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Overview: Digital Organizing 101 with Free Tools

As an organizer, your job is to meet people where they are. Increasingly, people are online – so you need to be online too. This toolkit will help you mobilize your community using free digital organizing tools to build power, get folks to take action, and create change.

Basic strategy

Before sending out any communication, go through a few steps of planning. Clarifying the following questions are a good way to focus your efforts. As you answer for yourself keep in mind that being narrow and specific is being ambitious. You don't have to spread yourself thin to make an impact, in fact the more specific and targeted you are the clearer it is to your audience what they need to do and why.

> What's your goal?
> Who has the power to make this happen?
> Who do you want to take this action?
> What do they need to do to take action?
> What is the best way of contacting them?
> What's the timeline?

Important Things to Remember!

Stay organized when organizing - using Google's free tools such as Docs, Sheets, Slides and saving them in Google Drive (free cloud storage) is one way to keep track of everything for your digital campaign like draft messages, graphics, and schedule. It is important to coordinate how you are communicating with folks, especially if you are utilizing different channels, like texting and social media.

Coordinate your efforts - drive people to take action together. Whether it's a day for everyone to call a representative or a deadline to raise money for a project, providing a specific date not only helps put pressure on all at once, but also creates urgency for your contacts.

When writing an email, text or a post on social media don't try to sound too formal - write in your voice! That makes your message more personal, and more likely to be responded to by your contacts.

Remember to follow up, give updates, and thank those who are participating. It takes more than one email, text, etc. to get someone to take action.

Email
Do you already have a personal email address? Do you have the email addresses folks that you think would support your campaign - these can be neighbors, friends, family? Great! You can use email to mobilize them to take the action for your cause. Even if you don't have an email account yet, you can quickly get up and running with Gmail for free.

An effective organizing email needs to do four things:
1. Create a connection between the recipient and your cause
2. Highlight the urgency for them to take action
3. Provide a reason why taking action is critical
4. Make an explicit ask

Important things to remember!
Keep your message short and clear.

Don't forget the subject line - it's the first thing the recipient sees and will by the reason why they do or don't open your email.

If you want to send out emails to a group of people at once, remember to BCC (blind carbon copy). Any recipients on the BCC line of an email are not visible to others who it is also being sent to. This means they will not be able to reply all to the full group - no one wants to read replies from 20 people that they don't know.

Even though you are emailing from your personal account, you can be marked as spam! Be mindful of how frequently you are sending emails to a specific person/group of people.

Example Email:

Hi neighbors,

I'm writing to you all today because we've talked separately about our frustrations with NYCHA - from their lack of accountability to remedy the mold and lead issues causing asthma, the crumbling infrastructure that means we can't rely on the elevators, and more.

We're neglected as residents; we can't expect NYCHA to fight for our health and safety. But we can certainly fight for each other. We don't have time to waste. **That's why I am asking you to call our representatives to let them know that you support the Green New Deal for Public Housing not only for our safety, but for the safety of future generations.**

The Green New Deal for Public Housing will train and mobilize the workforce to decrease the carbon footprint of public housing and improve the quality of life for all. You can learn more about the bill here, and if you have any questions please reach out to me!

If you're ready to take action, you can call Representative Jane Smith at 212-1111-111. If you want to share this information with folks outside of our immediate area, they can use this tool to find their representative.

Thanks!

[First Name] [Last Name]
[Phone number if you want to share]

Texting
Email is a great choice for communicating more detailed information, but using texting is a way you can almost guarantee the recipient will read it. Think about it, the last time you received a text, did you open it? With email, you probably don't open every message in your inbox, depending on who sent it and what the subject line was. Also, texting allows you to communicate with people who own normal-feature phones instead of smartphones that can also read emails.

One-to-one digital communications are personal, and makes people more inclined to listen.

