CAMPUS ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

EARTH DAY NETWORK

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I. A CASE STUDY IN CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY

When the College of the Holy Cross, located in Massachusetts, first launched its campus sustainability plan in 2009, it set some ambitious goals. It promised to become carbon neutral by 2040, to educate its student body about climate change and to reduce waste in its operations. It also committed itself to a more sustainable future and was praised by students and faculty alike.

Ten years later, however, few actions had been taken. While campus facilities had carried out some aspects of the sustainability plan, student activists wanted to go further. They were passionate about making changes of their own, but lacked the resources and institutional support they needed to do so.

Eager to address these issues, a team of students from the college's main environmental group, Eco-Action, decided to launch a sustainability campaign. Through these efforts, student leaders would propose two sustainable solutions while demonstrating the student body's support of improved campus sustainability.

The campaign lasted eighteen months and used promotional events, social media, relationship building, a petition and a campus-wide referendum to gather support.

With the help of key students, faculty, staff, and administrators, Eco-Action activists established an annual sustainability fund ("Green Fund") and a sustainability office through their campaign. They also convinced the college president to hire Holy Cross's first sustainability director.

Although the campaign was a success, it faced a series of unexpected roadblocks, including a failed vote with the student senate, a contentious referendum on one of the campaign's key proposals and pushback from some college administrators.

In this guide, three of Eco-Action's student leaders (Erin Dennehy '19, Renee LeBlanc '21 and Raphaella Mascia '21) share their tips, tricks and strategies for launching a campaign, gathering support and overcoming obstacles in order to achieve your campus sustainability goals.

II. INTRO TO CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY

Climate change is the most pressing human rights issue of our time. As more countries commit to sustainable futures in response, colleges and universities worldwide are beginning to acknowledge this crisis as well by becoming more sustainable.

Sustainability, as described by the Sustainable Endowments Institute, "signifies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Many colleges and universities have already addressed sustainability through advancements in operations, academics, community outreach and administrative reform. However, studies suggest many improvements are still needed to make universities more sustainable.

While some college administrators carry out sustainability solutions on their own, others require coordinated student efforts and widespread campus support (often through campaigning) before adopting sustainable reforms.

III. STUDENT ORGANIZING OVERVIEW

Organizing is all about developing leadership in others, working alongside those leaders to build a "community of action" and harnessing that community to achieve a certain outcome.

What is a Campaign?

A campaign is a way of mobilizing time, resources and energy to achieve a desired outcome (Ganz 8).

Campaigns are "highly energized, intensely focused, concentrated streams of activity with specific goals and deadlines" (Ganz 2). On college campuses, campaigns generally last 1-3 semesters with student organizers leading volunteer efforts.

But campaigns aren't just about building momentum to implement a proposed solution. Through a campaign's organizing, messaging and research efforts, student volunteers have the opportunity to build key leadership skills. Forming a community of leaders within a campaign allows you to delegate tasks and "pass the torch" to younger student leaders after you graduate.
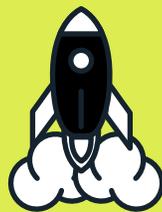
In order to develop student leaders over the course of a successful campaign, you should focus on three key objectives: *Identify, recruit and develop student leaders; Build a community around those leaders; and Build power from that community (Ganz 8).*

As you read through this toolkit, think about the unique ways your campus can accomplish these three objectives while working towards your shared campaign goal(s).

IV. HOW TO LAUNCH A CAMPAIGN

STEP 1: PROBLEM

The first step to any campaign is identifying a problem you want to solve. Perhaps you've noticed waste from the way your cafeteria operates. Or maybe you are distressed by fossil fuel emissions and poor energy efficiency standards in campus buildings. Whatever the issue, it is important to define what exactly you want to change before starting a campaign. The narrower the scope of your campaign, the easier it will be to explain the issue to potential supporters, opponents and other community members.

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY:
Lack of Funding and Administrative Support

The problem Eco-Action members decided to focus on at Holy Cross was a lack of funding and administrative support for campus sustainability solutions. For years, the campus's Presidential Task Force on the Environment advocated for a sustainability director and increased sustainability funding. However, after writing two letters to the college president, the proposals were rejected, forcing student members to rethink their approach. This setback led to the idea of launching a campaign centered around the issue of funding and administrative support for campus sustainability solutions.

