese women to learn about Canadian food products, and how they are prepared. Another has a "Canning Kitchen" where participants put up canned goods such as fruit, tomatoes and jam. Other kitchens specialize in vegetarian, ethnic, and special needs cooking. The interests of the group decide the focus of the kitchen.

Community kitchens are popular for a variety of reasons. Food costs less because it can be bought in bulk. It also takes less time to prepare because it is cooked in quantity - and sometimes frozen for later use. People most appreciate the way community kitchens provide an opportunity for people to get together. Many people have become close friends through community cooking. Some have discovered common interests that have led to the formation of new groups focusing on a variety of social issues.

For a lot more information on Vancouver's community kitchens and community kitchens in general see The Community Kitchens Project (http://www.communitykitchens.ca/)

Block Watch/Block Parents

One of the most formal community building activities in the city is the police-sponsored Block Watch program. This highly successful crime prevention program encourages people to keep an eye on the street and their neighbour's property, and to report any suspicious activity to 911.

A block is usually organized across the rear lane since most forced entries into buildings occur from the rear. Each Block Watch has a captain and often a co-captain, who undergo a police security check and then receive an identification badge. Block captains usually set up an initial organizing meeting to introduce neighbours to one another. Someone volunteers to draw up a map of the block with names and phone numbers, and to supply copies to the police and other members of the Watch. Police Officers will attend the meeting if requested, to talk about local policing issues and ways of securing your home against theft. They will also provide guides to home security. Police usually advise neighbours to jointly buy an etching pen ($15.00) so that members can mark their valuables with their driver's license number. Members are then given Block Watch stickers for entry points to their homes.

In many cases, introducing Block Watch has led to other community activities, from block cleanups and pet minding to plant swapping. When neighbours get together they find they have more in common than an interest in security.

The Block Parent program is another initiative sponsored by the Police Department. As with Block Watch captains, police run security checks on potential candidates. Block Parents provide a safe haven for children and, occasionally, seniors. When Block Parents are available to answer the door, they post a sign in their window. In an emergency, children who find themselves in trouble can turn to a Block Parent house for assistance.

Potential Block Parents are often concerned that signing-up will mean constant interruption for non-emergencies, such as drinks of water and trips to the bathroom. This does not seem to happen. For the most part, children understand they should turn to these houses only in emergencies.

For more information call your local police department.

Community Crime Prevention

Taking part in community crime prevention is a great way to meet your neighbours, and help make your community a safer place to live. Organized citizen participation in crime prevention usually begins with the opening of a Community Crime Prevention Office where people can meet with one another and the police to address local concerns. Staffed almost entirely by volunteers, the activities of an office include promoting crime prevention programs, collecting local crime statistics, referring people with every kind of problem to every kind of agency, sharing community information, conducting workshops, coordinating community clean-up days, and organizing other local projects.

Crime prevention offices are a part of a new strategy of community-based policing. The premise behind the strategy is that police need to do more than respond to incidents. They can be more effective if they spend more time on public awareness, partnerships with citizens, and local problem solving.
The most common problem with community crime prevention is too much police and not enough community.

Probably the best community building activity associated with crime prevention is foot patrols. They work to reduce drug dealers and prostitutes, because customers, fearing exposure, are frightened off by any visible community presence. But they also work to build community because foot patrols offer participants a lot of time to get to know one another. Often the patrols create large local networks of friends that persist beyond the patrols themselves.

Block Parties

Block parties give neighbours a chance to meet one another in a relaxed setting. To hold a successful block party you need to do some advance planning. A couple of months

ahead you should start thinking about dates, activities, and supplies. And you should start enlisting the help of neighbours. Find out how they can help, and what they can supply. Try to involve as many people as possible, and make sure everyone stays in touch with one another.

Block parties can be held in backyards, neighbourhood parks or on the street.If you close the street, the city may require you to take out liability insurance, and obtain the approval of affected neighbours. You may also be required to obtain traffic barricades from the city's special events co-ordinator. If you hold your party at a local park, you might check with the municipal department that looks after parks. Often people skip government permits and approvals.

You can make your block party just about any shape or size. One block in the Grandview-Woodlands area of Vancouver held a very successful block party several years ago, and invited the whole neighbourhood. They had live music, helium balloons, face painting and lots of food. Some people came in response to local ads, others in response to the sounds, smells and colour of the event itself. Block parties can come at the end of a block cleanup, a block garage sale, or a day of tree-planting. They can also have a theme such as a harvest festival, Independence day or Canada Day celebration. Whatever the nature of your first party, the next will be much easier to organize. On some blocks it becomes an important annual event.

Block Cleanups

Fed up with the mattresses rotting in the alley? Tired of litter on your street? Why not organize a block cleanup? A cleanup can get rid of the mess and prevent it from reoccurring by making residents more conscious of the appearance of their block. Just as important, a cleanup can provide an opportunity for everyone on a block to get to know one another. In many small towns, one-day neighbourhood cleanups involving adults, kids, and a variety of civic officials have become a recognized way of building community and instilling pride in place.

Cleanups can range from a simple litter pick-up, to an operation requiring more planning.One recent block cleanup in Vancouver began with a few residents calling two quick meetings to decide on a date and plan of attack. After distributing fliers to the neighbours, they contacted the city. Because group members were willing to do the work themselves, the city provided a truck and two men for loading. On cleanup day, residents not only collected the debris that filled their alley, but went door-to-door collecting large items such as old mattresses, water heaters and other junk. They also helped load the city truck.