Depending on who you are communicating with and how many you communicate with them, you can consider using Whatsapp if you have a smartphone. Just keep in mind you can only chat to other people with the Whatsapp installed on their phones.The app also lets you send PDFs, documents, spreadsheets, slideshows and more, without the hassle of email or file sharing apps. You can send documents up to 100 MB, so it's easy to get what you need over to who you want.

One useful feature of Whatsapp is being able to create a group of contacts, and have people opt-in to a group of contacts with a link or QR code. This is a great way to communicate in real time and coordinate efforts.

Important things to remember
Try not to mass text through your phone's messaging app (such as iMessage and Android Message) ! For large group messages stick to Whatsapp where folks can opt-in to your group chat, or be BCC'd on a broadcast. Both broadcasts and groups maxout at 256 contacts.

Example Text/Whatsapp Message

Hey! I want to remind you there's still time to let your reps know that you support Green New Deal for Public Housing! You can find their contact information by following this link: https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/addr/

I'm also sending you an image of a call script if you aren't sure what to say. Thank you!

Social Media
Movements today like #FamiliesBelongTogether, #MeToo, and #BlackLivesMatter have had lasting effects on conversations about justice and human dignity across the world – and they've started through social media. Leveraging platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can gain a campaign the momentum it needs to reach, educate, and change conversations among new audience members. Different platforms appeal to different audiences. The common denominator on each of these platforms is that they build communities with people, influencers, and partner organizations that can overlap and build reach, engagement, and advocacy

Each one below has a specific specialty in gaining impressions, views, and engagements from different people.

Peace is Loud has created a Partner Social Media How-To Guide where you can find step-by-step instructions on how to conduct each of the following. Find it here.

Facebook
On Facebook, you can post content to your feed, you can create groups to share information, go live and get multiple people to tune into a particular message, create events, and fundraise among other things. This platform works really well for communicating specifics and sharing details that you wouldn't on other platforms due to the unlimited characters.

People go on Facebook to
● Post

When you post on Facebook, people have the option to comment, like, or share your content. You then have the option to interact with individuals by liking or commenting back.
Example Post
People deserve housing that serves their essential needs. Our government needs to prioritize public housing by investing in the Green New Deal. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez explains what this means with City Lab:
https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/11/green-new-deal-public-housing-sanders-ocasio-cortez-retrofit/602002/

● Personal messaging
   Audience members and organizations can send you direct messages. While you can't build a community through partner relationships and engage with their constituents as you would on Twitter, you can work to create personal relationships with individuals who message you to learn more.
   Example Message:
   Hi X! Thanks for your interest in supporting Reclaim NYCHA's Green New Deal for public housing. Make sure to take next steps by letting your reps know to pass the GND! You can find their contact information by following this link:
   https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/addr/

● Events
   Creating events is a fun way to get a group of people involved at the same time! You can create events virtually or in person and post details and updates by posting directly to the event.

● Groups
   The way to engage folks who want to take action on a particular issue is by creating a group where updates, events, and calls-to-actions can be collectively shared and utilized.

● Facebook Live
   Lives on Facebook can get folks to tune into a particular moment to increase awareness and advocacy of a particular issue.

● Fundraising
   If you create a fundraiser for yourself or someone else on Facebook, all donations are sent to the fundraiser creator's personal checking account through Stripe, Facebook's fundraising payment processor. You can also create campaigns across Facebook by connecting a GoFundMe account and posting to share.

Twitter
On Twitter, partner organizations can also amplify stories and campaign outcomes by engaging their own constituents to take action. This creates an opportunity to grow your own base of supporters and grow overall awareness. You can also tag the organizations or people you are talking about for higher engagement:

Example Tweet:
People deserve housing that serves their essential needs. Our government needs to prioritize public housing by investing in the Green New Deal. @AOC explains what this means with @CityLab:
https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/11/green-new-deal-public-housing-sanders-ocasio-cortez-retrofit/602002/

● Hashtags
  What's also great about Twitter is that this is where movements start using hashtags. You can share your story to add a hashtag that's already trending or create your own hashtag to start a conservation campaign where others contribute their stories.
  Example Hashtags:
  #GreenNewDealNow #GNDforAll #PassGNDNow