STEP 2: PROPOSAL

Once you have identified a specific problem in your community, you can work towards crafting a solution to that problem. This may be a solution you've seen other schools use on their own campuses, or it may be an idea you had on your own. Regardless of how you come up with your idea, the solution(s) should be straightforward so that it is easy for you and your volunteers to explain it to potential supporters. It should also be backed by research in order to gain legitimacy from your campus community. Researching your proposed solutions ahead of time (through internet searches, interviews with group allies and conversations with your supporters) also allows you to learn from the experiences of others before finalizing your proposed campaign solution(s).

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY:
Green Fund and Sustainabilty Director Proposal

Eco-Action's proposal had two parts:

1) To create an annual "Green Fund" to support student sustainability projects on campus
2) To hire a full-time sustainability director to lead a sustainability office, organize campus sustainability efforts and advocate for sustainability solutions within the administration

STEP 3: LEADERSHIP TEAM

Once you have identified a problem and a solution to focus on, you have to assemble your leadership team.

WARNING: *It is easy to fall into the trap of doing everything yourself, especially if it is an issue you are passionate about.*

However, campaigns are intended to be shared efforts organized by a team of dedicated organizers. This is because campaigns involve a series of complex activities that require time, expertise and resources. A campaign also derives power from those who are a part of it. As a result, students who attempt to handle all aspects of a campaign alone will likely find themselves overwhelmed and unable to meet campaign needs. Their efforts will also be less impactful.

Drawing from the skills of multiple student leaders, leadership teams are always more powerful, effective and successful.

HINT

It is helpful to recruit individuals with different skill sets to your leadership team. That way, there is always someone with the expertise you need to complete the different tasks your campaign will require. Skills you can look for in potential team members include experience with social media, digital design, public speaking, research and canvassing.

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY

Eco-Action's leadership team consisted of eight student leaders who had at least one year of volunteer experience and who applied for a leadership position within the environmental group. They led efforts ranging from social media and graphic design to event planning and campaign research.

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STEP 4: RESOURCE AUDIT

The next step of any campaign is to conduct a "resource audit" with your new leadership team. Every movement needs resources to succeed. Unless you are starting your campus group "from scratch," you will already have some resources at your disposal. A resource audit will help you and your team get a better understanding of the resources available to you.

Some questions to ask yourself:

Does your campaign have access to....
- A sufficient budget?
- A mailing list of student supporters?
- Connections with key student government representatives?
- Names of faculty or staff who have assisted the group in the past?
- Digital media resources like Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator or Procreate?
- Affordable campus printing services for posters, invitations and campaign signs?

Taking stock of what you have before launching a campaign is key because it will highlight your strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the planning process.

For example:
- Maybe you have a large group of supporters, but they aren't very engaged?
- Maybe you have access to a budget, but it's also quite small and insufficient?
- Maybe you have support within the student body, but lack connections with key administrators or student government officials?

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STEP 5: RESEARCH

Next, you can use both your leadership team and your resource audit to plan out a research plan. All campaign strategies require some research, but you can divide research topics amongst your team members. Think of campaign research as the foundation from which your campaign will grow. Without a good foundation, you risk the chance of the campaign falling apart.

Below are some tips to help you and your team navigate the research process.

DEFINE YOUR RESEARCH GOAL
- What are you researching and why? This can also be framed as "What is the main focus of the campaign?"
- For example, if you're trying to start a composting program at your college, then the research goal is "Create a successful composting program."

IDENTIFY YOUR DIGITAL RESOURCES
- Identify the databases you can access for your research. Look at your school or local library databases. These are often free!
- Consider using public resources such as Google Scholar.

CREATE AN ACCESSIBLE RESEARCH DOCUMENT
- Once you start reading through materials, take detailed notes and make sure to keep track of your sources as you go.

DEVOTE TIME AND EFFORT TO YOUR RESEARCH

- Plan how much time to devote to your research. The more research the better, but be sure to set a deadline for research completion. It can be tempting to devote too much time to this phase, but having a deadline will keep you and your team from burning out.

MAKE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON RESEARCH

- As you collect ideas from your sources, record suggestions and recommendations for achieving your campaign goal.

PUBLICIZE YOUR RESEARCH

- A good rule of thumb is that you can measure the influence your research had by the number of people you share it with.
- Sharing your research is what gives your research its POWER.
- Distribute research documents to campaign supporters, to prospective allies and to the student body.
- Find cool ways to publicize your research such as creating social media posts or writing a short, easy-to-read blog post. You could even share your findings with an influential college newspaper.

