



## SECTION 6 TAKE ACTION

### IN THIS SECTION, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT

- Phases of an action campaign, with foundational work, kick-off, peaks, mid-peak organizing, and resolution
- Measuring and tracking outcomes of your action
- Important principles of a successful action, including timing, sequence, reminders and appreciations, shared work and shared success, and follow-up with participants
- Motivational Task Design, which can match team members and participants with tasks best for them and most effective for the campaign
- Getting media coverage and getting the most out of working with elected officials
- Balance between growing people power and resources, and having a concrete impact in a campaign
- Restrictions on what actions we can take as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization
- Basics on the legislative process: how a bill turns into law
- Wrapping up: evaluating and celebrating a campaign or action



You have set your impact goal, your people goal, your tactics, and your timeline — overall, your strategy for action. This final section of the Toolkit will help you implement your plan — to take action that maximizes your chance of reaching your people and impact goals.

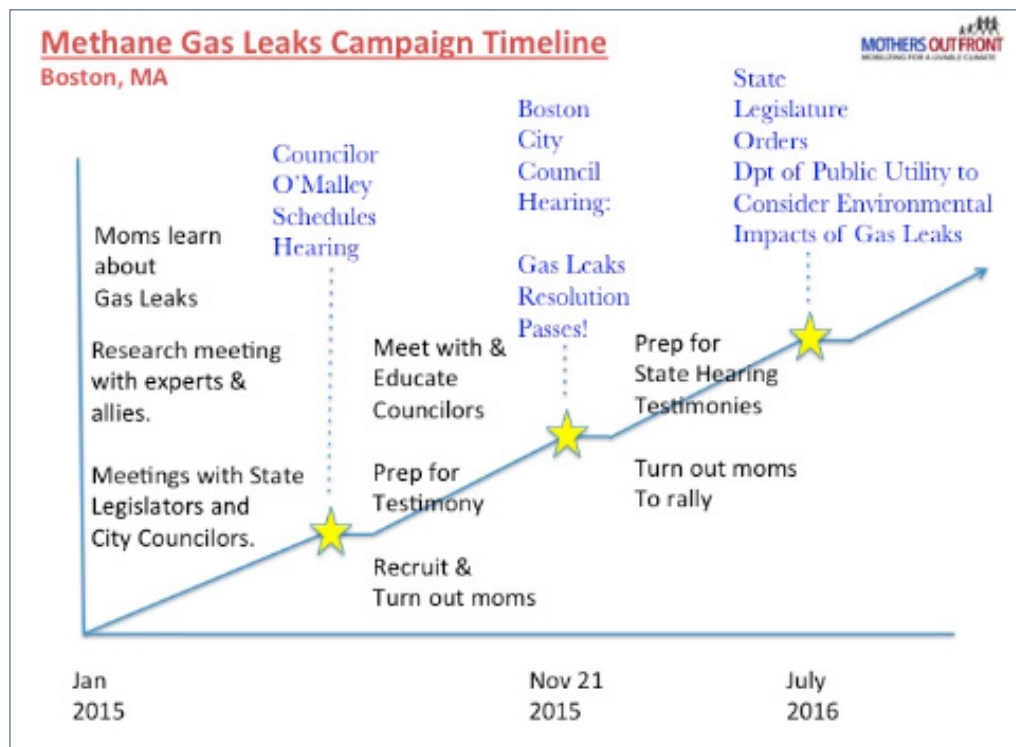
This chapter will lay out basic principles of taking action, sketch out some practical steps along the way, and give you tools and ideas for a few specific types of actions. If any section below seems too theoretical or not applicable to your work right now, just skim it and set it aside until any part of it is relevant for your team.

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## I. BASIC PRINCIPLES

Let's start by reviewing a few basic principles before launching into reviewing the steps of executing an action.

**Phases of a successful community campaign:** There is a foundation of an organization (i.e. people, and a common mission) before you start; there is a kick-off; there are smaller “peaks” (indicated by the yellow stars in the graphic below) as you organize, leading up to a final “mountain-top peak” before the resolution of the campaign.