Cleaning up your block can extend to graffiti removal, weeding, fence-painting, and

hedge-trimming. It can also extend to helping those on your block who lack the strength or resources to maintain their own property.

For more information call your city's sanitation department.

Parades and Festivals

Most cities are the home to a myriad of parades and festivals. Some focus on culture, like a Japanese Street Festival, others focus on religion, like the Vaisakhi (celebrating the birth of Khalsa), or sport, like a Dragon Boat Festival. Many celebrate some aspect of the performing arts, such as the Fringe Festival, the Folk Festival, the Women in View Festival, the Fool's Parade or the Children's Festival. In many places it is hard to find a weekend in the spring or summer without a celebration.

One well-attended Vancouver celebration is Illuminares, held on a summer evening at Trout Lake. It features stilt walkers, floating pyrotechnics and a moving procession of light created by hundreds of candle-lit lanterns. During the months of preparation, the Public Dreams Society organizes events and lantern building workshops for artists, children, and local residents. This makes the Illuminares an event at which the community is not only the audience, but also the players, designers, and stage hands.

Many Vancouver neighbourhoods have their own local festivals. Kits Days, with its famous Soap Box Car Derby, Cedar Cottage Community Carnival, and the Clinton Park Festival all provide excellent opportunities for neighbours to get together to celebrate their neighbourhood. Grandview, where festivals seem to be second nature, has

spawned a community orchestra that injects life into all kinds of public events.For more information call your local municipal hall.

Guerrilla Gardening

Residents of neighbourhoods across the city have been quietly adding flowers and other plants to lanes, boulevards and traffic circles. In Vancouver, along the boulevards of 100 block West 10th they have added planters, bicycle baskets, wheelbarrows and flower beds. Residents near McLean and Grant, 8th and Sasamat, 16th and Trimble and 20th and Fleming have also planted their boulevards with flowers. One east-side resident plants her boulevard with beans and other vegetables for public picking.

The city usually plants low junipers in the traffic circles that act as traffic calmers in some neighbourhoods. Citizens have taken it upon themselves to brighten these up by adding self-seeding annuals and long-blooming perennials. Some people have planted sunflowers, for a folksy but dramatic effect. Not all plants are happy in traffic circles; some have difficulty because of the shallow soil layer over the asphalt; others dry out during the summer months; some are disturbed by city crews "excavating" buried manholes.

Back lanes are a great place for guerrilla gardening. Unpaved lanes seem to work best. Some people have been re-introducing native plants, others have been planting food and flowers. One woman takes the seed heads from her large pink poppies and sprinkles them up and down the alley, to great effect the following year. Some of the easiest flowers to grow are (in decreasing size) buddleia, various bush roses, cosmos, flox, wallflowers, yarrow, perennial asters, daisies, tiger lilies, irises, purple sage, california poppies, red valerian, campanula, perennial sweet peas, forget-me-nots, pinks. Prickly berry bushes planted on the sides of alleys provide food, and make better, less expensive barriers than fences.

Guerrilla gardening is wholesome mischief. It breaks the law but improves public property. Because its wholesomeness is clearly apparent, some cities have started to institutionalize guerrilla gardening, with programs that invite local residents to “adopt” and plant traffic circles, boulevards, and other pieces of public property.

Community Image Making

Distinct architectural and decorative characteristics help to define neighbourhoods. Large brick buildings with tall widows and large cornices often define historic town centres. Bedragoned lamp posts, open air markets, ornate buildings and distinctive signage will define a Chinatown. Where some defining characteristics are left over from

the past or cultural preferences , others have disappeared or remain invisible. For this reason, many communities decide to describe their identity by adding banners, signs, flags, clocks, and gates. These elements should have a real connection to the place. They should not be generic junk or themed paste-on decoration. Addressing the need for community expression can take many different forms:

Community signs define neighbourhood boundaries

Residents in Seattle name their neighbourhoods, and then help design colorful street signs to mark the boundaries.

Community signs can slow cars, divert drug dealers

Residents of the block-long Rose Street in Vancouver have hand-painted “cat” signs that identify the street and ask motorists to slow down. Signs referring to kids playing also help to warn off street drug dealers who suspect the neighbourhood is full of hostile mothers.

Street becomes a communityblackboard

In another Vancouver project, residents seeking a linear park on Jackson Street, painted a mural showing their ideas on the street surface. The mural changed the street from a conduit for cars into a forum for public discussion.

Painting street banners attracts all ages & cultures.

Painting street banners attracts lots of local residents. But the final result is also attractive. When people see their own work on the street they begin to think of the street as theirs. And they begin to see other public issues as their business rather than the business of government.

A Community Fence built by many people

This fence project engaged two hundred children, adults and groups in creating four hundred highly individual pickets to enclose a community garden. Following a practice common to many community art projects, two local artists were hired to train local residents who then drew and carved their personal statements on fence. People without any wood-working experience—seniors, parents and children, people with disabilities, and members of many different ethnic groups—became part-time sculptors.

Urban Signaling

Crime and urban decay can begin to build in neighbourhoods that signal that crime and urban decay has already begun and no one really cares.

A downward spiral begins as criminals and drug dealers move in, families and businesses move out. The opposite happens with signals of health. Well-kept yards , well-maintained buildings and streets free of litter attract families and businesses. And the neighbourhood gets a reputation for being a good place to live. Urban signaling is an interesting phenomenon because it suggests that appearances trigger a process that converts inferences into reality.