TIPS FOR NOTE-TAKING

- Organize your notes for both yourself and for others! One of the easiest ways to organize your notes is using an outline. An outline will help structure the information you find in your research.
- Notes can be varied! Some notes can be summaries of the big ideas and other notes can be quotes or case studies. It depends on what you need and how you will use the notes.
- Make sure that your notes make are clear and legible. You never know when you might want to share them so make sure they are readable!

STEP 6: CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Before you can begin to share your message, recruit supporters and lobby for change, you need a campaign strategy. A campaign strategy guides your actions and should take into account the resources available to you, as well as the potential obstacles you will encounter along the way.

As you work towards developing a campaign strategy, it is important to consider the three components of a campaign: *the students who volunteer, the processes you use to volunteer and the structures you volunteer within.*

THE STUDENTS WHO VOLUNTEER:

YOU

YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

YOUR SUPPORTERS

THE PROCESSES YOU USE TO VOLUNTEER:

- *Building relationships:* Meeting with key students, faculty and staff
- *Telling stories:* Sharing experiences to convince other students of your mission
- *Devising strategies with your team*: Planning events and activities to engage supporters and share your message
- *Taking action:* Gathering signatures, protesting or earning votes

THE STRUCTURES YOU VOLUNTEER WITHIN:

Organizations: your student group or network of student organizations

Time: the timeframe you've given your campaign, such as a semester or school year

Organizing Your Team

Hours
Determine how many total hours you want each team member to spend campaigning or engaging the campus.

Create a Spreadsheet
Include days, time and location. Have each person sign up for their delegated hours and remind them the day before and the day of their commitment (via text or email).
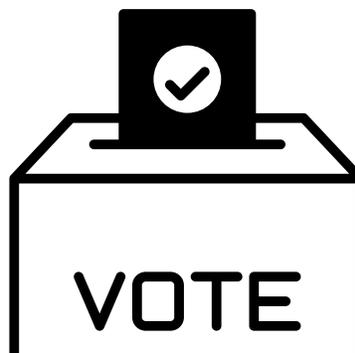
Celebrate
Praise your team for their hard work. If you have data that shows the progress you've made, share those results with your team.

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY: Green Fund Campaign

In order for the Green Fund to be implemented on campus, Eco-Action activists needed to prove that students supported the proposal.

To demonstrate this support, student leaders recruited fourteen supporters to their organizing team. Each student signed up for a total of 3 hours over two days. In those two days, organizers convinced over 1,000 students to support the Green Fund in the upcoming referendum. The hard work paid off, and they won with 78% of the vote.

VOTE

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

ACCESSIBILIITY

- Make sure you and your supporters visit places with high foot traffic.
- Be sure to approach each table to introduce yourself and the campaign.
- Make it easy for students to engage with you by providing campaign materials and by keeping your pitch as clear and concise as possible.

PROVIDE INCENTIVES

- Incentives should be very cheap; these can include stickers, pencils, pens, pins, raffles, etc.
- Incentives can be distributed at events to motivate people to engage with you and your campaign.

SPEAK IN CLASSROOMS AND AT EVENTS

- Reach out to professors and ask to speak in their class.
- Get people excited about the cause.
- Get many organizations to promote.
- Collect emails of students that would like to be on the campaign team.
- Use social media!

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY: GAINING STUDENT SUPPORT

Eco-Action supporters canvassed Holy Cross's cafeteria and student center to share a short campaign summary and ask students for their support. Organizers also gave out stickers to new supporters, which served as free publicity on laptops and water bottles. Finally, Eco-Action members sought permission to speak at events and in classrooms to reach a wider audience.

Why building strong relationships with administrators is vital to your success

Administrators have already built relationships and worked with the president, head of finance and other leaders on campus. They can give you advice on what type of communication has been most successful for student activists in the past. They can also recommend new contacts, saving you valuable time and effort.

You should also ask administrators what steps must be taken in order to properly implement your campaign proposals. Questions can consist of, "What is our timeline for presenting this to the president and student government?" or, "Which administrator can you connect us with next to help us achieve our goal?". They will help you figure out the most realistic timeline and give you information on campus policies, procedures and expectations. Finally, they can help advocate for you in the meetings you are unable to attend and will serve the point person for anything related to the campus administration.
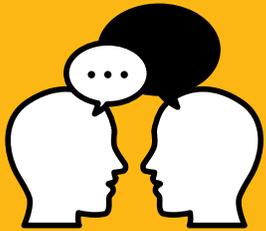
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

As students it can be difficult to make sure our voices are properly heard. The main goal is to create long-lasting relationships with the staff, faculty and students at our universities — thus gaining their respect and support.