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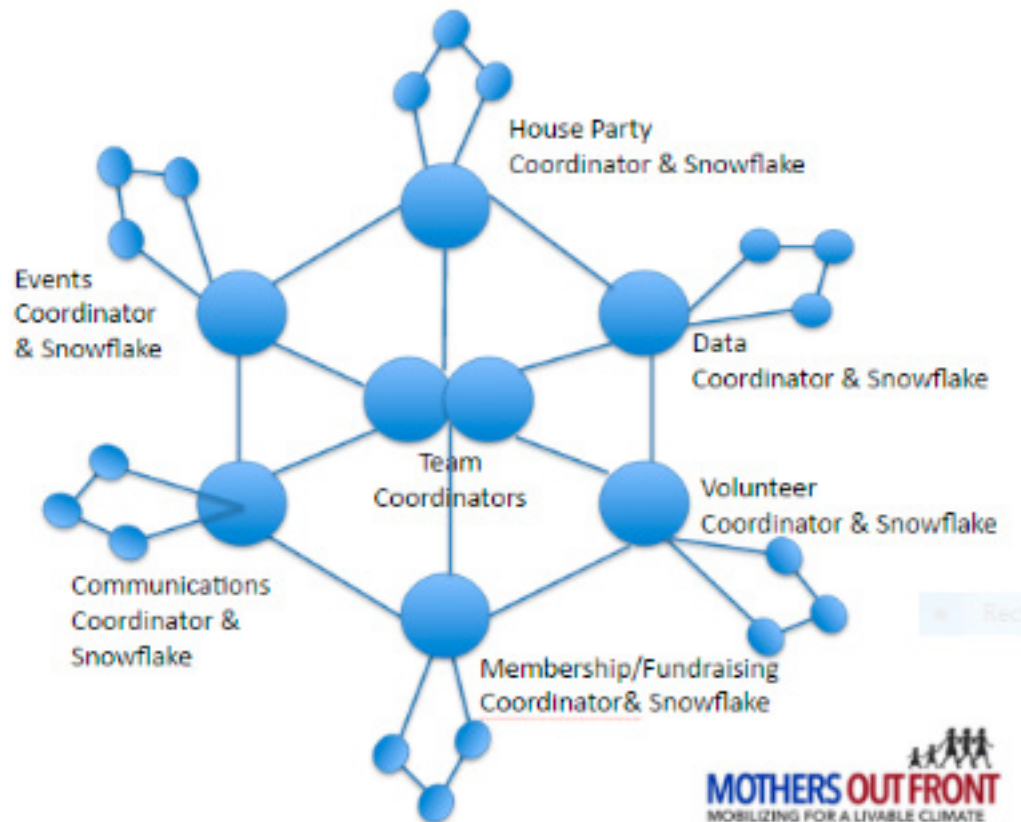
A successful action does a few things:

1. **It clearly communicates your goals to your base (those who support you, pro-actively or more passively), your active members/volunteers, and to your target (the person or institution you are asking something of).** For example, in the Boston gas leaks campaign, Mothers Out Front members held regular community meetings where they reviewed their goals and shared information using educational materials they had created. Members frequently communicated their goal of identifying and fixing the city's gas leaks to city councilors.
2. **It builds the capacity of your group by creating room for new people and fostering new leadership.** For example, during their gas leaks tagging campaign, Mothers Out Front members in Arlington reached out to people who had added their names to a sign-up sheet at a Town Day event and asked them to join their action by helping post signs near each gas leak on their public "tagging day."
3. **It supports the growth of the people in the campaign.** For example, Mothers Out Front members from the Massachusetts Leadership Team sent trainers to most of the local Community Team groups' meetings to do trainings on "one-to-ones," to make sure this important skill and basic organizing tool was shared.
4. **It's shaped so that you aim to reach a goal while gaining knowledge and learning new skills along the way.** The Boston Mothers Out Front Community Team is aiming to fix the leaks and get legislation passed to minimize the climate damage of methane gas; they were all on a steep learning curve about methane gas and the legislative process during the campaign.
5. **Shared Work, Shared Success:** The more widely we can distribute the workload on an action, the more people have a stake in it and benefit from the outcome. When many people have an opportunity to contribute to the effort, they also share in its success. It is "their" victory, not someone else's. This, in turn, creates motivation and a sense of ownership and entitlement. For example, several moms from Boston Mothers Out Front — not just one or two — now have a relationship with their legislators and the mayor that will be useful in the future. With more of them invested in the work and owning pieces of it, they can grow the organization faster as they spread their excitement, knowledge, and personal experience with more friends.

