

LIBBY'S

FREE & EASY GUIDE TO ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

A practical guide for people who want to make a difference ♦ 15 min read

? THE QUESTION

I want to help organize to change things but I don't have a ton of time. Is this really doable?

✓ THE ANSWER

Yup. Organizing is fun and life-changing for the better. A small group working together can move mountains.

Sometimes we give up on what's possible, because those in power make us feel cynical that we can't change anything. Organizing is how we find our power — as an individual or a small group — to do exactly that. What follows is Libby's three step guide to organizing for change.

WHO IS LIBBY?

Libby is a real person (no AI here) who began organizing at 19 in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, still known as skid road way back then. She holds an honours LDB degree — Learn By Doing — and at 73 is still at it. Along the way she became a city councillor, Member of Parliament, House Leader, and Deputy Party Leader.

She has organized inside and outside the halls of power: renter and housing rights, harm reduction, sex worker rights, anti-war, anti-poverty, Queer rights, neighbourhood and international organizing. Outside-the-box. Making change at every level.

“Organizing at the grassroots is where it begins.”

01

THE PLANNING PHASE

Getting Started

02

GROWING THE CHANGE

Organize, Organize, Organize

03

NAVIGATING ALONG THE
WAY

Staying Strong

01 THE PLANNING PHASE

A small group of people — even 3 to 5 — can start and change anything from small to big. It's about having a collective idea and a PLAN, then carrying it out methodically and creatively.

Begin With a Brainstorming Meeting

Meet (or connect online) and throw out ideas with no boundaries. What is your big goal? What are you trying to change? Talk it out, write it down, and seek consensus from your core group.

THINK BIG

Don't worry yet about HOW you'll do it. Start with the what and why. Big ideas get refined in the planning — but they have to start somewhere bold.

What Could You Be Organizing Around?

- ◆ A harmful law or policy — or a new one that's needed
- ◆ Developing a new service or program in the community
- ◆ Stopping something that harms a specific group of people
- ◆ Advocating for communities who have been excluded or discriminated against
- ◆ Creating public awareness on a particular issue
- ◆ Reckoning a historic injustice
- ◆ Advancing human rights or stopping their reversal
- ◆ Addressing the climate emergency

Develop Your Plan: The ABC Lens

Once you know WHAT you want to accomplish and a rough timeframe, work through your idea using:

A

Research & Information — What do you need to understand fully about your issue? What is the history? Were there wins or losses before?

B

Allies & Supporters — Who can help you win? Who has influence and can act as a champion? Name them, even if you can't reach them all.

C

Obstacles & Adversaries — What political, legal, or policy challenges might you face? Name them specifically so you know what you're up against.

List ALL activities and tasks that address A, B, and C. Assign timelines and who will undertake each task.

FOR EXAMPLE

“We need to gather these 6 pieces of information by X time.” “We need to contact these X people by this timeline to help us. What could they help us with?” “We need to figure out how we can deal with each obstacle or challenge we identified. What steps are needed?”

Based on the above group work, write up a brief summary for everyone to stick to. You can use flip charts, develop spreadsheets or just keep good notes. **This now becomes your BASIC PLAN for the change you are seeking.** It can be updated and adapted as things evolve and you move forward.

02 GROWING THE CHANGE

“Growing the change” means taking your plan and putting it into ACTION — making it as VISIBLE and ACCESSIBLE as possible to get the most people on board.

People have different capacities, risk tolerances, and amounts of time. Be broad in scope so there’s a diversity of ways to get involved. When actions come together they build a movement — an unstoppable force for change.

Organizing Activities to Try

LOW BARRIER

- Petition campaign — on the street or door to door
- Letter writing campaign (provide sample letters)
- Town hall meeting
- Pledge signing event

HIGH IMPACT

- Press conferences to announce milestones
- Rally, march, vigil, or sit-in
- Delegations to decision-maker meetings
- Community lobbying (see Lobbying Guide)

MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS

Keep track of what is working. What is gaining TRACTION for visibility and support of your issue. Modify and adapt as needed. Change is dynamic and always shifting. A win is a win — but success is also the advances you make, the public attitudes you shift, and the one person whose life changed for the better. Celebrate every step forward.

“Momentum happens when people can see that what they are doing is making a difference.”

CELEBRATE your wins with your group and the community.

“Growing the change” may have a finite end point, because you accomplished what you set out to do in your plan. Or it may lead to other activities, because people got fired up and want to do more. It may become a lifelong commitment. That’s up to you!

03 NAVIGATING ALONG THE WAY

Being disciplined, smart, and human with each other is what sustains a movement. Working successfully within a group is key to success.