The appearance of only a few derelict buildings may do nothing more than hint at the onset of decline, but this hint can alter people’s behaviour turning an isolated suggestion into a widespread fact. The consequence of small matters of appearance is so

pronounced that community groups would be wise to address the “broken window syndrome” by quickly eliminating the signals of neglect. Community groups can erase signals of decline as soon as they appear by forming partnerships with businesses, schools and local government. They can fix broken windows, paint out graffiti, remove junk, and mow overgrown yards. In the process, they will build community networks that make everything easier as more people get involved.

Intergenerational Activities

Activities that bring young and old together revive a social arrangement that was taken for granted in the past and is still important in many traditional cultures. Bringing old and young together promotes mutual care, transmits cultural values, and enriches the lives of everyone involved.

Some projects bring seniors and children together to focus on a community problem. In one project, high school students and seniors shared their experience of alcohol and substance abuse.

In some cities a Volunteer Grandparents Society matches children aged 3 to 12 who have no grandparent with volunteer grandparents, creating “extended families” that see each other regularly and participate in group events and outings.

An oral history project is another way of bringing seniors and young people together. Typically, young people locate, record, and edit stories and reminiscences of the elderly. They deposit the edited recordings in the public library, where they become an archive of local history.

For local information call:
Volunteer Grandparents Society of BC, at 604 736 8271
BC Council for the Family, at 604 660 0675.

Environmental Activities

The possibilities for environmental projects are too numerous to cover adequately in the context of this handbook. Here are just a few examples.

Environmental Awareness Projects

Painted yellow salmon now decorate some of the catch-basins of Vancouver, to remind us that what we put into our storm sewers eventually ends up in our oceans. A program administered locally through the City's Environmental Protection Branch, it encourages people to paint the salmon by providing a kit containing a video, instruction manual,

latex paint and template, and a reflective vest; as well as leaflets to distribute throughout the neighbourhood. The long term goal is to mark all 30,000 of the city's catch-basins. Although geared to school age children, the project can be undertaken by any person or group.

Stream restoration projects

Many west-coast environmental groups have been involved in projects to clean up and restore urban streams and shore lines. Projects usually begin by identifying a stream that once allowed salmon to spawn. Working with the federal department of fisheries residents clean up the stream, reintroduce indigenous plants, and eventually transplant fertilized eggs purchased from a local hatchery. Stream restoration projects create great sense of pride amongst residents.

Bird habitat projects

Bird habitat projects focus on restoring local habitat to bring back birds that have disappeared from an area . A project might include planting native seed-bearing plants in parks and lanes, or building birdhouses designed to attract a particular species. Bird habitat projects are good venues for bringing kids, parents, and community activists together.

Gleaning Projects

In traditional communities, harvesting was an activity that brought everyone together. In modern cities a version of this has reappeared in the form of cooperative gleaning, usually focused on the harvesting of fruit that would otherwise be left to rot. Here is the way organizers describe the Vancouver's Fruit Tree Project:
Our idea is simple: we build communities and strengthen food security using local backyard fruit. We connect people who have excess fruit from their backyard fruit trees with those who have the time and energy to harvest it. Most of the harvested fruit is donated to community organizations and individuals in need. We also offer canning and pruning workshops to pass on skills which are quickly being lost in our urban environment.

People become involved as volunteers who contribute to picking fruit, distributing fruit, or training people to care for fruit trees. Others become involved as donors of backyard fruit. Still others contribute tripod ladders, pruning gear, and canning equipment.

The harvesting projects can go awry if they focus too heavily on the quantity of food gathered. The best projects focus on having fun and doing something productive with others who live nearby.

River guardians

River guardians look after a river by regularly walking a stretch of riverbank.

Sometimes they do water tests, sometimes they report suspicious discharges to authorities. Different people looking out for different stretches of water can keep an eye on a river hundreds of miles long — something that would be impossibly expensive for government to do alone. A stewardship society usually trains volunteers and tries to make sure it has all the critical stretches covered. Guarding rivers has many spin-off benefits. When seniors participate they feel they can still make a worthwhile contribution to society. For others the project fits nicely into everyday life as part of a daily walk. And if each stretch of river is covered by two people or two families, it helps to build community by establishing regular contact between people. For more information on river guarding, check out the website of the Willamette Riverkeeper in Oregon.

Street Reclaiming

Street Reclaiming helps people address neighborhood traffic problems, and make the street a safer place for families and neighbors to socialize. It can be a spontaneous act done by one person, or a neighborhood- project that brings a community together.

Street reclaiming changes the psychological feel of a street; it becomes “outdoor living room” rather than a thoroughfare overrun by traffic. Examples include, community-designed “wiggly” streetscapes that slow traffic, celebrations in the street, art and gardens, reading on the sidewalk, and other every-day activities that fill the streets with people.

For more information see How to Reclaim your Streets: A Community Guidebook published by Better Environmentally Sound Transportation, available from BEST's website. See also: www.playforchange.com

Good Neighbour Awards

To launch a good neighbor award, put nomination boxes around the neighborhood in coffee shops, libraries, schools, and community centers. The nomination box should bear the name of the project and a few lines of instructions. Nominations should include the name and address of the person nominated, why they are being nominated, and the name and address of the person making the nomination.