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Another example of shared work is organizing a group of moms to make phone calls asking others to join them at a gas leaks hearing. Making 50 calls is too much for one person to do, but when five moms take responsibility for making 10 calls each, the task is manageable.

**GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF TYPICAL COMMUNITY TEAM SNOWFLAKE AND COMMUNITY TEAM ROLES**



## **II. PLANNING CAREFULLY IS CRUCIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL ACTION!**

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Here are steps to take when executing an action:

### **a. SET UP MEASURABLE STEPS**

Divide your goal(s) into clear, smaller, measurable sub-goals that will serve as tactics. For example, in our Methane Leaks Case Study, the ultimate goal in Boston was to have the city council pass a resolution ordering the utilities to fix the leaks. Tactics (or sub-goals) under this could be:

- meetings and discussions with each city council member;
- residents contacting each city council member and the mayor;
- organizing to get a specific number of moms to show up to meetings, educational events, and hearings;
- getting media coverage in newspapers and online.

Note that in your planning, tactics like this should be highly specific: i.e. when should who contact city council members and the mayor; which educational events or meetings you are organizing; how many media “hits” you are aiming for.

Breaking goals down requires that you plan carefully, and figure out how to use each goal to develop the skills of current volunteers and engage new ones. Of course, it’s critical that you leave time and have enough people for all the separate steps. Here are some additional factors to consider:



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## **b. WHAT IS THE IDEAL TIMING AND SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS AND EVENTS SO THEY SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF YOUR WORK?**

For example, in organizing a city council action like the one in our case study, pay attention to the electoral cycle. Is there a politician whose support you want to win? If they are running for re-election, this could help you reach them but you need to time it right and be thoughtful about how to approach them.

## **c. PLAN FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS/MEMBERS:**

Always be ready to tell participants what they can do next. When people hear about your work, come to an event, or take part in an action, they should walk away knowing what they can do next to help the campaign. Have options (involving various levels of time and commitment) written on a flyer and, if possible, listed on your website. Add new volunteers to our NationBuilder system so you can track their involvement (see Section 3 for instructions). Your plans can change or new events can be added. You want to be able to take advantage immediately of anyone's interest by showing that their help is needed, make your strategic path clear, and demonstrate that you intend to succeed in reaching the goal.

## **d. BALANCE CAPACITY BUILDING AND GOAL-FOCUSED ACTIONS. SUCCESSFUL MOVEMENT-BUILDING REQUIRES APPROXIMATELY EQUAL AMOUNTS OF:**

1. Capacity building: outreach, educating, empowering new volunteers, and moving people up the “Ladder of Engagement,” and
2. Public events or actions that work to reach our concrete goals.

If we didn't balance these two things, we would not be building our movement and our numbers would be too small; the opposition would win. For example, in our case study, the Boston moms continued to have public meetings, inviting new people into the campaign, building their commitment to the organization, and increasing their numbers. They were able to mobilize 120 people to attend the hearing that was a “peak” of their campaign. In this way, we build our capacity and swing more

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people to our side of the issue. It also gets us ready for “whirlwind events” (See Momentum Training sidebar, this page) – where something happens in the natural or political world and our quick, decisive, and broad-based community response makes the most of it for building our movement.

### **c. CREATE A CULTURE OF COMMITMENT:**

Taking action is important: it motivates people to participate even more. Holding a rally, conducting a delegation, or mounting a petition campaign all begin with a commitment. The following can also help encourage participation.

