

**NEW
ERA
OF
PUBLIC
SAFETY**

AN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR FAIR, SAFE,
AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY POLICING

New Era of Public Safety: An Advocacy Toolkit for Fair, Safe, and Effective Community Policing
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New Era of Public Safety: An Advocacy Toolkit for Fair, Safe, and Effective Community Policing is an initiative of the Policing Campaign at the Leadership Conference Education Fund, the education and research arm of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and was supported by the Google Foundation.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. Through advocacy and outreach to targeted constituencies, The Leadership Conference works toward the goal of a more open and just society – an America as good as its ideals.

The Leadership Conference is a 501 (c)(4) organization that engages in legislative advocacy. It was founded in 1950 and has coordinated national lobbying efforts on behalf of every major civil rights law since 1957.

The Leadership Education Fund is a 501 (c)(3) organization that builds public will for laws and policies that promote and protect civil and human rights of every person in the United States. The issues The Education Fund works on have deep roots in its organizational history and across the communities it represents.

Access the toolkit online at <https://policing.civilrights.org/toolkit> and the best practices report, *New Era of Public Safety: A Guide to Fair, Safe, and Effective Community Policing*, at <https://policing.civilrights.org/report/>.

VI. MAKING CHANGE



You have the power to create change. How you choose to influence policing in your community may depend on your purpose, resources, skills, and recent events. Each event below can create opportunities to pressure the stakeholders and institutions that shape policing and public safety.

Opportunities for reform include:

- An incident of officer misconduct or violence
- Release of data about traffic stops or other activities
- Release of other information about policing in your community
- The establishment of a commission or task force to study policing in your community
- The appointment of a new police chief or election of a new sheriff
- Approval of an annual legislative budget
- Negotiation of a police union contract
- Local or state elections

The methods you choose to effect change depend on where you are in the cycle of change.



Cycle of Change



Step 1: Identify the Problem

Change begins with identifying the problem you want to solve.

What are you most concerned about? Racial profiling? Use of force? Sexual violence or misconduct by police officers? Use of military equipment?

Step 2: Build Your Coalition

Before developing your coalition, identify who is already doing work around the issue(s) you are concerned about. Decide what voices need to be at the table in a coalition.

A **coalition** is a group of individuals or organizations who share an interest in a particular issue and come together to address that issue. A coalition may lead several projects or campaigns, and these may change over time as conditions change. Typically, one or two individuals represent their organization's interests at coalition meetings and events.

Who Came Before Us?

- *Do any organizations have experience working on this issue?*
- *Are there elders in the community or informal groups that have important historical information to share?*
- *Do any other community members have direct experience with the police department?*

Remember to defer to the expertise of those who have been doing this work for a while, even if they have been doing so with little to no funding or visibility. Having these groups and individuals at the table as you plan and launch your campaign can be critical to your success.

Engage Directly with Impacted Communities

Key players in any campaign include representatives from communities who are experiencing the brunt of the problem you are trying to solve. For instance, if you are concerned with how police officers interact with people experiencing homelessness in your community, be sure to engage not only agencies that provide services to homeless people but also groups that are led by homeless people.

Whether you form a small group or a very large one, decide on your group's structure before launching a campaign together. The group can be a coalition, a new organization, or something else.

Considerations for deciding which structure to use depend on:

- The number of organizations or individuals involved.
- How long you plan to work together.
- Whether you want to work on a general issue or toward a specific set of goals.
- Whether you can raise money to start and operate a new organization or will trust an organization to hold your collective work as a campaign.

Establishing a clear decision-making structure upfront can help the group navigate difficult decisions in the future. Consider existing power dynamics in your group as you determine what makes the most sense for your decision-making structure.

A Note on Supporting Survivors in Sharing Their Stories

Sharing personal experiences of profiling or violence by police officers can be traumatic, particularly in cases of near-lethal force or sexual violence and misconduct; it can be just as traumatic if a person is humiliated or abused during a brief stop or search. Police representatives must be mindful of such experiences when asking community members to share their stories, whether for a community-led research project, a public forum, or a meeting with a legislator. It is important to:

Ask people who have experienced violence or abuse what they need.

Do they feel comfortable sharing their experience? What would make them more comfortable?

- *Having a support person with them?*
- *Submitting testimony in writing instead of delivering it in person?*
- *Having someone else read their testimony?*
- *Sharing their experience privately?*
- *Including it in an anonymous report?*

Have support on hand.

People often do not know how they will react to sharing their experiences, so make sure that someone who has experience supporting people who have experienced trauma (a healer, social worker, therapist, community member with skills and experience) is available to speak with survivors before, during, and after they share their stories. Also, have a list of resources ready for survivors, including ongoing community support services, crisis lines, and attorneys experienced in officer misconduct cases who are known to the community.

Do not pigeonhole people.

Often, policymakers and the media categorize people as “victims” (people with direct experiences of policing) and “experts” (usually lawyers or other professionals who do not have direct experience with policing). They want to hear from survivors about the problem and from experts about the solution. Survivors are experts in their own experiences and can also be experts in the proposed solutions. Work with survivors who share their stories to develop campaign goals so that they can make connections between their experiences and the solutions in their testimony. Organize press conferences, meetings, and events in ways that prioritize both survivors’ voices and the solutions called for. Such an approach can also mean asking people seen as “experts” on policing issues to step back to make way for people who have more direct experience with harmful policing practices to speak out and articulate campaign demands.

Decision-making options include:

- Going with the consensus or modified consensus.
- Implementing majority rule.
- Creating a steering committee or advisory council that makes decisions with input from the larger group or from subcommittees.
- Creating committees that make decisions about their particular issue areas and then report to the larger group.

Also, consider how the group will be accountable to the larger community. For example, prioritize the voices and perspectives of people in communities that are directly impacted by the issues you are working to address. And be mindful that some groups are well resourced with funds, staff, and legal and policy expertise, whereas others may have no paid staff or budget to support travel or participation in meetings during work hours.

