

# TOOL KIT TO PASS A LOCAL ORDINANCE

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead*

Gather your group together, no matter how many or how few, to begin work to pass an ordinance limiting corporate power. The initial meeting can be in someone’s living room, a coffee shop, or a full-blown meeting room. The first meeting takes only a desire and a few phone calls or emails to get started.

This “tool kit” is intended to be a resource that describes the steps you’ll need to undertake to pass an ordinance in your town, city, or county. Limiting corporate power requires baby steps creating small incremental change. There’s no better time to start than the present and you’ll make new friends and learn new skills along the way. How soon can you start?

## **1. Meet Regularly from the Start**

Locate a convenient and comfortable place to meet to work on your ordinance. There should be adequate seating and a surface on which to write or take notes. It is important to meet regularly, at the same time and the same place. Meetings probably should take place weekly at first in order to maintain momentum.

## **2. Strategy, Your First Major Decision**

Every community is different. The mix of elected officials, mayors, city councilpersons, and county commissioners may be progressive, conservative, liberal, or somewhere in-between. They may be open to new ideas or closed to changing the status quo. Your locale may be rural, suburban, or inner-city. Your group will need to decide how receptive your local government will be to your ordinance. The degree of receptivity will determine your strategy. In some communities, it may be enough to speak personally with the mayor and a few commissioners to ensure the passage of your ordinance. Other communities may require extensive organizing, petition signing, and a massive publicity effort to pass an ordinance. Consider who might be open to the goals of your ordinance or resolution. Sometimes it may be a good idea to let some of your city or county commissioners know what you are doing before presenting your ordinance. They may have helpful observations that can make your efforts easier. Others may find it best to involve councilpersons as little as possible until your ordinance is brought before the full commission. These considerations should be part of your early strategic planning.

## **3. Networking – Identify Friends and Foes**

Identify your friends and foes. Make a list of individuals, groups, and organizations that are willing to work with you on your effort. If someone in your group knows someone in

another group or organization, ask that person to contact the potential ally. Friendly groups can expand your efforts in gathering signatures, include your articles in their newsletters, or they can supply warm bodies to help your efforts. In some cases they can do all three.

Similarly, make a list of individuals and organizations that are likely to work against your efforts. It's important to know who your detractors are and what their arguments are likely to be. Strategies can be developed to minimize or marginalize your opposition or to respond to their arguments.

#### 4. Funding your Efforts

You will need money. Funding may be needed for flyers, postcards, petitions, ads (newspaper, radio, television), website, posters, billboards, and meeting rooms. Most efforts to pass ordinances are self-funded, that is, the people working to pass the ordinance supply the needed funding. Sometimes there are supportive people with deep pockets in the community that can be counted on to help. Identify these folks and include them in your efforts from the start.

Look for ways to save money such as a friendly employee at a local copy/printing shop or businesses and organizations that offer the use of their copying machine free of charge or for cost only. Always place a jar labeled "Donations" on a table with your materials. Don't hesitate to ask for contributions.

It is important to have a realistic budget. Make changes to the budget as new information is gathered or as strategies change.

#### 5. "To Do" List

There can be lots of "to do" items to accomplish your goal. Some of the tasks might include:

Meeting agendas	Find and reserve meeting rooms
Public relations / Press releases	Find and contact program speakers
Public Service Announcements (PSAs)	Set up meeting room
Create newsletter or educational materials	Break down and clean up meeting room
Fundraising	Draft petition or resolution
Maintain database	Make postcards
Make flyers (8.5x11)	Make labels
Fact sheet	Create brochure
Action alerts	Create petition

Make posters	“Tabling” <sup>1</sup>
Set up and manage e-mail list	Buttons
Bumper stickers	Phone calling

**It’s important to have small, short-term, well-defined tasks for volunteers to do.** It is difficult to maintain volunteer interest in open-ended or poorly defined tasks. Be specific!

You may or may not want to form committees to address these and other tasks. Larger groups may need committees whereas individuals in smaller groups simply may volunteer for several tasks. Examples of committees might include:

- Coordinating Committee
- Program Committee
- PR Committee
- Statement/Petition Committee
- Fundraising/Sponsorship/Organizing Committee

## 6. Community Outreach

The benefits of community outreach are:

- More bodies to join in the effort to pass an ordinance;
- Larger audience for distribution of posters and petitions;
- Larger pool of people who can speak in favor of the resolution at important community meetings or write letters to the editor of your local newspaper;
- More credibility showing broad support and appeal for your resolution because endorsers from the community are listed on posters and programs.

Effective outreach sparks community dialogue and raises the visibility of your resolution.

Prepare a presentation that can be given as a program to organizations and groups that are potential allies. Many groups have regularly scheduled meetings, such as monthly brown bag lunches, breakfasts, or membership meetings, and are looking for programs. Presentations should make good use of audio/visual tools to keep interest level high. Be prepared with sign-up sheets, fact sheets, postcards, petitions, action sheets, or other materials.