1. **Strong commitment and good habits:** As you begin to take action, make sure your group leaders model strong commitment and good habits. Know who is supposed to be doing what, and by when. If a leader isn’t prepared for a meeting, with agenda copies, enough seats, food, sign-in sheets, and other materials, new attendees will not feel that there is a serious commitment to reach the goal.
2. **Reminders for volunteers:** When you organize an action – say, showing up at a city council hearing – people who agree to attend should get reminder calls about the event. E-mails are good, but to make sure people turn out, an email is not enough. People need to know that they – personally – are needed and valued.
3. **Thanks and appreciation:** Gratitude goes a long way. Notice what people are doing, and what they have done. Keep track of their roles and help them if they’re having trouble. This can be an appointed role, or spread throughout the organization (see Section 4: Forming and Developing Your Team). Even a beginner taking on a very small task is an important part of

## **Whirlwind Moments**

Social activists and brothers Paul and Mark Engler lay out a picture of slow and steady community organizing and “capacity building” being catapulted into new levels of success and public awareness of an issue, through what they call a whirlwind moment:

“The defining attribute of a moment of the whirlwind is that it involves a dramatic public event or series of events that set off a flurry of activity, and that this activity quickly spreads beyond the institutional control of any one organization. It inspires a rash of decentralized action, drawing in people previously unconnected to established movement groups.” [from “This is an Uprising,” by Mark and Paul Engler, 2016]. Whirlwind moments or events can be instigated by people, or can be set off by natural events — say, a nuclear accident setting off a rash of people-driven actions by people working to prevent radioactive damage to their health and communities.

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the whole and deserve appreciation and praise. (Note: If someone is consistently underperforming, meet with her individually and diagnose the problem together. Is she overworked? Unclear about her responsibilities? Not enjoying her role? Figure out who can step in, then help her find a better fit for her skills, interests, and level of commitment.)

4. Debrief the action with your volunteers: Together, identify and celebrate your successes, and also take time to identify what you collectively could have done to make the action even stronger. This is a critical step in building volunteers' and Mothers Out Front's ability to learn and organize increasingly successful actions and campaigns.

**f. TRACK AND REVIEW OUTCOMES REGULARLY:**

It's important to set up a system to track progress and outcomes from the beginning. Keep track of your progress as you go forward with your actions, educating, and organizing. This data can inform your campaign. For example, the moms in our case study wanted to reach a certain number of city councilors, so they tracked the number of visits to each, the number of calls or letters generated to each councilor, and how many contacts it took before a city councilor finally supported their measure.





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Here is a sample “dashboard” chart of a goals/outcomes chart that a Mothers Out Front team might use:

Impact Goals	2017 Goals	This Month	YTD	% of Goal
Impact Goal 1: # of stories captured and news pieces focused on or citing Mothers Out Front				
Impact Goal 2				
Impact Goal 3				

People Goals	2017 Goals	This Month	YTD	% of Goal
Capacity Goal 1: # of people part of our movement’s constituency (L I-IV)				
Impact Goal 2: # of engaged constituents (L I-III)				
Impact Goal 3: % of engaged constituency (L I-IV) who are members				

Assign one or two people to be Data Coordinators for your campaign. We’ve found that leaving this task to “whoever can get to it” just doesn’t get the job done. You’re bound to find a few volunteers who enjoy doing data collection and entry, and tracking outcomes.

## **g. USE MOTIVATIONAL TASK DESIGN:**

Our job as organizers constantly challenges us to delegate tasks to others. This is how we develop new leaders and grow our movement. Trying to do all the work alone not only causes burnout, it hinders our growth.

As we get new volunteers and leaders through house parties, one-to-ones and our actions, our job is to set them up for tasks that will use their strengths and abilities well, and ensure follow-through and accountability. Motivational Task Design is a tool that can help us do this. Tasks we develop and assign to people should:

- Be meaningful: The volunteer can see that their task is important in the overall scheme of things,
- Assign responsibility: How well the task gets done is up to the volunteer,
- Show results clearly: As the volunteer does the work, she can see whether or not she is doing it well.

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For example, let's say I am the Mothers Out Front Community Team Coordinator in our case study. My tasks might include coordinating outreach to turn people out to the hearing on gas leaks, and identifying a mom to share her story and testify. I want to reach our sub-goal to pack the hearing room. I have a list of 120 names gathered at public events and through house parties and one-on-ones, and I have our team of eight coordinators. Since I need more than these eight coordinators to do the outreach and speaking, I will use this opportunity to move some of those 120 names "up the Ladder of Engagement." (See Section 3 of this Toolkit) Using the principle of motivational task design, I might work with the eight coordinators to call and email the 120 people on the list, inviting them to an evening meeting to organize the hearing. At the meeting, the eight coordinators and I assign volunteers to appropriate tasks for the hearing action. Here is a box we might use when we make these calls:

**Mothers Out Front Tasks for Organizing Hearing**

Tasks needed to fill	Possible people to take on task	Task significance (is it meaningful for the volunteers?)	Responsibility (will these people be able to be and feel responsible for this task?)	Clear results (will they be able to see the results clearly?)
Speaking/testifying at hearing				
Making signs to make us more visible				
Making reminder calls the day before				
E-mailing details to all a week before				
(More tasks?)				