Often members' ability to participate in meetings and do work determines whose ideas take priority and who makes decisions. You can also:

- Schedule meetings for late afternoons, evenings, or weekends, so people with full-time jobs or young children in school can attend.
- Provide transportation, childcare, and food for attendees.
- Set up structures to equitably share resources to help less-resourced groups participate, such as by holding teach-ins around issues that require specialized knowledge (e.g., search and seizure, accountability mechanisms), so that everyone has the same basic information.
- Create opportunities for members of directly impacted communities to share their expertise on the problem with groups that may not have direct experience.
- Create working groups or committees to make decisions in particular areas or develop proposals to bring back to the larger group for discussion.

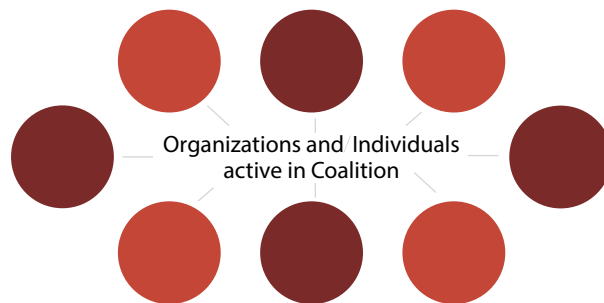
Examples of campaign structures:

Communities United for Policing Reform is a campaign governed by a steering committee made up of member organizations. The campaign is an independent organization, with a director and staff. Decisions about the campaign are based on the recommendations of its working groups and its voting members.⁶⁴

Community Safety Act Coalition (formerly run by the STEP UP Network) is a broad-based coalition that successfully passed the Community Safety Act in Providence, Rhode Island.⁶⁵

Coalition Structures

Coalition

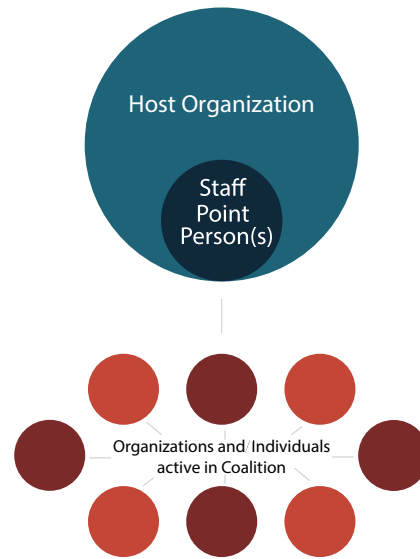


Coalition with Advisory or Steering Committee

Individuals or Organizations on Steering or Advisory Committee



Coalition with Host Organization



Campaign Structure

Campaign Hosted within Organization



Step 3: Set Goals

Next, decide how you want to make change and set specific, short-term goals: Do you want to change policy? Pass a new law? Change the structure and oversight of a local police department?

Consider breaking long-term goals into several shorter-term goals. For example, if your goal is to end profiling in your community, the best way to achieve that goal may be to advocate that your police department adopt policies that address bias-free policing, including racial profiling and police officer interactions with people of color, women, gender nonconforming people, LGBTQ people, youth, undocumented immigrants, people with limited English proficiency (LEP), people with disabilities, religious and ethnic groups, low-income people, and people experiencing homelessness.

You may also want to advocate for specific policies regarding stops, searches, and arrests; changes to police training; and establishing or expanding oversight mechanisms for reporting. Each can be its own separate, shorter-term goal.

Use the SMART approach to choose an effective goal, improve your chances of achieving your goals, and build on the momentum of a campaign toward community power.⁶⁶ This acronym stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imed goals. Goals that are too broad, too vague, unrealistic, unmeasurable, or constantly changing will likely result in a campaign that leaves community members confused, hopeless, or unaware of the progress they are making toward building true community power.





Step 4: Gather Information

After you have identified the problem, built a coalition, and set goals, gather all available information. *Is the department already collecting data that would help make your case? What policies and laws are already in place?*

Policing Data.

Police departments are increasingly making public information about stops, searches, and arrests. So, a good place to start is the department's website; search for an annual or quarterly report. Another resource is a local legal organization like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which analyzes and publishes policing data. The Police Data Initiative, which houses data from dozens of police departments, is also a good source of information. If no one in your group has the skills to analyze raw data, consider partnering with researchers at a local university or college. The Stanford Open Policing Project, the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Mapping Police Violence Project are good sources of national data.

Community-Led Research.

Community-led research or participatory action research is another important way to gather information and data. This can include surveying community members, conducting a poll, and gathering community members' quotes and experiences through a story bank. This type of qualitative data and research can complement data gathered from official sources or be used in place of official data that have not been collected or made public. It can also be useful if local officials are swayed more by local data than national data or by stories rather than numbers.

Online resources can help you refine your methodology and conduct research in a way that is accountable to, empowers, and uplifts directly impacted community members. Your research findings may result in a one-pager presented to the city council or a report released to the media or shared at a press conference, protest, or rally.

For information on participatory research, visit the Public Science Project at: <http://publicscienceproject.org/principles-and-values/>

Public Information.

Some information about your police department may already be publicly available. Many departments post their policies (standard operating procedures [SOPs] or patrol guides) on their websites. These data may also be available through an organization that has made a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for them.⁶⁷ In some jurisdictions, data are available for purchase. Start with an online search for [X police department] standard operating procedures/patrol guide/policies.

Individuals or groups can issue a FOIA request for information about policies, data, or the structure of a police department. Read more about FOIA at <https://www.foia.gov>

FOIA Requests.

If the information you need is not publicly available, you may want to file a FOIA request. The federal government and all 50 states have laws mandating that information kept by public agencies and officials be made available on request to members of the public. Some exceptions limit what the government is obligated to provide. Exceptions include information protected by privacy concerns, law enforcement privilege, and deliberative process privilege. If your request for information is denied on any of these bases, you can appeal the decision to the agency and in court.