CONSISTANT COMUNICATION
While emails are good at the beginning, Zoom calls and in-person meetings will be the most successful. In every email you send, determine the next time they can meet and ask a few questions that you hope they can answer at the next meeting. Always remember to thank them after the meeting.
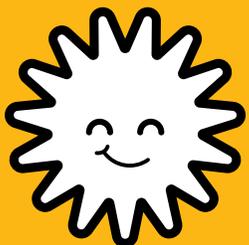
START CONVERSATIONS EARLY
Once research has begun, get in contact. Do not wait until all the research is done and everything is in perfect order. Show that you have started work on the project and want to meet to ask questions to discuss the end goal, timeline and how they will be able to help you. Student-run campaigns are time-sensitive as your team is only there for four years, so the earlier you start building relationships with key campus stakeholders, the better.

POSITIVE PRESENCE
When creating these relationships, be sure to show how excited you are to work with them. The tone of voice you adopt — polite, professional and friendly — is highly valued. Make them feel appreciated for their work and for agreeing to meet with you.
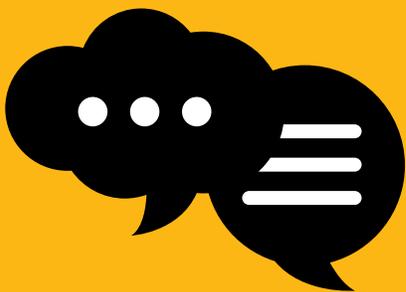
CAMPAIGNING VIRTUALLY

While your campus is the best place to run a campaign, that is not always possible. Whether you are away from campus because of unforeseen circumstances, study abroad or for any other reason, you can still act as a valuable member and leader of a campaign!

COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION. When you must campaign from afar, communication becomes even more important. Being on top of emails and responding quickly to calls and text messages is essential for being an active member and leader from a distance.

SOCIAL MEDIA. Increase your social media following and post everyday to increase engagement.
- Some technology suggestions:
  - Messaging & Phone Apps: *GroupMe, Whatsapp*
  - Video apps: *Google Hangout, Gotomeet, Zoom, Facetime*
  - Scheduling: *When2meet, Google calendar*

REACH OUT. Do not hesitate to contact leaders of the campaign and fellow volunteers so that you can contribute to the campaign in a way that is both valuable to the leadership team and fulfilling for you. Also, keep in mind that you will most likely need to devote more time and energy to a campaign from afar because virtually participating might require more effort on your part.
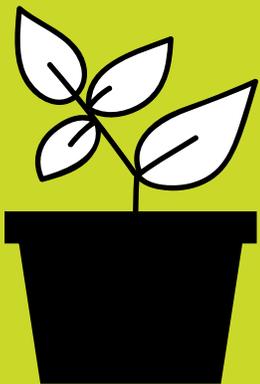
STEP 7: KICK-OFF

After you've worked out your strategy, you can formally launch your campaign with a "kick-off" (Ganz 2008:8). This event will serve to introduce your campaign, your organization and your mission to your community. It may also attract new supporters who can assist you and your team in future campaign efforts.

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY

At Holy Cross, students launched their campaign during their annual "Sustain a Bash" celebration at the beginning of the Fall semester. Not only did the event introduce the campaigns to the student body, but it also attracted over 100 new members to Eco-Action.

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STEP 8: PEAKS

After the kick-off, your campaign will experience a series of "peaks," including a larger peak during which a major campaign goal is reached. Following each peak, you should celebrate successes with your leadership team, volunteers and supporters. Celebrating successes is key in acknowledging your volunteers' hard work and dedication (Ganz 114).

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY

Major peaks from Holy Cross's student campaign included collecting over 1,000 signatures, meeting with the college president to present two campus sustainability proposals and winning a campus-wide referendum.

You can also celebrate specific members or holidays to build solidarity within the group. To celebrate a successful fall semester, for example, Eco-Action leadership hosted a holiday party potluck with hot chocolate, desserts and giveaways. The party served as a way to thank supporters while also motivating them as they entered the second phase of the campaign.