Of course, it takes a lot more than organizing a hearing to get a bill signed into law. For more details on this at the federal level, see this guide from [Votesmart.org](http://Votesmart.org). You can search the internet for details on your state's legislative process; [click here](#) for a sample state-level guide for Massachusetts.

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## **h. WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH THE MEDIA AND SECURE MEDIA COVERAGE:**

1. To maximize impact, most of your actions should attract public and media attention. Media (both traditional tv, radio and newspaper, and electronic/social media) will help educate the general public about your issue. It will also connect the dots between a local problem (e.g. gas leaks), a regional or national problem (e.g. rising asthma rates and other health problems; rising sea levels), and a policy or legislation that could help the problem (e.g. legislation that would require fixing the gas leaks statewide and thus reduce the speed of climate change).

Media attention also makes it clear to elected officials that people are watching them. That translates to voters for them, which increases the pressure to pay attention to the issue and vote the way we are asking them to. It can also make our allies more aware of us and encourage them to join our work.

There are many media guides for social justice or community organizing work. [Here is one written for Mothers Out Front](#) that includes [tips for talking to reporters](#), sample press releases and letters to the editor, and ideas for getting on local cable or radio shows.

2. Identify key points, and practice aloud:

Prepare diligently before meeting with the media. Write down your key points, practice repeating them, and stick to them during an interview. This works because (a) it increases the chances that your basic message gets across to the public; (b) it prevents the journalist from distorting your message and hurting your cause; and (c) it gives you a chance to practice your public speaking skills and “speak truth to power.”

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**Here is an important guideline for media work: Before talking to a journalist, write down two or three things you definitely want to get across to people and elected officials. Practice them aloud beforehand, and answer with these points almost no matter what they ask you.**

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## III. ACTION EXAMPLES

Finally, here are some specific types of actions you might take, and elements of those actions. Each community is unique, and each action reflects that unique mix of issues and participants.

### a. MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Some community organizers say that elected officials can't and shouldn't be trusted, and that the only way to get them to support you is to threaten them with withdrawing your votes or support.

Mothers Out Front has not found that to be true.

Some officials have stepped up strongly to lead climate change initiatives, support our work, and help shift public opinion and policy. Many officials are realizing that solving the climate crisis is in the interest of all of us. Almost all Community Team

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**Tip - It's important to move quickly from the point where you are learning who your legislators are, to the stage where you are making sure that they know who you are.**

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wins involved working with a “champion” elected official. For example, Representative Lori Ehrlich of the 8th Essex District in Massachusetts filed two strong bills that would require more accountability and responsibility by the gas utilities. Local Mothers Out Front and other climate change groups around the state organized around these bills and achieved a historic success when two important provisions from the bills were included in the resulting Energy Omnibus Bill by the MA State Legislature in August 2016.



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Still, use caution when allying with state or national representatives. They are often beholden to other interests, including energy companies or others who make money from the fossil fuel industry. When your strategy includes working on a piece of legislation or getting a legislator to work with you, be clear on your goal and don't give up on, or water down, your principles just to please or befriend them.

Do your homework before contacting an elected official. Research their history on climate change issues, whether they do have any financial or family ties to the fossil fuel industry or the utilities, and their voting record in general. Knowledge is power!

Sometimes elected officials are with us, and we need to let them know they are “right” and thank them for that. If the official wants to claim credit for a victory that you set in motion, as long as it's really a victory, that's alright. It will help keep them close to your group and increase the likelihood of their active support on your next campaign.

Whether your elected officials are with or against you, make it a point to get to know them, and work toward the time when they will know you and listen to you. In many Mothers Out Front communities, we hear officials referring to us in ways that show we're having an effect. As Tito Jackson, Boston MA City Councilor, said at a 2016 gas leaks hearing packed with women wearing Mothers Out Front t-shirts, “We will be held accountable by Mothers Out Front, by mothers in the back, and by mothers on the side. We will have 360 degrees of accountability.”