The Freedom of Information Act requires the full or partial disclosure of information and documents controlled by the government upon request. The federal government and all 50 states have laws mandating that information kept by public agencies and officials be made available on request to members of the public. A freedom of information request may ask for information about policies, data, or the structure of your department. Read more about FOIA at <https://www.foia.gov>

Requests for information from your local law enforcement agency must be made in writing but can be sent by email, fax, or letter. Use the form on the next page as a template to create a request.

Sample FOIA Request

TITLE

i.e., "John Doe Arrest Report," "Use of Force Policy," or "2017 Organizational Chart"

AGENCIES

Agency's name

Location

Address

i.e., Police Department, Austin, Texas, or Office of the Governor, Arkansas

To Whom It May Concern:

Pursuant to the *[insert the name and number of your state's law]*, I hereby request the following records:

"[Briefly describe the documents you are looking for. The more specific you can be, the better. For instance:

Any and all Austin, Texas, police department policies and training materials currently in effect governing the use of force and sexual misconduct by police officers employed by the department." or

"Any and all organizational charts or descriptions of the organizational structure of the Austin, Texas, police department, including reporting relationships and the name and rank of commanders for each unit or department." or

"Any and all data or information collected by the department concerning the number of stops, frisks, and arrests of pedestrians in the city of Omaha, Nebraska, over the past five years (2013-2018)."]

The requested documents will be made available to the general public, and this request is not being made for commercial purposes.

In the event that there are fees, I would be grateful if you would inform me of the total charges before fulfilling my request. However, I would also like to request a waiver of all fees in that the disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest and will contribute significantly to the public's understanding of *[describe the issue you are concerned about here]*. I would prefer that the request be filled electronically, by email attachment if available or CD-ROM if not.

The *[insert the name of your state FOIA law here]* requires a response within *[insert the number of days the agency has to respond to your request, as outlined in your state FOIA law]* business days. If access to the requested records will take longer, please contact me with information about when I might expect copies or the ability to inspect the requested records.

If you deny any or all of this request, please cite each specific exemption you feel justifies the refusal to release the information and notify me of the appeal procedures available to me under the law.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation in this matter. I look forward to receiving your response to this request within *[insert the number of days the agency has to respond to your request, as outlined in your state FOIA law]*.

Sincerely,

{your name and signature}

Step 5: Build a Campaign

Often, reforms are achieved through strategies and tactics that involve a broad-based and diverse group of people working on a campaign together in coalitions or informal partnerships. You may choose to come together with other community members and organizations to launch a grassroots campaign in your community to make changes to your police department.

A campaign involves setting clear goals for change and agreeing on a set of strategies and tactics that will operate cohesively to achieve your common goals. A campaign also brings together a group of individuals and organizations around a singular set of goals, strategies, and tactics. Once the goal is achieved, the campaign ends because the group has no other purpose. A campaign can be housed at an organization where it will become a component of the larger body of work or mission, or it can operate through an independent organization created for the sole purpose of implementing the campaign.

Choosing the Correct Target and Pressure Points.

It is important to understand your target and pressure points. A target could be an agency, institution, or decision-maker who has the power to give you what you want. A pressure point may be a relationship you leverage or someone/something you use strategically throughout a campaign. There could be multiple pressure points, whereas there is normally only one target. Your pressure point may shift throughout the campaign, but be clear about who or what you are targeting, and limit it to one individual or institution, if possible.

If multiple law enforcement agencies operate in your area, identify the specific agency you are targeting for reform. Some larger cities may have state police, city police, county sheriffs, private patrols, or campus police all working within the same area. In addition, federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; the Federal Bureau of Investigation) may operate in your area. Many constitutionally protected rights are the same when interacting with these agencies, but they all operate under their own policies and are governed differently.

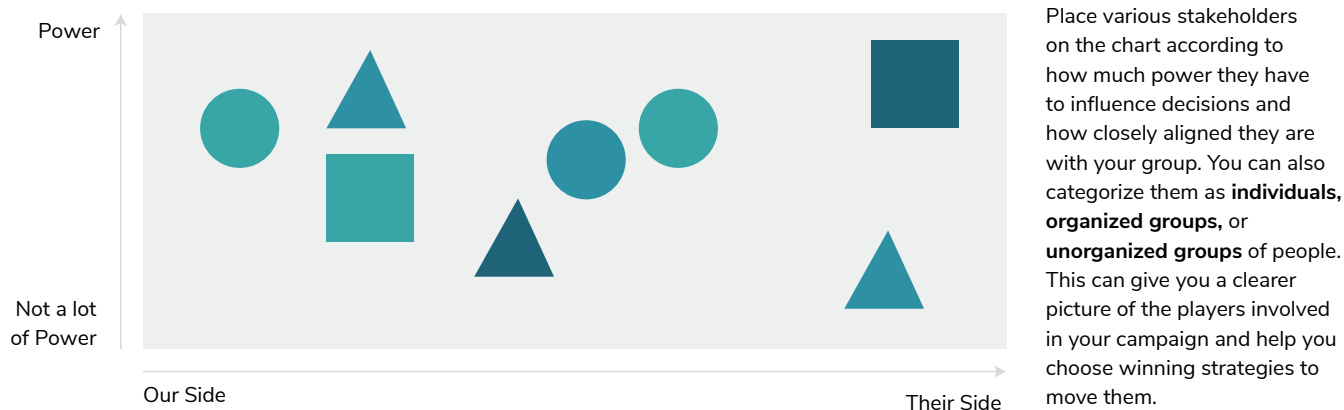
When you have determined which agency, institution, or decision-maker you are targeting, educate yourself on the structure of that agency. If it is your local police department, determine:

- *Who sets the policies for the police department — an elected or appointed position?*
- *Who controls the budget?*
- *Which other stakeholders have influence on public safety, and what is their role?*

Sometimes, you can find answers to these questions on city, county, or police department websites. It might also help to draw a map of who controls or governs these important areas.

Power Mapping.

To determine pressure points and tactics, try a power-mapping exercise. Place stakeholders on a chart according to how much control they have over a decision or your goal. Categorize them as individuals, organized groups, or unorganized groups. Power mapping yields a clearer picture of the players involved in your campaign and the strategies to influence and move them.



