

APRIL 2009

BUILD A NETWORK

Reach out to the Community

What is community outreach?

Community outreach involves identifying and working with other people and organizations in your local area. The goal is to build an ongoing and strong network of contacts and allies who will support you and whom you can work with on issues of common concern.

Why is community outreach important?

- **Strength in numbers:**

Numbers count when it comes to influencing public opinion and public policy.

- **Getting the word out:**

The bigger the network and the more connections, the easier it is to spread the word and get our message heard. Every organization has its own network of contacts and ways of communicating with its members.

- **Pooling of Resources:**

Campaigns take time, people and money. When we work together, rather than separately, we make more effective use of what we have.

- **Recognition:**

Networking with other organizations helps get OSSTF/FEESO known in the community and strengthens our ability to speak out and be heard in the future.

Who should we be reaching out to?

Remember that support may come from different places at different times, depending on the issue and type of campaign. Think strategically, but be creative — start with natural allies, but don't be afraid to reach out to new organizations and people.

Many OSSTF/FEESO members are active in their communities and with various organizations. Keep track of members' involvement — acknowledge it and encourage it. These connections can provide us with an “in” to that group and offer opportunities to find out whether the group would be a potential ally.

As a starting point, your outreach list should include labour, parent and education groups as well as those involved with social justice and community issues, service clubs and local organizations. Political parties and elected representatives at all levels should also be considered.

BUILD A NETWORK

Reach out to
the Community

How do we create a network?

- **Brainstorm a list.** Consider any and all groups or individuals that might support your position or campaign. Ask around to find out about others that should be approached.
- **Identify and go to your strengths first.** Natural allies are your best bet for creating a core network of support. Once this is in place, you can build from there.
- **Approach identified groups/organizations/individuals about possible support.** Ask to speak at their meetings about your issue/campaign. Know your stuff!
- **Be realistic** about what kind of support you can expect and be clear about your expectations.
- **Be respectful** of your allies and show appreciation for their support.
- **Don't burn bridges.** Keep doors open to future opportunities to work together with an organization or individual even if they do not join you this time.
- **Consider forming a coalition** if there is enough support for it.
- **Maintain your network over time.** Even after the particular issue or campaign is over, keep in touch with key contacts and keep information (names, phone numbers, email addresses) current.
- **Evaluate your work** so your next campaign can be more successful.

Always remember...

Support must be a two-way street. Be open to working with allies on their issues.

When should we do community outreach?

Anytime, all the time! There are always opportunities to build and maintain relationships with different organizations. If none seem apparent, create those opportunities. Don't wait until a crisis hits to start reaching out.

Resources

- Canadian Labour Congress. *Campaign Organizing in Your Community: A Handbook*. Ottawa: 1991
- Canadian Federation of Students. *Getting Things Done: Effective Events and Campaigns Organising*
- OSSTF. *OSSTF Public Relations Resource Binder*. Toronto: August 2003.