

Planning Nonviolent Campaigns

Demonstrations alone do not end a particular war or correct a deep-rooted injustice. Faced with the horrors of the world, it's easy to do the nonviolent equivalent of lashing out – jumping into action or activity without stepping back or looking ahead. Too often groups go directly from recognising a problem to picking a tactic. Or we suffer from the 'paralysis of analysis', educating ourselves and others, but never getting to action, and therefore never reaching our goals. The power of a nonviolent campaign comes in creatively combining tactics, strategic thinking, and participants' commitment.

Influencing change on a specific issue usually requires a campaign, that is a connected series of activities and actions carried out over a period of time to achieve specific, stated goals. Campaigns are started by a group of people with a common concern. The participants develop a common understanding and vision, identify goals, and begin the process of research, education, and training that strengthens and expands the number of participants who engage in the activities and action.

A campaign has goals on different levels. First is a specific campaign demand or stated goal. Most campaigns challenge the policies of people at the top of some hierarchy. To reach this goal, we need to bring a new factor into their decision-making—be that persuading them with new information, convincing those on whose support they depend, or warning them of the resistance they will face. We do not treat them as enemies, but as adversaries—people who have to be stopped or moved in order for us to end a specific injustice.

A campaign also has internal goals such as building the capacity of and number of participants. A nonviolent campaign takes people through processes of empowerment. This involves personal empowerment (people discovering and exercising their own power against oppression, exclusion, and violence, and for participation, peace, and human rights) and builds collective power. Groups learn how to be organisers and become political strategists in the process.

Campaigns should also communicate something of the vision of what we want, leading to further campaigns that challenge existing power structures. Multiple campaigns can move us towards the social empowerment that leads to the social transformation we are working for. In our training and planning we need to consider all aspects of this nonviolent social empowerment process: personal empowerment, community power, people power.

To develop an effective nonviolent strategy we need to develop strategic thinking skills.

Developing effective strategies

Creative campaigns hold the key to exploring the potential of nonviolence. And when groups are excited about the power and possibilities of a nonviolent campaign, they are more likely to develop an effective campaign strategy. The exercises suggested below can help produce that enthusiasm and excitement; they also offer suggestions on making campaigns effective as well as an understanding of how change happens.

If you are working for social change in your community, you may want to undertake a group process to prepare an effective strategy for moving towards this change. A group process draws on the resources already in the group and can generate enthusiasm and commitment.

To begin, you may want to have the group share its own knowledge of campaigns, using either the '10/10 Strategies' (p125) exercise or discussing how change happens by asking participants what effective campaigns they know about and what made them effective. Create a check-list from the responses. Case studies (see 'Campaign Case Study Guide', p54) are another way of learning from what has been done in the past. They do not offer blueprints, but show the determination, resourcefulness, and patience of successful nonviolent campaigns. See the Resources section (Section Eleven) for films and books that describe nonviolent campaigns or use some of the stories told in this Handbook or in the Weblinks.

If your group has a great amount of knowledge, you have limited time, or another factor makes this type of historical review not feasible, you can move right into developing your own process for a successful strategy for change. In order to develop effective strategies, a useful process is to:

- name and describe the problem or situation
- analyse why it exists
- create a vision of what the group wants, including clear goals and
- develop a strategy to reach those goals.

These steps are explained below.

Name and Describe the problem

For many who face problems in their daily lives, describing and analysing problems is a natural part of the process of living. But others need to be more intentional about it. These steps are intended to help people move together in a non-hierarchical, inclusive process to a deeper understanding of effective non-violent strategies.

Naming and describing the problem or situation may seem too simple a first step for some, but if it is not done collectively, people may have different assumptions, different descriptions, and therefore different messages and goals. And we can't analyse without clarity about what we are analysing. Going through this process together strengthens the participation of the individuals while developing collective action.



Exercises: A group can choose either 'The Tree' (p126) or 'The Pillars of Power' (p128) exercise to use throughout the strategic thinking and planning process, depending on which seems more suitable to their issue and their style.

Analyse why the problem exists

To transform a problem situation, we need to understand why it exists and who potentially supports and opposes it. We need to analyse the power structure to find entry points for resistance, constructive work, etc. An analysis should consider the following questions:

- Do we understand the context and the root causes of the problem?
- Who benefits and who suffers from it and how?
- Who holds the power, and who has the power to create change? (Who forms part of the structures underpinning this? Who opposes this?)
- Is there a difference between male and female roles? (See also Section Three, 'Gender and Nonviolence'.)
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for a campaign to change this? (SWOT analysis)
- What theories do we bring to this analysis?
- How does our commitment to nonviolent social change affect our analysis?