Consider the following questions:

- *What moves the target? What motivates them?*
- *Can you move groups or individuals closer to your side and make them allies?*
- *What relationships already exist among the stakeholders? Do any new relationships need to be developed or cultivated?*
- *Can you use relationships with particular groups or individuals to influence your target or pressure points?*
- *Do unorganized groups exist that you can mobilize?*
- *Where do the media fall on your power map?*
- *What additional information do you need? Who can help you access that information?*
- *With which people or groups do you need to meet to learn more about their position or how they can help your campaign?*

Choosing Your Strategy and Tactics.⁶⁸

Next, discuss your strategy — your detailed plan about how to achieve your goals. Your strategy is, in other words, your plan for winning.

When deciding on a strategy, consider your group's strengths and weaknesses, your allies and opponents, your targets and your tactics. Your strategy should incorporate ways to move your targets and refine your media messaging as well.

WHAT: *What are you trying to achieve?*

WHO: *What staffing needs will the campaign have? Consider capacity of each individual and organization involved in the campaign. Establish clear roles and responsibilities. Establish effective channels of communication and data sharing among coalition members.*

WHEN: Establish a timeline.

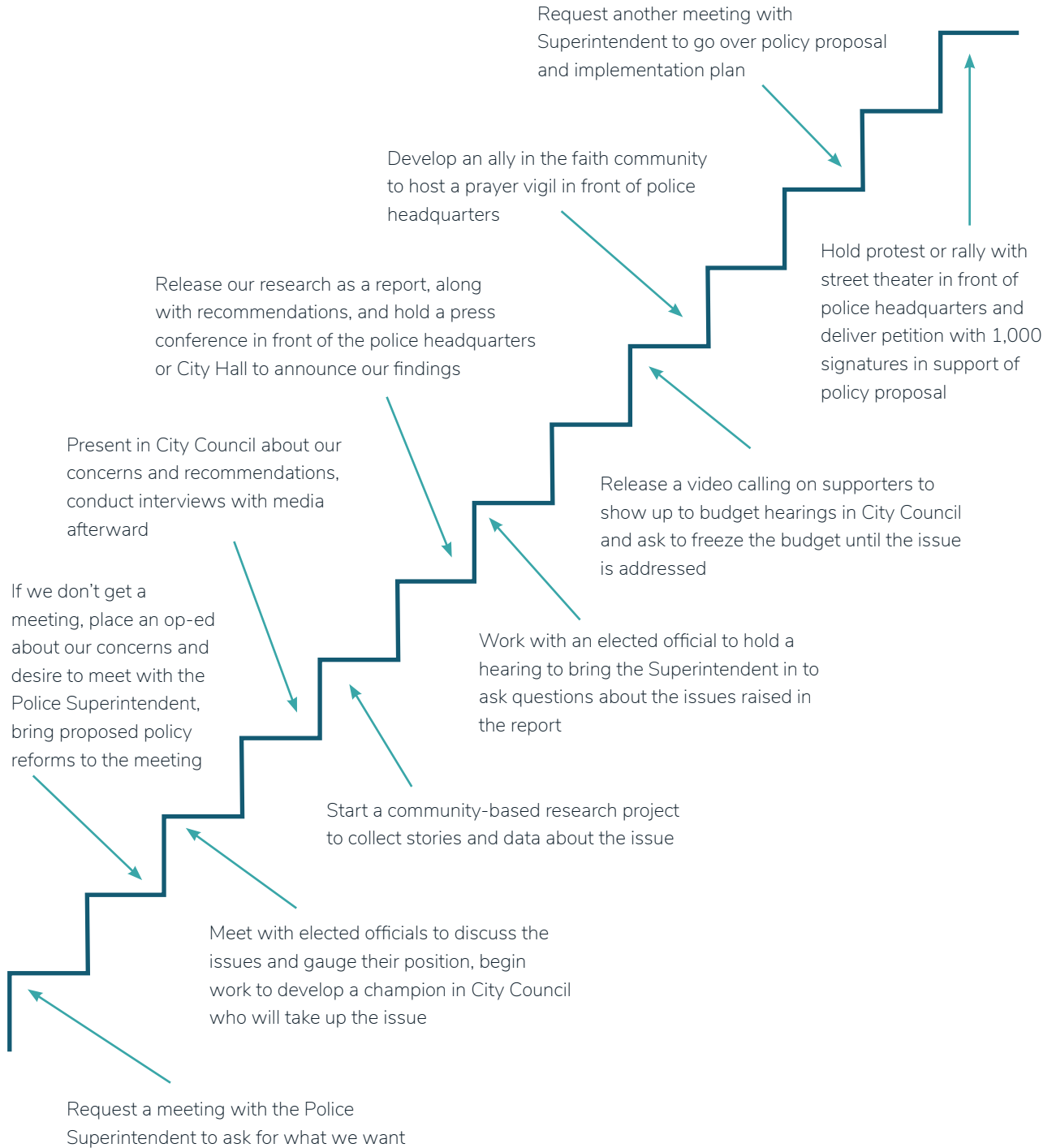
HOW: Conduct a needs assessment to determine what resources you need to successfully complete the campaign.

Identify the tactics you will use to execute your strategy. The tactics you choose depend on your group's preferences, your capacity and resources, the political climate in your area, and how you motivate your target points to action.

The first tactic in a campaign is usually to simply ask for what you want. You can make your request in a meeting with an elected official or the police chief.

If a direct approach is ineffective, an escalating tactics chart can help you determine your next tactic.⁶⁹ An escalating tactics chart is a visual representation of how the campaign can turn up the pressure on each target point over time, depending on the target's reaction to that pressure. The chart ensures that the tactics build on one another in a cohesive way. To make a chart, write down all the possible tactics on paper, and then arrange them according to the order in which you should execute them.

Escalating Tactics Chart



For more information on escalating tactics, see: http://www.bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/escalating_tactics_chart.pdf.
Also see: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.350.org/images/EscalationGuide.pdf>

Tactics should respond to current conditions. Ordinarily, it may not make sense to organize a large, unannounced protest in front of the police department and then request a meeting the next day to discuss policy reforms. But that may be the right choice if a police-involved killing or other high-profile incident has occurred in the community.