It’s important that every legitimate nominee get an award. Some well-meaning organizations, focusing on outstanding service, choose to recognize only a few people. This is a mistake. By giving out lots of awards you encourage lots of people to think of themselves as good neighbors. This has an upward spiraling effect, encouraging more neighborliness and more small acts that create attractive social places.

To give out the awards, stage a brief ceremony in a public place. Issue a media advisory before and a press release after the event.

Organizing around Hot Issues

People often organize around a single issue. They get together because they are annoyed or angry about street prostitution, extra taxes, or an ugly building scheme. Often the issue is a proposed change or addition to the neighbourhood that is seen as undesirable. Those in favour of changes or additions often describe this kind of activism as NIMBYism (Not-In-My-Back-Yard syndrome), a selfish attempt by residents to keep their part of town just as it is, in defiance of some larger public good. They rarely mention how the first towns arose out of the natural tendency for people to band together to oppose disruptive outside forces.A potential threat may be just what is needed to mobilize citizens.

In Vancouver, residents in Hastings/Sunrise found strength and common purpose in the discussion surrounding the proposed redevelopment of Hastings Park. Oakridge had no neighbourhood organization until community planners began talking about redevelopment - when suddenly the need for a neighbourhood "voice" became clear. Kitsilano residents found the need to organize over proposed zoning changes that threatened older houses and low-cost rental accommodation. Glen Park Neighbours got together to deal with an unsatisfactory development proposal for an abandoned supermarket site.

Sometimes an issue can serve to invigorate an existing organization. On one east-side block in Vancouver, neighbours decided to petition the city for paving and lighting in their lane. Their group grew as they contacted neighbours across the back lane to support their request. This in turn strengthened a Block Watch already in place.

But organizing around a hot issue can be a waste of time if it leads to a hardening of positions. Too often, citizens have worn themselves out in fights that might have been resolved to everyone's satisfaction through collaborative problem solving that focused on interests rather than positions. Until recently, most of the books written about community organizing have taken a battlefield approach, because it used to be the only way to influence public decision-making. With the dawning of a new age of co-operation between government and citizens, let's hope that the roundtable will replace the battlefield.

For more information see:
"The Citizen's Library" and "Community Organizing" sections of the Handbook; and the community problem solving practices developed by the US National Civic League, published in its journal The National Civic Review.

Block-by-Block Organizing

In the spring of 1993 a number of residents in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood of Vancouver decided to create a community organization that included everyone. They wanted a democratic organization with authority vested in a large number of people rather than a small group of self-appointed individuals with a high tolerance for evening meetings. After some discussion they sketched out a model micro-democracy based on block-by-block representation.

This is how a block level micro-democracy works. Resident organizers find block reps for every block in the area. A block can either be a block of houses on opposite sides of the same street, an apartment block, co-op, or condominium complex. Block reps get to know everyone on their block, then introduce everyone to one another. When neighbours first meet, they are often surprised and delighted to discover how many interesting people live on their own block. Once residents know one another, they can elect a block rep. Block reps then elect neighbourhood reps, who can form an area coordinating committee.Neighbourhood reps can also elect area reps, who can form a city coordinating committee.

Area and city coordinating committees are ideal for addressing problems that extend beyond neighbourhood boundaries such as transportation. They are also useful for determining city spending priorities.Area and city coordinating committees require modest resources, particularly some paid staff time, to do their work. So far, few Canadian or US cities have been willing to provide any resources. But this may change as more cities begin to recognize their greatest asset is their citizens.

Block-by-block organizing can easily link many people over a large area; it can also help to form a strong link between citizens and government. In addition to making connections between people, block reps can promote mutual aid. At the block level, mutual aid can range from dealing with a noisy neighbour, to finding someone to look after your cat while you are on vacation. The side effect of these small exchanges is a sense of community, a commodity in short supply in the modern city.

Here are some tips when organizing block-by-block.

- First, make the task manageable by focusing on small neighbourhoods. What some cities call neighbourhoods are actually large areas that each contain many small neighbourhoods. Cities the size of Seattle or Vancouver contain well over a hundred real neighbourhoods. The boundaries of real neighbourhoods are defined by residents rather than government.
- Secondly, encourage each block to act independently. Only when a problem is too large or difficult for a single block should people from other blocks become

involved.

- Thirdly, organize in twos, so each block has two block reps, and each neighbourhood has two neighbourhood reps. This provides friendly support, improves information exchange, and reduces workloads.
- Finally, consider integrating with Block Watch. While the former works across a street, and the latter across the lane, they can support one another.

For more info contact: Charles Dobson, Vancouver Citizen's Committee
Creating a Community-wide Study Circles Program

Study Circles Resource Center

Every community-wide program adds to the store of information about how to organize study circles. At SCRC we've tried to learn from every organizer, using each new lesson and innovation to modify the basic model. The following steps represent our most current thinking about what works best:

1. **Find a few allies.**

Single out a few people you know well, have worked with before, and who would be excited about this project. Tell them your plans, and introduce them to the process by holding a single pilot study circle with this group.

PILOT STUDY CIRCLES

Pilot study circles are invaluable for a number of reasons. You can use them to help you build and expand the coalition, spread the word about the program, and provide practice for newly trained facilitators. You may even want to hold an entire round of pilot study circles before you officially kick off the community-wide phase. Try to make your pilots as diverse as possible. A note of caution: make sure you explain the purposes of pilot study circles, and how they differ from the community-wide phase to come. For instance, the pilots may not represent the full diversity of the community, and they are unlikely to lead to significant action. They will help you create a community-wide program, where many people from all walks of life take part in meaningful dialogue and constructive action.