Sources for support and outreach include individuals, businesses, and nonprofits such as ACLU, Sierra Club, Kiwanis Club, local smart growth/sustainable growth organizations, AARP, Audubon Society, AAUW (American Association of University Women), political party meetings, PTA, Alliance for Democracy, faith-based groups, etc. High

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<sup>1</sup> “Tabling” is setting up a small table (card table for example) with literature, postcards, petitions, and signup sheets for people to read or take with them. This allows you to more effectively get the word out to people in your community.

school and college students can be especially helpful in collecting signatures or tabling at various locales.

**Important:** Take a volunteer sign-up sheet to every meeting. Include spaces on the sign-up sheet for name, address, phone, email, and a box to check for interest in volunteering. Enter this information into a computer file or database immediately after a meeting, a forum, or a day of gathering signatures has taken place. Use any software program that allows you to organize and track the information you are gathering, such as Excel, Word, Access, or FileMaker Pro. All of these programs allow you to create mailing labels easily.

## **7. Distributing Educational Materials**

Set up a table to distribute your materials at local events and businesses whenever possible. Materials can often be placed in coffee shops, book stores, local co-op grocery stores, or wherever a sympathetic audience may shop. Forums, meetings, and presentations are all good opportunities to make educational material available to the public. Fact sheets, literature and articles, petitions, donation jar, and sign-up sheets, all should be available. Bumper stickers and buttons can be made available for a donation.

## **8. Drafting your Resolution**

There are several resources on the Internet where you can copy existing ordinances and resolutions as a starting point, altering them to meet your needs. The attachment titled "Local Ordinances" lists some of the more common resolutions dealing with corporations and corporate power that you can amend for your own needs.

After drafting your resolution, meet with the City Council sponsor of your draft resolution (or city manager or city attorney) to determine if your document is one that will have a majority of support. This effort will be much like drafting a bill for your state legislature. You'll need a sponsor and you'll need to have it reviewed to make sure it passes legal muster.

## **9. Communicating with Supporters**

Communication with supporters is as important as communication with the media.

The easiest way to communicate with supporters is via email. Creating an email discussion group is a great way to keep everyone informed and to notify your supporters of events and opportunities, especially fast-breaking news. There are several sources for establishing a free email list. The most common are Yahoo Groups and Topica. Have a sign-up sheet with you at all times (sample attached). **Set the example for others to follow by signing the sheet first.**

It's helpful to find one or two people who can keep your lists current -- both database and email discussion list. Perhaps one person can do it all if you have a small group. If your

effort is larger, it may be easier to have one person maintain the database list and another to add people to the email discussion group.

Backup your files! Store a copy of your list or database at a friend's house.

## **10. Communicating with Media, Getting the Word Out**

Brainstorm with others to identify all known media outlets. These include radio and TV stations, newspapers, community newspapers, and weekly publications. Don't forget university newspapers and radio stations. Identify the publications of various organizations as well. Call each outlet to ask for a fax number and an e-mail to which press releases, articles, op-ed pieces, or letters to the editor are sent.

After sending out a press release, make a follow-up phone call to verify receipt of the fax or email.

The cheapest form of communication with the public is letters to the editor. The more letters people send in, the more support demonstrated for your ordinance.

## **11. Petition Drive**

In some locales, organizing a petition drive and obtaining signatures may be the only way to get the commission, mayor, or council's attention to pass an ordinance. If your group determines there is need for a petition, there are several good sources of collecting signatures for petitions.

Attend meetings where the audience is likely to be receptive to your efforts. Come to the meeting with educational materials, including fact sheets, "what you can do" sheet, signup sheet, and petitions. Set up a display table with your educational materials. Ask ahead of time if you can have a minute to describe your effort and pass around a petition at the meeting, otherwise stand next to your display and talk to people, asking them to sign your petition.

Consider tabling at local businesses where the clientele is likely to be supportive of your efforts. For example a health food store, grocery store, coop, farmers' market, or local organic food store are good places to set up a table.

If the weather is nice, you can set up a table or collect signatures for a petition in front of your post office or local grocery store.

## **12. Postcard Campaign:**

If letters, signatures, or turnout at an event or forum is needed, postcards can be helpful. Use your sign-up sheets, or even the membership list of other organizations, for enlarging the pool of people you reach. Outreach to other organizations can be very helpful.

Organizations that are sympathetic to your cause may give you their mailing list outright, or sell it to you for a reasonable fee.

### **13. Lobbying Efforts:**

Make sure each city councilor, county commissioner, and mayor is contacted by their constituents at the appropriate time.

Ask those community supporters of your resolution to call or write their City or County Commission members or legislator to ask for their support. If email is used for communication, verify that your commissioners have, use, and read their email! Often a letter or phone call carries more weight than an e-mail message. Urge your supporters to attend the City or County Commission meeting and to speak in favor of the resolution during the "public comment" period. (Don't overlook high school and college students as speakers!)

### **14. Following Through to the End . . .**

It is common that city councilors, county commissioners, or mayors need coaxing. Several meetings may take place before a vote is taken. A resolution might be tabled indefinitely. Or a resolution might fail when the voting does finally take place. Don't allow your working group to be discouraged. Assess the current situation, review the reasons your resolution didn't pass, then try again when the time is right. This may happen several times before finally succeeding. However, don't be discouraged and don't give up. You've made new friends, your confidence is bolstered, and your entire working group has been empowered.