● Tweet threads
  Twitter allows its users to add onto tweets and continue conversations! You can use this tool to share resources for the communities, photos and videos, articles that link to more information, etc.
  Example Thread:
  T1: We need to prioritize frontline communities—those that are most likely to be harmed by the climate crisis by passing the Green New Deal for public housing. Follow this thread to learn more. #GNDforAll
  T2: The Green New Deal for public housing would commit up to $180 billion over 10 years to upgrading 1.2 million federally administered homes.
  T3: The #GND will rehabilitate public housing that is severely distressed, causing residents to be exposed 5 to unhealthy and unsafe environments #GNDforAll
  T4: If passed, upgrade and equip all public housing with cutting-edge materials, infrastructure, and electric appliances made in the US to improve energy efficiency, water quality and material living standards in public housing. #GNDforAll
  T5: It would drastically change NYC, where the nation's largest public housing agency maintenance costs of nearly $32 billion! #GNDforAll
  T6: Now more than ever, we need jobs. The Green New Deal would create some 250,000 jobs—including high-paying jobs and union jobs, which will benefit those living in public housing themselves. #GNDforAll

T7: Let your reps know that you support Green New Deal for Public Housing! You can find their contact information by following this link: https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/addr/ #GNDforAll

- Tweet storms
The cool thing about Twitter is that you can get people to join a call-to-action and get a hashtag trending when all participants join the conversation at the same time. When you do this and use the same hashtag or words, Twitter recognizes and makes the conversation a trending topic if enough people participate.

- Twitter chats
If you're looking to educate your audiences on a particular advocacy action, or you want to spread awareness about a certain topic, you can host a Twitter chat! Twitter chats are especially helpful to continue building partnerships with organizations doing similar work.

The Twitter chat host poses several questions over the span of an hour to audience members who participate. The Twitter chat begins with hosts asking the first question and participants answering each question accordingly. Participants can either reply directly to the tweet of the question or they can tweet a singular answer referencing which question they're answering. For example, when you tweet "Q1…," participants respond by tweeting, "A1…" and so on.

To spread the word prior to the day, hosts should ask folks you know (other organizers, neighbors, groups you are involved with) to join and share out to their own accounts. As you prepare everything beforehand like promotional graphics and questions, also create a toolkit to send to the people you want to inform ahead of time. That toolkit would include the questions that will be asked and some sample answers.

Example Hour-Long Twitter Chat:
Below find sample Twitter Chat questions and answers that you would share ahead of time as a toolkit. The questions are included below, but the answers are examples for organizers and participants to provide during the chat. Each question and answer should include the hashtag so that folks can follow the conversation by clicking onto it.

Q1: What is the Green New Deal for Public Housing and why is it important to public housing tenants? #GNDforAll
A1: "In the Bronx alone, 2,400 public housing residents may be going without heat tonight." The #GND for public housing would change that. #GNDforAll https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/11/green-new-deal-public-housing-sanders-ocasio-cortez-retrofit/602002/

A1: Environmental justice is providing people with homes that are efficient. Buildings are responsible for about 39 percent of global carbon emissions, and about one-third of emissions in the U.S. #GNDforAll

Q2: What's going on in public housing right now? #GNDforAll
A2: NYCHA tenants have historically been left to the sidelines and ignored. It's time to prioritize public housing tenants rights. #GNDforAll
A2: NYCHA deserves to be part of the conversation.
https://jacobinmag.com/2019/02/green-new-deal-housing-ocasio-cortez-climate #GNDforAll

Q3: What are the key elements of the GND for Public Housing bill that you are excited about? #GNDforAll
A3: How making public housing zero emissions will also bring jobs to those who live in these communities. #GNDforAll
A3: How it makes public housing the leader in sustainability in the USA. #GNDforAll

Q4: Why are some representatives so hesitant to pass it? #GNDforAll
A4: Lobby groups! Campaign donors! #GNDforAll
A4: They are not listening to the folks they are representing - we need to put more pressure on them. #GNDforAll

Q5: What can we do to educate the public about the GND? #GNDforAll
A5: Hold more events in our communities so we can talk to our neighbors one-on-one about why we need the #GNDforAll
A5: Share our stories about our experiences and how the Green New Deal will create positive change #GNDforAll

Q6: How do we pass the GND for public housing? #GNDforAll
A6: Organize in public housing communities across the country! #GNDforAll
A6: Coordinate lobby days so our reps know that we need the #GNDforAll

Important Things to Remember!