2. **Begin building a coalition.**

A sponsoring coalition is the organizing "engine" that makes study circles happen in a community. You need a wide variety of people and organizations, including some with high visibility on the issue, some with strong connections to the grass roots, and some on opposing sides of the issue you're addressing. Try to make the coalition a microcosm

of the community. This phase of a study circle program is key; you are laying the foundation for all that follows, so don't hurry.

It is essential that as many of your coalition members as possible take part in pilot study circles. This introduces them to the process, builds relationships and trust, and equips them to be informed advocates for the program. Within the coalition there will probably be a smaller group of people who are involved more intensively in the program; this is often called the working group.

3. **Find a coordinator.**

A good coordinator is the linchpin of a successful program. The ideal coordinator is an experienced organizer, is detail-oriented, works well with different kinds of people, and is well connected to many sectors of the community. Sometimes, one of the organizations in the coalition can assign a salaried person to serve as a coordinator; other times, coalitions submit funding proposals to a local foundation or company to enable them to hire someone. Some communities get their programs started by enlisting volunteer coordinators, including graduate students, loaned executives, and recently retired people. A good rule of thumb is that a medium-sized or large city will probably require a full-time coordinator, while a town may be able to get by with a part-time coordinator.

4. **Form committees to handle the following tasks:**

- **Work with the media.** First, try to recruit media outlets like newspapers and radio and television stations to join your coalition; in that capacity, they can play a much greater role in bringing a study circle effort to life than simply giving it some coverage. Develop press releases and public service announcements for all the media outlets in the community.
- **Plan for action.** Planning and publicizing the action component of your program will attract more participants and will help the program reach its potential to make a difference on the issue. The action committee should include professionals in the issue area. The committee should keep records of the themes and action ideas being brought up in the study circles, and use them to plan the action forum (this information can also be used in a program report). At the action forum, establish task forces to implement action ideas on those themes that emerged. For each task force, recruit one or two professionals in that area to serve as the initial convenors.

- **Develop a budget and plan for fundraising.** Though study circle programs are more labor-intensive than capital-intensive, you should make sure that your resources match your needs. In most cases, the two major budget items for study circle programs are the coordinator and the evaluation effort. If these costs can't

be carried by the coalition, seek funding from a local institution such as a community foundation, large corporation, Chamber of Commerce, or city government.

- **Document your work, and plan for evaluation.** Through documentation and evaluation, you can better assess your program, learn about what kinds of effects it is having, and discover ways to strengthen it. These processes need to be part of the initial planning; they can't be accomplished after the study circles have ended. From start to finish, keep track of your efforts by creating and saving minutes of meetings, schedules and plans, lists of attendees, and the like. The evaluation committee should begin its work by describing the specific goals of the study circle program and deciding what kinds of things it wants to measure. For evaluation help, look for partners in the social sci-ence depart-ments of a local university, in local government, and in local research firms.

- **Find, recruit, and train facilitators.** A well-trained facilitator is the key to a well-run study circle. That means you need to develop a strong capacity for finding and training facilitators. Fortunately, there are probably a number of people in your community who have experience training facilitators, whether in businesses, universities, relig-ious organizations, or other community groups. The committee needs to find people who have good facilitation skills, conduct a number of trainings, and convene meetings of facilitators to support those who have already been trained.

- **Recruit participants.** Every organization in the coalition should take responsibility for recruiting a certain number of its constituents to be study circle participants. The recruitment committee should assist in these efforts, and also try to reach segments of the community not represented in the coalition. The committee will need to create basic outreach tools like brochures, small newsletter articles for school and church bulletins, one-page flyers, and sign-up sheets which can be distributed throughout the community.

- **Plan the kickoff.** The kickoff is a great opportunity to show the community that many different organizations are involved in the program, that community leaders have 'bought in' to the idea, and that taking part in a study circle will give citizens a real opportunity to effect change on an issue they care about. The kickoff committee should plan an event which includes some combination of high-profile speakers, an explanation of the program, testimonials from people who participated in pilot study circles, and breakout study circle sessions.

- **Find sites and handle other logistical details.** Public buildings such as schools, libraries, church halls, community centers, businesses, firehouses, union halls, police departments, and social service agencies make excellent sites for study

circles. The committee should set times and dates for all the different study circles, and develop a plan for matching study circle partici-pants, facilitators, and sites. Also think about child care, transportation, food, translators, and accommodations for people with special needs. To ensure a mix of participants in each group, consider pairing organizations or gathering demographic information about participants when they sign up; most organizers use a strategy that combines both.

5. **Hold the kickoff.**

(STUDY CIRCLES BEGIN ALL OVER THE COMMUNITY)

6. **Monitor the program and support the study circles.**

The coordinator will be doing a fair amount of trouble-shooting while the study circles are underway. The facilitation committee should convene the facilitators so they can compare notes. The sites and logistics committee should start new study circles for late registrants, rather than allow them to join groups already in progress. The action committee should collect the records from each study circle. The media committee should help journalists report on the study circles to the larger community.

(STUDY CIRCLES CONCLUDE)

7. **Hold the action forum.**

8. **Support and track action efforts.**

Stay in touch with the task force convenors and monitor their progress. Encourage media coverage of the task forces. Consider establishing a newsletter, and find other ways of publicizing the action efforts.