STEP 9: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Leadership development is key in sustaining a campaign's momentum and building power within an organization. After all, two of the three main goals of a campaign are to "identify, recruit, and develop [student] leaders" and "build a community around those leaders" (Ganz 2008:8). Devoting time and resources to leadership development efforts within your campaign will create competent, experienced organizers who can take on key tasks and build leadership capabilities in others. This is especially helpful if your campaign lasts longer than you had originally hoped. For example, as members of your original leadership team graduate, having a group of supporters who are already familiar with the campaign and trained in key campaign activities will make the leadership transition more seamless. It also helps to ensure that your efforts succeed even as key strategists and supporters exit the campaign.
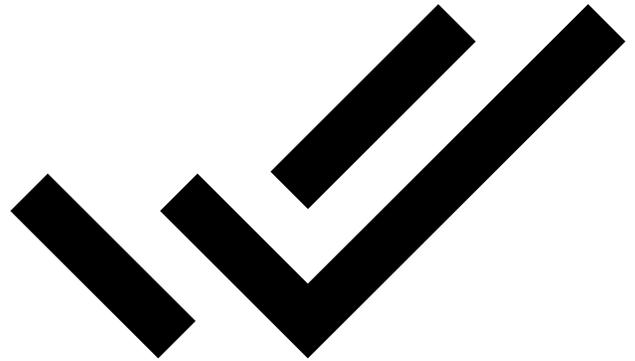
HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY

Within Eco-Action, campaign leadership founded a student internship program in which members of the leadership team would train student interns in various aspects of community organizing — including event planning, social media, research methods and graphic design. Many of these interns went on to become members of the campaign leadership team later in the year. This allowed the campaign to thrive even after senior members of the original leadership team graduated.

STEP 10: RESOLUTION

At the end of the campaign, you should reach a resolution to the problem you aimed to solve in step 1 (Ganz 2008:8). This resolution should be marked by the adoption of your proposal laid out in step 2. As the final step in your campaign, the resolution should also involve a celebration to thank the individuals who joined in campaign efforts.

HOLY CROSS CASE STUDY

Student activists finally reached a resolution to their campaign when the Holy Cross Board of Trustees voted to create a Green Fund and hire a campus sustainability director. While students were off-campus when the campaign concluded, leadership celebrated through a series of posts on the group's social media platforms by thanking everyone who helped make the campaign a success.

V. Beyond the Campaign: Membership Tips and MobilizeU Network

#1: As a club member, decide how much time you want to dedicate to a campaign. If you don't really want to spend your time focusing on a particular campaign, then you should look to other causes and campaigns that excite you more!

#2 Once you commit to dedicating time and effort to a campaign, go to meetings and events to hear about all involvment opportunities

#3 If you are a committed member and have ideas for the campaign, this is your chance to step-up! Also, don't hesitate to create your own opportunities for leadership within the campaign.

#4 Make the effort to reach out and form relationships with leadership. Good leaders will tell you how your actions can most benefit a campaign, and they can often serve as good mentors.

#5 Fulfill your assigned tasks to the best of your ability. This often includes communicating continuously with leadership, letting them know how the task is progressing and announcing completion dates.

#6 Take initiative to create new projects, pursue new ideas and further research new interest areas as a member! Don't hesitate to create and explore new ideas and potential opportunities as a campaign member.

Ultimately, a valuable member of a campaign is...

- Actively involved
- Proactive in completing tasks and coming up with new ideas for the campaign
- Communicative with leadership
- Cooperative with other members

EXPAND YOUR IMPACT: JOIN MOBILIZEU

MobilizeU is Earth Day Network's higher education outreach campaign, designed to unite university students and administrators in a shared demand for climate action. The higher education community is pivotal in creating the next generation of environmental leaders needed to protect our planet.

MobilizeU's ever-growing international network of students & universities is creating change on their local campuses; through the MobilizeU campaign, their voices are united and amplified, forming a global call for action that cannot be ignored.

LEARN MORE AND JOIN NOW

VI. Meet the Authors

Erin Dennehy

Erin was an active member of Eco-Action at Holy Cross from 2015-2019 and led the group as a co-chair from 2017-2019. She helped launch the college's first sustainability ("green") fund and sustainability director campaign with a focus on research, event planning, volunteer management and leadership development.

Renee LeBlanc

Renee was an Eco-Action co-chair from 2018-2021. She focused on campaign strategy, relationship building, social media and community engagement. During the campaign, she organized volunteers to collect over 1,000 signatures for the campus sustainability petition. She also earned the votes of over 75% of students in support of the campaign's Green Fund proposal.

Raphaella Mascia

Raphaella co-wrote the Holy Cross Sustainability petition and wrote the Green Fund Charter. She currently serves as the Holy Cross Green Fund's first student manager. She is also the Research Director for Eco-Action and has been an active member of the campus group since 2017.

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