There are a number of ways to engage with the stakeholders to gain visibility for your campaign, including:

Community Forums.

Community forums spread awareness about your campaign and hold decision-makers accountable for implementing reforms. These fora are effective at disseminating information to many people at once, particularly those within a specific community. As with any action or event, it is important to identify your goal before hosting a community forum. Note that if elected or public officials are invited to your forum, the media may cover the event, but it may also be more difficult to get firm answers from decision-makers.

Direct Engagement.

Once you have built your campaign with consensus around the policy changes you most want to see, directly engage the department chief and police leaders. Ask for a meeting with the police chief to discuss the policy topics you are most concerned about — and get a seat at the table.

Open the dialogue by discussing the issues and then “make asks.” To make your argument for why change is needed, present the information you have gathered, including stories of people who have been impacted. Be sure to ask for data that is not publicly available. Aim to educate the chief and police leaders you meet with. Be attentive during the meeting and be open to their perspectives. They may have insights on different topics that could inform future engagement.

Rallies, Protests, and other Creative Actions.

Rallies, protests, and creative actions, such as street theater and cultural performances, can effectively share information about your campaign. Actions with a lot of visuals help attract attention from your target, pressure points and the media. Some actions, such as marches, may require significant attendance to be effective; others can be effective with a small group of people. Whatever you are planning, be sure that your message and goal are clear to your audience and supporters. As you plan, prioritize everyone's safety, and consider appointing *legal observers*, *police liaisons*, and a *safety team*. Also, obtain any permits required for rallies and protests on public property.

Tactics can be creative, such as:

- Street theater outside city council chambers to call attention to pending legislation.
- Photo campaigns in which people take pictures with signs describing how they would spend the police department budget to advance public safety. Post the images on social media and tag decision-makers.

Creative tactics engage people in the campaign, make it fun, and attract media attention.

Legal observers work to make sure everyone's rights are protected while they engage in free speech and other actions. These observers can serve as important documenters when people's rights are being violated and help advocate on defense teams if someone is arrested. More information about legal observers is available at:

<https://www.nlg.org/legalobservers>

In a protest context, **police liaisons** are people organizers choose to serve as the main points of contact and communication between protesters and the police. They can convey information from the police to the protesters, help facilitate constructive dialogue, and de-escalate situations if needed.

In a police context, police liaison may be a position within the police department designed to facilitate relationships between the broader community or specific segments of the community, such as the LGBTQ community, and the police.

The role of your **safety team** members depends on the type of action or event you are hosting. It could include ensuring that everyone is well hydrated, serving as a marshal for a march, or making sure that a de-escalation plan is in place.

For more information on direct action, see: <https://organizingforpower.org/action-2/>

Litigation.

Litigation is a go-to tactic when trying to change police department policy or practice. Lawsuits may allege that a particular incident violated the constitution or law or point to a larger systemic issue through a class action lawsuit with multiple plaintiffs.⁷⁰ Lawsuits can be part of larger grassroots or organizing strategy — or complements to them.

If a lawsuit is being filed by one individual alleging harm against one individual, the goal is usually to get damages or monetary compensation for the person who suffered harm, but remedies may also include training or policy changes.

Collaborating across sectors and fields is sometimes challenging, so lawyers, clients, and organizers should meet regularly to develop trusting relationships, learn about the issues important to those involved, and share information about strategies. It is also important to establish to whom each party is accountable; for example, lawyers may be accountable only to their clients, who may have a different goal different than you do. Social justice lawyers familiar with community organizing strategies might see the benefit of close collaboration and may be accountable to their client, as well as to the larger community.

Advancing one cohesive strategy in the courts with local legislators, police chiefs, and mayors, and using similar talking points and messages with all audiences, will help achieve meaningful and sustainable reform.

Department of Justice Interventions.

The DOJ Civil Rights Division is responsible for upholding the civil and constitutional rights of all people and enforcing federal statutes that prohibit discrimination.⁷¹ Within the Civil Rights Division are two sections that focus on policing issues: The Special Litigation Section and the Criminal Section.

The Special Litigation Section investigates law enforcement agencies to determine whether patterns or practices of constitutional violations exist. The Criminal Section brings federal criminal charges against individual officers for violating constitutional rights during incidents of police violence.⁷²

The difference between these two types of investigation is important. Because a criminal investigation typically focuses on an incident and the individuals involved, the result of a successful prosecution is prison time for the responsible officers. In a pattern or practice investigation, the DOJ will publish the findings of its investigation and usually enter into a court-ordered settlement, or “consent decree,” with the local police department. Rather than going to trial, the parties will agree to a set of remedies, such as policy reforms, community advisory boards, new training, and making other changes to the police department.

The Civil Rights Division offers opportunity for community involvement. Community members can inform the investigation, propose language for consent decrees, and meet regularly with representatives from the DOJ to update them on the progress of reforms. In addition, even if the Civil Rights Division does not launch a full investigation and pursue a consent decree, the COPS Office may enter a collaborative process with local agencies to support reform efforts, issue recommendations, and offer technical assistance. Community members can file complaints or alert issues in the community to the DOJ online at <https://www.justice.gov/>.

Choosing Your Communications Strategies, Messaging, & Tactics

A strong communications strategy is key to a strong campaign because it helps drive the public conversation and shift public opinion toward your analysis of the problem and your proposed solution. Your communications strategy has the power to influence other community members, voters, decision-makers, and even the identified target. It can help amplify the campaign, build support for its goals, recruit people for events, and attract new allies to the cause.

You will repeat your message and message frame throughout the course of the campaign. Therefore, you should always deliver a consistent message when discussing your issue, whether during one-on-one conversations in communities, in interviews with the media, or in print materials.

A strong message and frame for your campaign is critical to your campaign’s success. To develop a winning message, appeal to values shared by the community members as well as decision-makers and stakeholders. A strong message often builds on the shared values of community and public safety.