## **b. ORGANIZING AN ACTION LIKE A RALLY OR EDUCATIONAL EVENT**

A successful action can be a “peak” event, or a more minor event that builds toward a peak. In either case an action should:

- Be strategic, clearly communicating your goals to your base and your target,
- Build capacity by creating room for new people and new leadership,
- Support the growth of the people currently working on your campaign,
- Be measurable: set metrics for each sub-goal of the action and study your data afterward.



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Take the time to organize the action well. The date you choose should give you time to alert the media, do substantial outreach, coordinate logistics, invite public officials, prepare follow-up actions, etc. Leaving enough time can make the difference between a successful and a failed campaign.

## **c. ALLIES AND COALITION-SPONSORED EVENTS**

An action can be sponsored only by Mothers Out Front or it can be co-sponsored with other groups. In many towns where Mothers Out Front is organizing, there are other climate change groups that may be excellent allies for organizing events and campaigns. These groups can get extra help for organizing, add to crowds, and if they are known by others in town their participation can add to the legitimacy of the event or action.

Sometimes, however, organizing an event with a coalition has downsides. If a potential co-sponsor would water down your demand or message, their presence does not add value.

Remember, the climate crisis is urgent, but urgent attempts at rushed actions will not build our movement.



## **IV. EVENTS AND ACTIONS MOTHERS OUT FRONT CAN AND CAN'T ORGANIZE AS A NONPROFIT 501(C)3**

Since Mothers Out Front is incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we can do many things under our name, but there are a few things we cannot do without risking losing our nonprofit status. Prohibited actions are:



- Breaking the law or encouraging others to do so,
- Spending a “substantial” part of your budget (normally considered over 5%) on lobbying (defined as trying to influence, or getting others to influence, outcomes on legislation, referenda, or ballot measures),
- Influencing people to vote for or against candidates for office.

It's often thought that nonprofits cannot do “controversial” or “political” activities. This isn't true. Here are some things Mothers Out Front members can legally do:

- Write letters to legislators to influence them to vote for or against legislative bills, or encourage others to write letters to legislators to influence them to vote on bills (we can spend a limited amount of our budget on this....but there is no limit on unpaid volunteer hours on it),
- Educate the public about legislation or an issue that relates to legislation, a ballot initiative, or referenda,
- Participate in nonpartisan voter registration efforts,
- Sponsor electoral debates, as long as they don't favor one candidate over another,

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- Educate candidates on issues, as long as it remains nonpartisan.

For more detailed information about what nonprofits can and cannot do, click [here](#).

If you wonder whether something your local group wants to do is legal for Mothers Out Front, please contact the national Mothers Out Front staff for guidance before proceeding.

## **V. EVALUATING AN ACTION OR EVENT**

We can evaluate the success or failure of our “action” program in three ways:

1. Does it solve the problem at hand? Did you get done what you set out to do? Did more money get allocated for environmental protection, for example? Did the city council pass the resolution? Has a public official done something they wouldn’t have otherwise done? Has the amount of fossil fuels used been reduced?
2. Does it strengthen the organization? Did it deepen understanding, build relational commitment, and generate new resources?
3. Does it facilitate the growth of individuals who take part in the action? Did people learn, did they gain confidence, were they energized — or were they burned out, uninspired, or confused about where your group was going next?

Don’t forget to publicize your win via any local media, including social media. If it isn’t written about and written down, it’s like it didn’t even happen!

Invite your whole group to a post-campaign session to talk through these evaluation points. Write down and share what went well, what went poorly, and what you learned. Leadership should refer to these learnings you plan your next action For a list of debriefing questions, see [Section 5 Worksheets](#).



## **VI. LAST BUT NOT LEAST: CELEBRATE!**

Whether you reached your goal or not, it is important that you took action. If you followed most of the steps and advice in this section, you most likely expanded your base, built your power, got your message out to the public and key stakeholders, and improved your skills as changemakers and organizers. All cause for celebration! Thank everyone, reflect, rest, and celebrate before moving on to your next step.