9. **Pause, reflect, and review what you've learned.**

How did things go? What went smoothly, and what caused difficulties? What did the evaluations show? Record (and applaud!) your achievements, and look for ways to make the program stronger. Give feedback and encouragement to volunteers. Integrate your learnings into your plans for the future.

10. **Repeat steps 2-8.**

Take advantage of the hard work that has gone into the first round of study circles by expanding the coalition and planning another round, either on the same issue or a new issue. In this way, you can sustain and deepen your study circle program and continue to

build the civic life of your community.

STUDY CIRCLE TERMS

Working group
The close-knit group of 5-15 people who are most actively involved in making the program happen. (Some communities refer to this as the steering committee.)

Coalition
The entire array of organizations committed to recruiting participants and supporting the program with in-kind assistance.

Coordinator
The highly organized person (sometimes 2-3 people) at the hub of the organizing effort, who keeps track of the work of all the different people and committees in the coalition.

Facilitator
The person who facilitates a single study circle. This should be a facilitator's sole responsibility (don't make the mistake of asking facilitators to organize their own study circles).

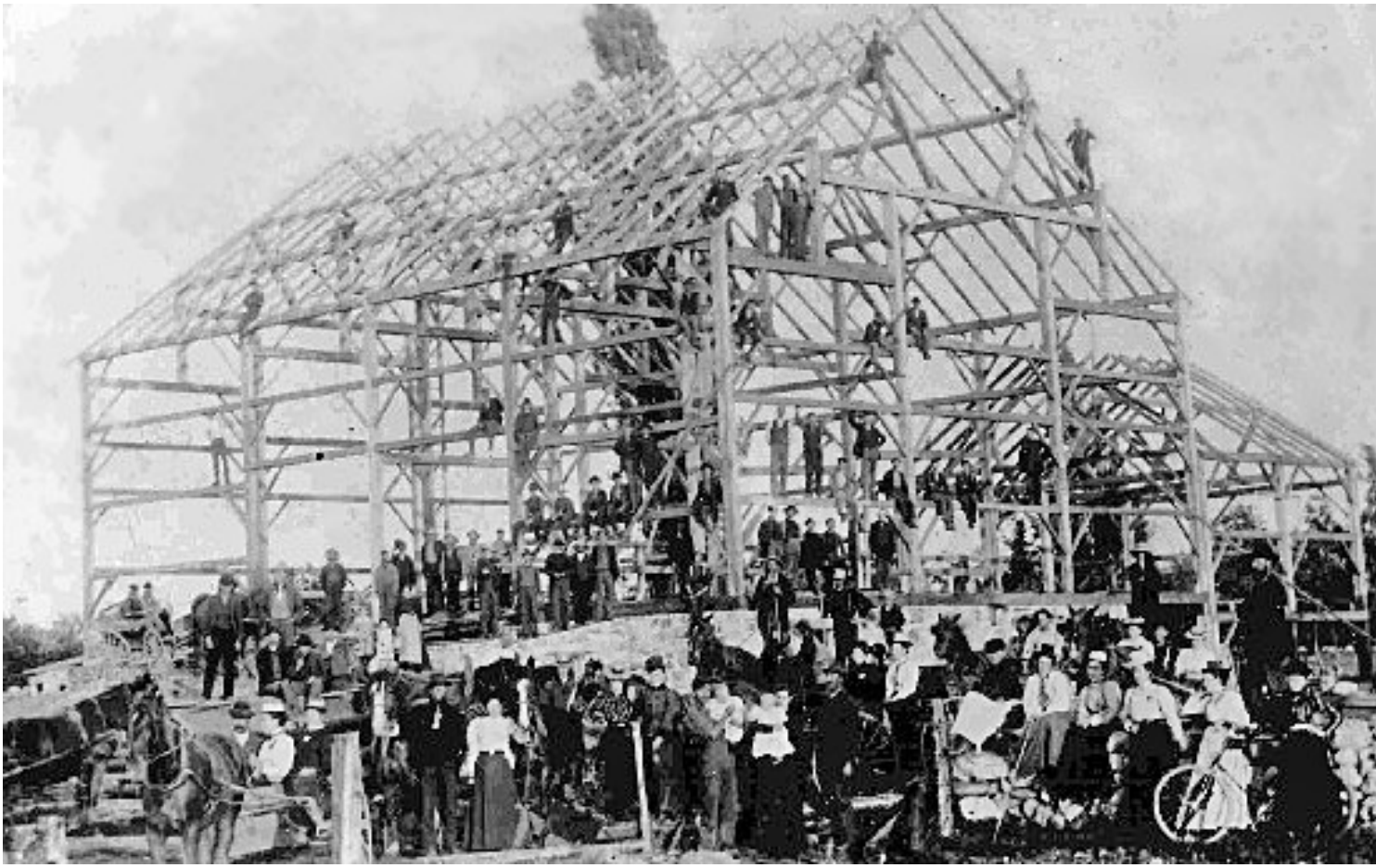
Participants
The community members who take part in the study circles.

Action forum
The large-group meeting at the end of a round of study circles which allows people to hear about action opportunities, sign up for task forces, and celebrate the successes of the program.