Exercises: Continue to use either 'The Tree' (p126) or 'The Pillars' (p128). To look more deeply at those who support and oppose the structure, use the 'Spectrum of Allies' (p130) exercise, which helps us identify and analyse the players and our allies and opponents and helps in making strategic decisions regarding who we want to move.

Create a Vision of What We Want

To move forward, a campaign needs a vision of what it wants. Otherwise actions can simply be reactions, protests easy to disregard. A vision is likely to include ambitious long-term goals. It is worth asking groups to discuss their vision of big questions: world peace, economic justice, the society we want. The challenge then, however, is to identify the first steps in those journeys: the short – and medium-range goals that lead towards these long-term goals. Campaigns face dilemmas in setting goals. To get the maximum possible support, a campaign might choose a short-term goal as a 'lowest common denominator' – that is, a point upon which a wide range of people can agree. However, if this does not have deeper implications, if it does not suggest further steps for social transformation, then any change that results is likely to be shallow and unsatisfactory. On the other hand, utopian goals that seem unrealistic are not likely to mobilise people unless there are more attainable intermediate objectives. When the ultimate goals are revolutionary, campaigns need to identify limited, but more acceptable, stepping stones.

Questions to consider while developing goals:

- Are the goals realistic; can they be achieved in a certain period of time?
- Will people believe they can achieve this goal?
- Does the goal match the group's purpose and capacity?
- Are the goals measurable; will we know when we have achieved them?
- Are the goals relevant to people's lives; will they be moved to participate?
- Will people feel empowered by the 'victory'?



Exercises: Envision a Healthy Tree – Use the questions in ‘The Tree’ exercise (p126). Can we answer the above questions positively? ‘The Pillars of Power’ (p128) – What are the short – and medium-range goals that weaken the pillars? What do we aim to do with the underlying principles? Can we answer the above questions positively? (For more information on messages, also see ‘Messaging’ in ‘The Role of Media’, p49, and ‘Sending the Protest Message’, p57.)

Develop a Strategy

Once you have described and analysed the problem, a vision of what you want, and goals to move you towards that, you need to develop a strategy – a plan – to get there. Strategy development is not done in one meeting or by one person. It is a process of decision-making, organising, mobilising, and developing creative strategies.

What follows are the basic components of a nonviolent campaign. The ‘Stories and Strategies’ (Section Eight) describe how many of these components were used in campaigns.

Components of a Campaign

The following questions can help you and your group in the process of developing a campaign strategy. You and your group need to do this work on an ongoing basis, not just at the beginning of a campaign. This Handbook includes many resources to help you through the process.

Common Understanding

Is there a common understanding of the problem or situation that exists? Have we analysed why it exists? Does the analysis include the social, economic, and political structures? Do we have a common understanding of what it means to have a nonviolent campaign? Do we have an agreed upon decision-making process?

Nonviolent Discipline

Have the organisers discussed and agreed to nonviolent principles? Are there nonviolence guidelines? Are these clearly stated for all to understand? (See ‘Principles of Nonviolent Action,’ p31, and ‘Nonviolence Guidelines’, p32)

Research and Information Gathering

What do we know, and what do we need to know? Are we searching for the truth or just trying to ‘prove our side’? Who can gather the information we need? Who can guide us and provide sources? Research includes finding out how others think about the issue. Listening Projects Community Surveys (see <http://www.listeningproject.info>) are one way to do that. Listening

Projects help activists look more deeply at an issue, gathering information on which to base future strategy while developing a connection between those being interviewed and those listening. Listening projects have been done in Cambodia, Croatia, Cambodia, South Africa, and the United States.

Education

Is the information understandable for the people we are trying to reach? A role of nonviolent activists is to put the research in a form that can be widely used in a campaign, or facilitate people through that process. Are we using popular education and conscientisation processes? Have we developed good educational materials, considering the different constituencies and allies we want to reach? What other educational processes can we use (e.g., street theatre)? How are we using the media to raise awareness?

Training

Do we need training to learn the skills to develop strategy and organise (e.g., group process, strategic planning, media work)? Are we providing training to prepare people for nonviolent action? Is training available to everyone? Do our trainings address issues of oppression and how we deal with them both in a societal context and within our groups and relationships? (See Section Four, as well as the ‘Speak Out’, p122, and ‘A Gender Dialogue for Peacebuilders’, p124, Exercises.)