You need a hashtag to keep Twitter Chats running - it should be included in all questions and the sample answers you send to folks beforehand.

Each question should be tweeted with the question number, and with enough time for participants to answer, typically 10 mins.

Make sure to thread each question together and retweet replies.

Typically Twitter Chats last an hour and are composed of around 6 questions with ten minutes between when each question is posted.

When you are done with the Twitter Chat thank folks for joining.

Instagram
You can use Instagram as a bank of photos, art, and graphics that call you to take action! Despite these sounding like narrow options, Instagram makes it so that you can engage with each post you see. You can share pictures to stories, you can repost it yourself, you can view someone else's day-to-day with a takeover. Instagram allows audience members to actively view what a person or organization does everyday, which makes it a wonderful tool for movements that are undergoing changes and for movements that need action in the moment.

- IG Story Takeovers
  If you want to highlight a person at an organization, an activist that you look up to, or someone whose story aligns with the movement, an IG takeover is what you want to do! IG takeovers allow all those who view your story to learn about the person taking over. You can use tools on the story feature to ask questions, create polls, and add gifs that appeal to your audience!
  Example IG Takeover:
  Check out Peace is Loud's IG takeovers from [Samina Ali](), [Jennifer Fang](), and [Katherine Oung]()! The key to a takeover is to prep the org or person taking over. Have a plan of action for the person taking over and schedule graphics and posts ahead of time!

- Instagram lives
  When you go live on Instagram, everyone gets a notification. Lives on Instagram can get folks to tune into a particular moment to increase awareness and advocacy of a particular issue.

Virtual Events
We tend to think that physical events are more powerful than virtual ones, but there are many advantages to hosting events online, including:
- Overcome physical barriers
- Bring together communities that otherwise would not be able to congregate
- Increase audience size and reach
- Offer communal support in times of crisis

- More affordable than large scale live events
- More accessible for people with disabilities
- Sustainability squared! Online events have a smaller carbon footprint and they can easily be recorded and saved for future use or repurposing

There are many free tools to host these events, three of them that work great for meetings are:
- Google Hangouts - This is available with a Gmail account. Video calls can include up to 10 participants. Everyone who wants to join a group conversation must use the classic Google Hangouts chat function.
- 8x8 - Unlimited free video and audio meeting access for up to 50 participants at a time, no account needed. But, if you do create a free account you get more functionality.
- Zoom Meetings - Zoom is user friendly and free for discussions for up to 100 participants and up to 40 minutes in length: Note: there is a paid upgraded version that allows for longer discussions and screen/content sharing - Zoom offers a 30 day free trial.

Check out Peace is Loud's Digital Events Toolkit for more information on hosting virtual events.

Free tools for organizing
Canva
Canva is a graphic design platform that allows users to create social media graphics, presentations, posters and other visual content. It is available on web and mobile, and integrates millions of images, fonts, templates and illustrations.

Change.org
A platform where you can create free petitions, download the names, city, state and zip of all signers. Additionally, you can download all email addresses for individuals who opt-in to receive more information.

Click-to-Tweet
A tool that allows you to share a specific tweet you'd like multiple people to share across their own platforms.

Common Cause
A search engine that allows people to find their representatives to take action in their specific areas.

Gofundme
A free fundraising tool for the people and causes you care about.

Eventbrite

An online event organizing tool where hosts can take RSVPs, collect contact information for future actions, and fundraise.