Shared values include:

- Safety
- Community
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Fairness
- Respect
- Families and youth
- Civil and human rights
- Ending violence (including violence by police officers)
- Commonsense solutions (or being “smart” when responding to social problems)
- Leadership in adopting best practices or models (particularly those that rely on data or research).

You can adapt your message to your audience, but the core of your message should remain the same. Therefore, it is important to develop a message that has broad public appeal. A strong message and frame also help your campaign “control the narrative” by encouraging media outlets to repeat your talking points and spread your message. Examples of good overall messaging frames include “Safe Streets, Strong Communities” and “We Deserve Better.”

🗨️ Develop your **talking points** — a few short reasons or factors in bullet form that support your message and cause — from your message. These talking points can include examples to better explain your message.

🗣️ **Sound bites** are short, memorable ways of communicating your talking points in the media.

Positioning the members of your group as experts on the issue at hand lends credibility to your campaign or cause. The clearer it is that your group has researched the problem and is providing solutions, the more that media outlets and the general public will seek out your group for expertise and guidance. Therefore, your group should include people who have direct experience with the police department. Their experiences should not only inform the campaign’s strategies and goals but also provide expertise on the issue. You can bolster this expertise with data that support your cause, research, and best practice models.

Use your communications strategy to generate coverage in various media outlets. This will bolster your outreach and inform your tactics. For example:

Do you need more community support from young people at events?

Develop a social media strategy, shoot videos, or create shareable memes to attract the attention of younger community members.

Do you want to attract the attention of voters in a specific neighborhood or community?

Place letters to the editor of the local newspaper, develop flyers to post in places community members frequent, or even fundraise for a small billboard.

Do you want to communicate directly to a decision-maker or your campaign target?

Create a sign-on letter or policy brief or generate talking points for use at an in-person meeting.

These communication strategies are quite different, but with a strong, unifying message, they can work together toward one cohesive and winning communications strategy.

Common Communications Tactics

Two common communications tools are letters to the editor and op-eds, which appear in the opinion section — the most widely read section of the newspaper after the front page.

Letters to the editor are typically written in direct response to a current issue or event or in response to a previous article the newspaper printed. These letters are 150 words or less and summarize one or two key points. They are extremely time sensitive: generally, a newspaper will not publish a letter to the editor more than a few days after the original event or article.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Yesterday, [this paper published an article stating that...]. As a community member working to reform the police department, I [agree/disagree, insert position].

Evidence shows that [insert data, research, or stories demonstrating the impact of the issue on communities and public safety].

[Describe best practices and where they have been successfully implemented.]. Adopting policies that address [issue] would [positive impact of proposed solution.].

It is time [city or locality] began adopting commonsense solutions to the issue of [issue or problem], which will result in a more transparent and accountable police department and a safer place for all [city's or locality's] residents.

[Insert Call to Action.]

Sincerely,

[Name, contact information]

An op-ed (which stands for opposite the editorial) is typically much longer — 500 to 750 words — and takes a position. It is a good idea to peg an op-ed to a recent issue, incident, article, or story, but op-eds are not as time sensitive as letters to the editor. The usual authors of op-eds are experts or otherwise credible community members who have direct experience and expertise with the issue at hand. Both a letter to the editor and an op-ed can include a call to target, pressure points, other decision-makers, or the community at large.

Depending on your city and news source, you can submit letters to the editor and op-eds online or by mail. Instructions for submission typically appear at the beginning of the editorial section, on the first or last page of the newspaper, or online. Be sure to follow these instructions carefully to improve your chances of publication.

An OP-ED should include the following components:

- A compelling first sentence to draw the reader in.
- Established credibility and expertise on the issue.
- Discussion of the problem.
- Discussion of dangers and risks associated with the problem.
- Discussion of the solution.
- Compelling “kicker” last sentence or paragraph.

A sign-on letter is an example of a communications strategy that goes directly to your target. You typically use a sign-on letter to show widespread and diverse support for a solution to an issue. Therefore, it is important to reach out to different types of organizations and communities to ask them to sign on to your letter. You can mail sign-on letters to your campaign target or deliver them in person as part of a meeting creative action, or press conference.

You can also write a form letter and have each supporter send it individually to the campaign's target. Alternately, you can write a call script that individuals can use when they target and you can create an online or hard-copy petition and circulate it for signatures.

Sample Sign-On Letter

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals made up of more than [number] diverse grassroots organizers, policy advocates, lawyers, lobbyists, policing reform experts, and family members who have direct experience with the [police department], call on the [campaign's targeted pressure point] to [campaign goal].

National studies and local data community members have gathered show that [insert relevant data about the problem.]. In fact, in [city or locality], [insert local story about the problem].

We know that [insert problem] does not make our communities safer. In fact, it can have an adverse effect on public safety. Therefore, to create true public safety in our communities, we must create policy solutions that are informed by directly affected community members and strengthen relationships between the community and the [police department].

A policy that [insert policy solution and any positive impacts] will not only improve the lives of our community members who encounter police officers but have a positive impact on our [city/town/county] overall.

The [police department] has an opportunity to create a transparent and accountable organization that values public safety, mutual respect, and the human rights of all our residents. It can position itself as a national model, built on best practices and commonsense approaches.

We urge you to [insert campaign goal].

Sincerely,

[The undersigned]

Press Conferences and Press Releases.

Press conferences are another important means of distributing your campaign's message and highlighting important updates or milestones in the campaign's progress. You can use press conferences to garner mainstream media attention or independently create and distribute media.

Press releases attract media attention: They should answer “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” “why,” and “how” and be written in the third person. News outlets — particularly ethnic media outlets — may use the press release as a primary source of information and even reprint it without following up with your group for additional quotes or information. Make sure to write the press release in a style that easily lends itself to transformation into an article and include everything you want your readers to know. Consider including one or two quotes from community members or representatives from local organizations, as well. Be concise, clear, and timely.

Online Activism and Social Media.