Allies

Who are our allies; who might become allies or supporters if we communicate with them more? How do we reach out and build cooperative relationships with groups with whom we want to work in coalition? (Use the ‘Spectrum of Allies’, p130, Exercise to identify potential allies.)

Negotiation

Have we clearly identified who we need to negotiate with? How will we communicate with them? Are we clear what we want? Are we clear that our aims are not to humiliate our opponent but to work for a peaceful solution?

Constructive Work/Alternative Institutions

Gandhi saw constructive programmes (see ‘Constructive Programme’, p40) as the beginning of building a new society, even in the shell of the old. A key element of social change, it is designed to meet the needs of a population (e.g., economic equality, communal unity, developing local industries) and to develop community. Constructive work is often missing in campaigns in the West and emphasised in the East. While we say ‘no’ to an injustice, how do we say ‘yes’? How do we begin building the vision of what we are working towards?

Alternative institutions may be temporary creations, such as setting up alternative transportation while boycotting a segregated/apartheid bus system.

Legislative and Electoral Action

Is legislative or electoral action part of the campaign, either as an educational tactic or a goal? How will we put pressure on politicians? How do we exercise our power? How will people participate in that action? What are our plans if our goals are not met?

Demonstrations

How can we best demonstrate our concerns? Have we considered the many methods of nonviolent action? (See 'Forms of Action', p46.) Are we clear about the objectives of the demonstration and how they will help us reach our goals? How will we involve the public? Will our actions make sense to the local community?

Nonviolent Direct Action/Civil Disobedience/Civil Resistance

Have we done all we can to build support for our action? Will it encourage more community involvement or will it be counter-productive? How will it advance our cause rather than be an end in itself? Are our objectives clear? Will it put the kind of pressure on our adversaries that will influence them to move? Who will it pressure?

In his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, 'You may well ask, "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatise the issue that it can no longer be ignored.'



Exercise: write this quote on a wall chart. Ask the group to identify the crisis, the creative tension, the community, and how they can dramatise the issue in their campaign. See also 'Stages of Escalation', p47.

Reconciliation

'As a way of engaging in conflict, sometimes nonviolence attempts to bring reconciliation with it: strengthening the social fabric, empowering those at the bottom of society, and including people from different sides in seeking a solution'. (WRI Statement of Principles) Have we been working for a win-win, rather than a win-lose situation? Is the reconciliation public or private? (In some successful nonviolent campaigns in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement white businessmen asked that restaurant integration be done without a public statement to avoid a negative reaction, while in other cases a public event demonstrated the desegregation of a system.)

Celebrate

When we reach our goals, let's take time to recognise what we have done and celebrate our achievements. Sometimes we reach beyond our goals, or accomplish other goals, and don't take the time to understand that. Collective evaluation is vital; by documenting our successes and failures and sharing with others we have sources to learn from when we take steps towards our next goal. If key activists are tired or burnt out, they may not see what is being achieved. Some compulsive types may also not accept that a campaign is stuck and may need some help to see that the best part of banging your head against a brick wall is when you stop.

Evaluate

We have a lot to consider when developing strategic nonviolent campaigns. We need to learn to think strategically, to develop our understanding of the power of nonviolence, and to go through the steps that can move us effectively to our goals. This should strengthen and empower our community along the way. It's important to evaluate our campaign, not just at the end, but as we go through it. Unless we do so, we may be making mistakes that we will not recognise until it is too late. We should listen to everyone involved. Keeping a record of our meetings, our decisions, and our work becomes the basis of our own case study. Whether we were successful or not, we can learn from our experiences. And it's crucial so we can share our strategies and stories.

* See *'Action Evaluation'*, p90 and *'Campaign Case Study Guide'*, p54.

Constructive Programme

According to Gandhi, nonviolent social change requires building a new society in the shell of the old, which he termed constructive programme. 'Nonviolence for Gandhi was more than just a technique of struggle or a strategy for resisting military aggression,' Robert Burrowes explains in his 1995 study, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach*. Rather, 'it was intimately related to the wider struggle for social justice, economic self-reliance, and ecological harmony as well as the quest for self-realization.' As Burrowes describes it: 'For the individual, [constructive programme] meant increased power-from-within through the development of personal identity, self-reliance, and fearlessness. For the community, it meant the creation of a new set of political, social, and economic relations'. In cases where political revolutions have taken place but the population was not organised to exercise self-determination, creating a new society has been extremely difficult, and a new dictatorship usurping power has too often resulted.

Gandhi posited three elements needed for social transformation: personal transformation, political action, and constructive programme. He saw them as