From the Study Circles Resource Centre (http://www.studycircles.org/en/index.aspx)

Bees

A bee or work bee is an ad hoc assembly of people created to get something done. Bees used to be common on farms; farmers would get together to build a neighbors barn, bring in the hay, or saw logs for the winter. Once an essential part of farm life, the bee has all but disappeared. Instead of relying on neighbours people now turn to the marketplace. This gets the job done but eliminates the most important contribution of the bee — the excuse and opportunity for social exchange.



Bees can serve as a vehicle for bringing people together in contemporary society. We don’t have to be pawns of the marketplace. Instead of buying a product, we can organize a bee to make it.

Consider this example from Vancouver. Every year on a Sunday afternoon in the first week of December, a group of women get together to make Christmas crackers. They could easily go out and buy Christmas crackers but this provides an excuse to spend time seeing friends, meeting friends of friends, and sharing stories. The first time the event was held a few women were skeptical and made fun of the project, but they attended anyway and quickly became engaged in the intricacies of cracker manufacture. The event has become surprisingly popular. Everyone who is invited shows up — even those without a shred of craftiness — and everyone wants to do it again next year.

Visioning Exercises

Guided visioning exercises have become popular in many fields as a way of defining and achieving a desirable future. Recent studies have shown that we are more likely to reach an objective if we can see it, and can imagine the steps to reach it. Visioning has become

a familiar technique in sports. High-jumpers, for instance, regularly take the time to imagine themselves going through the steps of jumping higher than they have ever jumped before. Citizens can use visioning to create images that can help to guide change in the city.

In a typical visioning exercise a facilitator asks participants to close their eyes and imagine they are walking through their neighbourhood as it should be fifteen years into the future. What do they see? What do the buildings look like? Where do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How are they travelling? What is happening on the street? Where is the centre of the neighbourhood? How does greenspace and water fit into the picture? What do you see when you walk around after dark? People record their visions in written or pictorial form; in diagrams, sketches, models, photographic montages, and in written briefs. Sometimes a professional illustrator helps turn mental images into drawings of the city that people can extend and modify.Many places use visioning techniques to arrive at a number of alternative futures for the city. Residents are then asked to vote for their favourite.

Sometimes visioning can lead to poor results because people can't want they don't know. After World War II, Londoners were simply asked what kind of housing they wanted. The results, based on their responses, were dreadful both from the point of view of residents, as well as architects and planners. Because people "can't want what they don't know" governments need to present a range of options each with a list of pros and cons. Once this has been done satisfactorily, people can then be asked, "What do you want?"

Information Sharing

Knock and drop

How do you tell everyone in your neighborhood about an event they should attend? Many neighborhood associations do a “knock and drop.” Block reps knock on doors to invite neighbors to attend; if no one is home, they drop off a leaflet. Other groups put up posters. Some photocopy machines can turn a leaflet into a small poster suitable for advertising in laundries, community centres, and libraries. If you want people to attend your event, the best approach is to ask everyone to invite friends, family, and neighbors.

Newsletters

A newsletter is one of the most common ways for organizations that have resources to stay in touch. Community newsletters range in frequency from once yearly to twelve times a year. Most are printed on both sides of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet or on both sides of a folded 11 x 17. Printing is either by high-speed photocopying or “instant” offset printing.

You may be able to defray printing costs by enlisting the support of local merchants, local government, or community organizations.

The big job in putting out a newsletter is finding people who are willing and able to write articles that others are interested in reading. To get good newsletter content, a group often needs to find and pay a writer who will seek out good stories and write them up. Simply asking group members for submissions often yields few or poor results. Besides a writer / researcher, you will need the skills of an editor, and people willing to arrange printing, and distribution. You will also need the services of a graphic designer to make your newsletter appear worth reading. Engaging newsletters look like newspapers, with narrow columns, photographs, and bold headlines.

You will also need people willing to arrange printing and distribution. Try to deliver your newsletter by hand — if you have block reps, they can easily deliver to their own block. Co-distribution is next best. This involves partnering with a local school, business, or community centre so that they distribute your newsletter with their own. Other distribution possibilities include schools sending the newsletter home with students, distribution in churches, literature distribution boxes in libraries, community centres, and other public places, ad mail, or a flyer distribution service. An emailed newsletter avoids the issue of distribution, but limits the audience to those who use email.

Local newspapers

Local newspapers can also help with information sharing, although you may find that a local problem gets far more attention than a local solution. Fortunately, some small papers are changing their idea of what should go into a newspaper. They are beginning to publish articles with a positive local focus that are well written and worth reading.

Telephone trees

A telephone tree is a fast, person-to-person information- sharing technique. It requires a coordinator, and a list of who -calls -whom. An outgoing message starts with the coordinator, who calls a predetermined list of ten activators. The ten activators in turn each call another predetermined list of ten people, who in turn each call another ten. It is important to make sure those at the base of the tree are reliable. The coordinator should check by occasionally calling people at the outer tips of the tree to ensure they’ve been contacted. One of the largest citizens’ groups in the US, Common Cause, initiates most of its actions through an effective national telephone tree.

Computer networks

Community- based computer networks — called community nets — have become important sources of local information. They provide free dial-up and web access, as well as community information, community discussions, expert advice, and email. Most also provide web space, and training on maintaining a web site for local organizations.