Much of your campaign's success will come from effective communication strategies, including use of the internet and social media. From email blasts to online petitions to trending hashtags, the internet can be an effective tool for mass mobilization, helping you get your message out broadly and quickly.⁷³

Amplifying your message across social platforms is an important part of getting your campaign message out to your target audience. Creating social media posts from your talking points and condensing them into the appropriate character count — and including a call to action — help your audience and those interested in your campaign get involved. Including a hashtag to house your creative information and take the campaign viral spreads your message farther.

Color of Change

Color of Change is a digital petition and training platform that allows people to organize and mobilize individuals around a variety of racial justice topics.

For more information visit: <https://www.organizefor.org/>

The average person's attention span is decreasing rapidly; at the same time, our news feeds and inboxes are becoming increasingly cluttered with media competing for our attention. Therefore, it is more important than ever to be able to communicate your message in a compelling and succinct way. Hashtags help by giving you a way to describe the core of your issue in just a few characters while also framing your issue and reaching a wider audience. Images and videos are a visual representation of your message, so it is important to keep all social elements cohesive and clear.

Social media is critical for getting the word out about your issue and building broad support for your campaign. Make sure your outreach does not stop there. Through various online platforms, you can create petitions, conduct phone and text banking to turn people out to events, email targets directly with prefilled or custom letters, send emails to supporters in specific ZIP codes to encourage them to contact their representatives, and more.

Social media algorithms that determine your online experience are always evolving, and new online organizing tools are created every day. Check the internet for up-to-date guides on how to use these strategies effectively.

Know Your Rights Trainings

Know Your Rights training is an important part of police reform. These training sessions can get more people involved in your campaign and are an important community education tool. They can also be helpful in explaining new reforms to community members who should understand how police officers are expected to treat them during police stops and encounters. One key to successful Know Your Rights training, however, is understanding the difference between “rights” and “reality” because often what police officers are supposed to do varies from what may occur during an encounter.

Step 6: Engaging your Target and Pressure Points, and Meeting with Other Stakeholders

Organizing a meeting with the police chief, a community liaison, or a representative from the police department is a critical strategy when the campaign goal is policy reform in the police department. Because the police chief is the decision-maker for police department policy, that person tends to be your campaign's target pressure point.

Many campaigns begin with a direct request for what your community wants. This initial request can set the tone for the campaign, give you important information that informs your strategy and tactics, gauge how long it may take for you to win your campaign, and identify obstacles you may encounter along the way. Other times, you may meet with the police chief or others in the police department when drafting policies, designing training on policies, or providing updates from the community about policy implementation.

Meeting with decision-makers such as elected officials and representatives is important for getting legislation, ordinances, or resolutions passed at any level of government. Even if legislators do not have direct power to make the change you want, they can have relationships with those who do. They are also generally willing to meet with the people they represent, directly or indirectly.

Set goals.

Regardless of the reason for your meeting or whom you are meeting, set a clear goal for the meeting.

Before scheduling your meeting, be sure that you are prepared. You will likely have limited time with the representative, so setting a clear goal (why you want to meet) before you step into the room is essential. Your goal may be:

- To get a commitment from an elected official to introduce legislation or vote a certain way.
- To educate an official on an important issue to prime them for future action or to support your efforts to move a different pressure point.
- To gather information about where the official stands on an issue or any reforms the official is contemplating.

Knowing your goal beforehand helps ensure that you and your group know whether the meeting was successful — which is especially important if members of your group have never met with an elected official before. Be prepared for the official to be in a rush, ask difficult questions as they attempt to understand the issue from all sides, or already have a firm position on the issue.

A clear goal also helps set the tone for your meeting. If you asked for the meeting, then the official will likely expect you to take the lead and set the agenda, especially if you do not have a prior relationship with the official. The meeting's attendees and your talking points help set the meeting's tone as well.

Decide who should attend.

When you know why you want a meeting, decide who should attend. An official may be more likely to share information — especially sensitive information — and answer your questions in a smaller meeting. In contrast, if you prefer a larger meeting without much back and forth or want to draw attention to the support your cause has garnered, opt for a community forum.

If you decide to bring a larger group to the meeting, be sure that everyone is clear on and unified in the message and goals of the meeting. You should also notify the official's office beforehand, so that staff can book a conference room to accommodate everyone. If your meeting is in a government building, check beforehand whether identification is required, and advise the people who will be attending accordingly.

When meeting with police department leaders, keep in mind that they frequently bring additional people to meetings with the community. It is unlikely that you will be alone in the room with the police chief or other leaders within the department unless it is a small or rural jurisdiction.

Similarly, elected officials and police leaders will sometimes have you meet with someone else in their office or use a stand-in at a meeting. If this happens, do not be discouraged. True, it is best to get a face-to-face meeting, but policymakers have busy schedules; they rely on their staff to be their “eyes and ears” and often defer to their proposals and recommendations. Never underestimate the power of the person you are meeting with, even if they are an intern. Treat the surrogate with as much respect as you would the person they are representing.

Many people in positions of power, whether elected or appointed, meet with their constituents or other concerned advocates regularly, but it can be more difficult to get a meeting in a large jurisdiction or during a busy legislative session. If you do not receive a response to your meeting request, it may be time to escalate or use a different tactic, such as a letter-writing or call-in campaign, or a creative action like a sing-a-thon outside the official's office.

Develop clear talking points.

Whether you have a few or many attendees in your meeting, **clear talking points** are critical to your success. If you are still trying to determine who will attend your meeting, your talking points can help drive this strategic decision. Consider whether some points will be better received if they come from a particular member of your group based on that person's direct experience with the issue or level of expertise. If you are meeting with an elected official, consider whether the meeting's attendees live or vote in their district.

Your group may choose one spokesperson or divide the meeting into portions, each with a clear speaking role for a participant to discuss one talking point. Not everyone in your group needs to speak, but everyone should be prepared to speak if asked or to fill in if someone forgets an important talking point. If language interpretation is needed, be sure that your group has a designated interpreter.

