

ROGUE ACTION CENTER

Tools for Organizing: Rallies That Inspire

Well-organized rallies can be one way to demonstrate unity and support from allies and attract public attention. Rallies also can boost group spirit by letting participants see proof of their strength in numbers.

However, rallies that are poorly attended and poorly run can be worse for morale than no action at all. It takes thought to involve people in the planning and in the event itself so that their experience of it does not just consist of standing in one place, listening to a parade of officials speak, and feeling like they are watching someone else's event on TV.

- **Don't assume that people will come just because you gave them printed material** advertising the event. Instead, organize on-the-job contacts, phone trees, email networks, social media, and/or community canvassing to remind each possible participant several times and get their commitment to come.
- **Involve people in making signs and banners ahead of time.** Keep the message simple and in large and compact enough type to both be read at a distance and show up well in photographs or on TV. *The message on signs -- as well as in songs, chants, skits, and other features of the event -- should use the best possible words to connect to the public interest and build broader community support, and not just appeal to the already converted.*
- **Use props and skits to provide humor, provide visual interest to the media, and dramatize your public interest message.** Typical props include large puppets, blown-up checks or money, or people in costumes. More serious visuals, depending on the cause, might include people in wheelchairs or wheeling their children in a march of strollers.
- **Consider balloons with slogans printed on them** to make the event more spirited.
- **Arrange for musicians to lead the crowd in singing** before and after the speeches and skits and, if appropriate, once or twice between speeches. Involve members in making up new words to familiar tunes, and distribute word sheets so everyone can sing along.
- **Get some members and staff to brainstorm ideas for chants ahead of time.** Like signs, chants may reach passers-by and be featured in media coverage. Therefore, they should be designed to connect your goals to the broader public interest.
- **Feature as speakers workers or community members** who can speak from the heart about the issue and what the campaign means to them.
- **Negotiate with speakers ahead of time about what they are going to say and how long they have to say it.** For example, if politicians are going to speak, get their agreement

that they will use the time to clearly endorse your goals. Send a message to all speakers by interrupting the first speaker who runs over the prearranged time limit.

- **End the rally with a clear statement of what the next step is** and how people can get involved.

Logistics

- **Get people to sign in.** This information can be used to update charts and maps that show where organization is strong and weak and to correct mailing, phone, and email lists.

- **Talk to local police well in advance** about permits you may need.

- **For a big rally, train marshals** to keep order and help anyone who becomes ill or lost. Provide armbands, shirts, or hats to identify the marshals.

- **Test the sound system enough in advance** that you can get other equipment to the scene if something is not working properly.

- **Arrange to have photographs taken by a professional or by an experienced volunteer.** For people who didn't attend, pictures will show better than words what the event was like. Volunteers also may be available to videotape the event in case you need to put together a video about the campaign for members or the community.

- **Make sure someone calls each media outlet** and invites the appropriate reporter to attend. Offer to have a member meet the reporter at a particular time and place and stay with the reporter throughout the event to provide any necessary help, such as identifying people to interview or explaining something one of the speakers said.