E-mail newsletters

Another way of staying in touch with citizens locally and in other cities is through an e-mail newsletter To start an email newsletter, put some interesting material on a web site, then invite people to subscribe. You can bulk email the newsletter to subscribers by entering their addresses as on the “Bcc” (blind cc) line so that addresses remain invisible. The big advantage with of email newsletters is that you pay nothing for printing, distribution, and color photos. The other way to do an email newsletter is to put all the content on a website, then email subscribers the web address. You can also build up a searchable archive on the site and hotlink to other interesting material. The main advantage of web delivery is that people without email can view the newsletter at community centers and libraries with public web access.

Autodialer networks

For a few hundred dollars you can buy an autodialer that will send short messages to answering machines. The system uses a computer and database directory to digitize voice messages and then send them out automatically. Operating on one line, during weekdays, a single machine can deliver a one- minute message to 6,000 people per week. It’s best to send messages to people who have said they wish to receive them, and to send the messages during the day when they will hit reach answering machines or voice- mail.

A community group can also “‘cold call”’ people with bulletins or short messages they might reasonably assume people would want to receive. To obtain numbers for cold calling, buy a phone CD which contains millions of current names, addresses, and phone numbers that can be pulled off block by block. Because everyone gets their telephone messages, autodialers are useful for guaranteed delivery and for messages that have to go out quickly. They are useless for asking people to do something they would not normally do.

Citizens Juries

A citizens jury is a forum where citizens can address a complex or contentious issue. Juries are usually organized by a neutral non-profit organization devoted to democracy building. The project begins by hiring a polling company to identify a large random pool of potential jurors. This pool is boiled down to a representative group of jurors who will consider an issue over three or four days. The ideal jury is a microcosm of the community from which it is drawn.

The jury receives a charge — one or more questions it must try to answer — and is briefed on the issue. Jurors then hear evidence from experts and various intervenors. They ask questions, discuss the issue amonghemselves, and finally issue a “verdict.”

The project organizer must take care to ensure all sides of an issue are represented and

that biases do not creep in during the selection of jurors, the presentation of information, or the choice of witnesses.

Jury “verdicts” are usually recommendations for how government or some public authority should proceed. Because of this the project organizer should get some prior commitment from the public body to take the recommendations seriously and provide a genuine response.

Citizens juries get good reviews when they are properly organized. They build citizen capacity and reduce public suspicion when decisions are eventually made in line with jury recommendations. Some political scientists have suggested that citizens juries should review every proposed new law as a way of democratizing government. On the downside, citizen juries are expensive and tend to involve relatively small numbers of citizens. To avoid accusations of bias, a jury needs to be run by an organization with a reputation for neutrality. Little-known organizations need to assemble a public oversight committee that includes respected people such as retired judges, church ministers, and even-handed journalists.

In England, the Local Government Management Board has experience running citizens juries. In the US, the Jefferson Center has developed a successful citizens jury process.

Rating candidates for public office

Since 1911 the Municipal League of Kings County (Seattle) has been assembling evaluation committees that rate candidates seeking public office. Seattle papers publish the recommendations of these committees as a guide for voters who do not have the time to investigate candidates in depth. In many ways an evaluation committee resembles a citizens jury.

The Municipal League begins by assembling an unbiased committee that will evaluate political candidates as if they were people applying for a job. The League tries to ensure the committee is a microcosm of the voting community, with members representing a mix of age, sex, education, income, ethnic background, and political orientation. The League asks various organizations to participate, then asks individuals who come forward to fill out a questionnaire. One of the questions asks would-be evaluators to define their place on the political spectrum by putting an x on a scale that ranges from radically right to radically left. Using this and other information, a group of people who have served on a recent committee select the new evaluation committee members.

The new committee receives some training before it goes to work. It then reviews background material on the candidates, including press clippings and the candidates’ resumes. The committee also checks the references supplied by the candidates. Next,

the committee interviews each candidate for half an hour with a standard set of revealing questions.

Following the interview, committee members score candidates for knowledge (candidates should be well-versed in major issues), involvement (candidates should have a record of community service and be familiar with their constituents), character (candidates should be free of questionable character attributes and questionable history), and effectiveness (incumbents should have a proven record of accomplishments in office; challengers should be able to demonstrate success in past endeavors).

A candidate evaluation project is a good way to sidestep the influence of money and to elect better people to public office, but it requires resources and a credible organization to sponsor the project. Little-known organizations might be able to pull off a successful project by getting a media partner and a number of respected people to oversee the process

All Sorts of Other Activities

The preceding list of community building activities only hints at the possibilities for community building at the local level. Other possibilities are limited only by your imagination. They might include joining or creating:

- a garden club that exchanges cuttings and advice;
- a local traffic committee to promote traffic calming;
- a parks committee;
- a car co-operative that allows people who do not own cars to access one inexpensively; (An example is BC's Cooperative Auto Network)
- a community cafe, or local hangout;
- a local barter, LETS or currency system; (Here is an example of a currency created for Saltspring Island, BC)
- a neighbourhood brewing circle to batch brew beer;
- a local baseball, volleyball, road hockey, boccie ball team;
- a seniors' club that arranges excursions;
- a local historical society that unearths local history and tries to preserve local buildings;
- a supper club that eats its way around a circuit of local restaurants;
- a kids' sports group;
- a local jogging, exercise, or tai-chi club;
- a local food co-op that provides inexpensive food in exchange for a small contribution of time;
- a volunteer group providing after-hour services to those in need;
- a local theatre group;
- a local singing group;

- a neighbourhood design panel that comments on new development;
- a local earthquake preparedness group;
- a local welcoming committee for new residents.