Practicing your talking points and even conducting role-plays of the meeting beforehand can help prepare your group, particularly if group members have never met with a person in power before or are nervous. It is also important to consider what your bottom line is if you are requesting something from the person with whom you are meeting. Ask yourself:

- *What concessions will your group make and under what circumstances?*
- *What will you not decide on or agree to until you have a chance to talk about it again as a group?*

Make sure everyone attending the meeting is clear on and committed to upholding these bottom lines.

When developing your talking points, be sure to consider what moves or motivates the person you are targeting:

- *Are they concerned with fiscal responsibility and how reforms may affect the budgets?*
- *Are they motivated by the possibility of becoming a national leader in police reform?*
- *Are they vying for a seat in an upcoming election?*

Speak directly about community concerns.

Regardless of the pressure point's motivations and interests, be sure to **speak to concerns of the public officials you are meeting with**, showing how your solutions will have a positive impact on the issues the official cares about most. Bring data and personal stories to grab their attention.

Similarly, focus on solutions and what the official can do to affect change. Positioning your group as an expert may mean that that official is more likely to turn to your group for its perspective

during critical moments, such as drafting legislation, developing counterarguments to an opponent's position, or seeking feedback on policy language.

Bring your talking points with you to the meeting; in this way, no matter what the official says, your group will not be derailed and will hit your most important points.

Checklist for Questions to Ask Decision-Makers at Meetings

Direct questions, such as:

- ☑ [For elected representatives] “Can we count on your support for Resolution XX?” or “What will it take to get your support on XX?”
- ☑ [For police departments] “Is your department willing to adopt a policy on XX through a community-led process?”

Follow-up or recap questions, such as:

- ☑ “When can we expect to hear back from you about XX?”
- ☑ “Just to confirm, our next steps will be to XX . . .”

Give them information to take away.

Finally, **get something in the pressure point's hands that they can look at later.** This may be a one-pager that reiterates your talking points or draft legislation you want the official to consider. Include your group's contact information on the document so that the official's staff members can contact you with any follow-up questions or updates.

Sample One-Pager or Fact Sheet

Background *[Provide important information about the history or background of the issue. Include compelling statements on why this issue is urgent in the community, including any relevant data.]*

Solutions *[Focus the majority of your document on the solutions to solve the problem. All talking points should align with the solution.]*

Talking Point 1:

Talking Point 2:

Talking Point 3:

Addressing the opposition: If opposition exists to the solution you are proposing, address it here — for instance, “Although Tasers are often promoted as an alternative to lethal force, they can be lethal, especially under certain circumstances, and they are often used in situations where lethal force would not be warranted. This is why strong limitations/a ban on their use except when the only other option would be lethal force are/is critical.”

Closing statement

Special considerations when meeting with the police department.

Meeting with police leaders can be difficult for people who have had negative experiences with police officers. If planned appropriately and with care for the people who have had direct experience with policing, the meeting can be an empowering or even a potentially healing experience for community members. If not done properly, the meeting can result in further emotional and psychological harm. Also consider whether anyone in your group has open warrants, is an undocumented immigrant, or may otherwise face risks by meeting with police leaders.

Special considerations when meeting with elected officials.

When choosing whom to meet with, be sure you **understand the official's role in the government** and their ability to impact change on the issue at hand. You may be requesting a meeting with your campaign's targeted pressure point or those who can influence your target.

Learn as much as you can about the official and their position on the issue prior to the meeting. What motivates the official and what is their relationship to other decision-makers? Questions your research should answer include:

- *To which organizations does the official belong to?*
- *On which committees does the official sit?*
- *What kinds of legislation has the official introduced or championed?*
- *What policy changes has the official spoken in favor of?*

Officials typically provide much of this information on their official or campaign websites and social media accounts. Alternatively, your group can talk to other organizations with which the official has a relationship. Power mapping will help ensure that you meet with the appropriate official and give you a visual understanding of where they stand politically relative to your cause.

Remember, if your group is a registered nonprofit organization, you can still meet with public and elected officials.

Notes for registered nonprofit organizations: Is it lobbying?

→ If I... ask a legislator to pass specific pending legislation?

This is direct lobbying. If your group is a registered charitable organization, the amount of time and money you spend on lobbying is restricted. Check Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations and grant agreements before moving forward.

→ If I... ask others to contact a legislator to ask them to support specific pending legislation?

This is called grassroots lobbying, or indirect lobbying. Your charitable status still restricts such lobbying, but the regulations are not as strict. Check IRS regulations and grant agreements before moving forward.

→ If I... Ask a legislator to take general action on an issue without referring to specific legislation or educating the legislator on an issue more broadly?

This is not lobbying: It is considered educating lawmakers.

Disclaimer:

Check your state and federal regulations for restrictions on lobbying and be sure to check any grant agreements you may have that restrict this activity.

No matter whom you meet with, it is important to send an email or letter to thank them afterward and clarify any next steps that you discussed. This contact can also serve as a way to document in writing any commitments made.

Sample Thank-You Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for meeting with _[name of group]_____ on _[date]_____.

At the meeting, we discussed _[summary of meeting]_____. We look forward to _[any next steps from meeting]_____.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us should you have any additional questions. We can be reached at _[contact information]_____.

In appreciation,

_[name of group]_____

Step 7: Evaluate the Impact of your Campaign

Once a change has been made, monitor how it is being implemented. For instance, *are all officers being trained on a new policy? Is the department evaluating its understanding and compliance with the new policy? Are community members seeing improvements? Are new or different problems arising?*

For policing reforms to be sustainable over the long term, the community at large must understand what changes have been made and hold police officers and departments accountable to them. Ways to do this include continuing to document encounters with the police department so that the campaign can report on the progress of reforms, encouraging people to file complaints against the police department when it is safe and necessary to do so, continuing to engage with decision-makers and stakeholders by attending city council meetings and other public forums, and participating in a civilian oversight board.

Change is a long-term undertaking. It is important to celebrate victories and improvements along the way and to recognize that it is a continuing process in which new problems will be identified and the cycle will be repeated until we can overhaul policing systems for true systemic change that guarantees fair, safe, and effective policing.