Ground Rules for Organizers

- ◆ **Collaborative leadership** — develop mentoring and shared leadership models, not authoritarian or cult-like figures.
- ◆ **Transparency** — avoid an “insiders” mentality. All contributions count at whatever level.
- ◆ **Manageable goals** — prevent burnout. It’s ok to take breaks. Our health matters.
- ◆ **Respect diversity** — disagreements should be respectful and not personalized. Understand privilege and give space to those without it.
- ◆ **Build trust** — authentic relationships with allies and even adversaries. Be open and willing to share.
- ◆ **Run open meetings** — a simple code of conduct and seeking consensus goes a long way.
- ◆ **Media relationships** — be forthright, never lie, never fudge. Stay on message. Know who gives fair coverage.
- ◆ **Use social media wisely** — “Likes” are not a substitute for real organizing on the ground.
- ◆ **Network broadly** — silos divide us. Make a bigger tent. Being puritanical will cost you support in the long run.

QUICK SUMMARY

Brainstorm

Plan

Focus

Involve

Activities

Evaluate

Cooperate

Discipline

Trust

“Every struggle for change in human history is about overcoming impossible odds, because enough good people believed they could do it.”

Organizing at the grassroots is where it begins.

CASE STUDY IN ACTION

Sunshine Coast Resistance Network

A core group of 6 people organized a public speaking event, inviting Charlie Angus of Meidas Canada to the Sunshine Coast of BC.

200+

people attended

\$2,000

+

raised at the door

6

core organizers

3 mo.

to organize it

- ◆ They did extensive outreach via social media, (including a FB page) personal contacts, old fashioned poster in town, and community networking and word of mouth.
- ◆ The theme was engaging a younger audience to generate energy for change.
- ◆ They created the program to include speaker diversity and cultural elements. It was moderated and welcomed by 2 young change makers.
- ◆ Attendance was over 200 people in a small community hall, within a small rural community. Donations were given at the door with a suggested donation of \$5 or more.
- ◆ They raised over \$2000 to cover all the event costs.
- ◆ The group successfully got media coverage in the local newspaper and gathered a contact list of interested people in the community.

The network regrouped 4 months later for a second event on Big Tech — packing the coffee house. They plan to continue hosting teach-in style socials, educating and inspiring ways to resist encroaching forms of fascism.

CASE STUDY 2

Palestinian Families Organizing for School Board Equity in Ontario

A community-based group of Palestinian families in Ontario began organizing informally in 2021 and formally established itself as a registered organization in 2025 with a small core team of six organizers and around 30 active volunteers. The group formed in response to concerns about the

lack of recognition of anti-Palestinian racism within a large urban public school board's equity policies.

The group's overarching goal was to help ensure the physical, psychological, and emotional safety of Palestinian students within the school system, including the right for students to express their Palestinian identity and lived experiences without fear of discrimination.

4+ yrs

of sustained organizing

6 + 30

*core team + active
volunteers*

2 votes

*won at school board
level*

Incorporated

formally registered 2025

Coalition-Building and Partnership

The group prioritizes coalition-building and works in partnership with Jewish community members to develop joint programming and advocacy initiatives. These collaborations intentionally challenge narratives that portray Palestinian and Jewish communities as inherently in conflict, instead emphasizing shared commitments to equity, dignity, and safety for all students.

The organization operates through a stream-based structure, with each stream responsible for advancing specific objectives through regular meetings and coordinated planning over a multi-year period.

Advocacy and Action

- ◆ Developed a written resource guide for educators and families navigating the school system.
- ◆ Undertook direct advocacy with school board staff.
- ◆ When the board failed to address reasonable requests for action, held a public press conference in October 2023 to raise awareness of their concerns. This led to a meeting with senior school board leadership.
- ◆ When requests for follow-up meetings were not addressed, submitted a formal complaint to the city's ombudsman office. The process ultimately contributed to building stronger relationships with the school board's equity department and several elected school trustees.
- ◆ Organized delegations to key board meetings and successfully advocated for two separate board votes committing to explicitly name and address anti-Palestinian racism within the board's broader strategy to combat hate and racism.
- ◆ Trained parents and community members on how to effectively participate in delegations and engage in public advocacy by drawing on their lived experiences.
- ◆ Encouraged Palestinian and allied community members to run for Parent Advisory Committee positions in order to participate more directly in school board decision-making structures.

Programming and Resources

In collaboration with Jewish partners, the group co-developed an interactive workshop series addressing both antisemitism and anti-Palestinian racism. The workshops were co-designed and co-facilitated by Palestinian and Jewish educators and emphasize humanization, shared dignity, and critical examination of stereotypes rooted in white supremacy.

The group also developed a shared "basis of unity and values" framework to demonstrate that communities can work together toward collective action and systemic change.

STRATEGIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Throughout its advocacy, the organization strategically referenced existing school board policies and commitments to equity and inclusion in order to hold the institution accountable to its own stated principles.

Regular newsletters are distributed to members and supporters to sustain engagement, share updates, and encourage ongoing participation in advocacy efforts.

“Supportive trustees helped identify strategic moments when delegations would have the greatest impact.”

For more about Libby Davies and to find other Free and Easy Guides, visit www.groundandsky.org

For a deep dive into Libby's approach to bringing about transformative change read her book [“Outside In: A Political Memoir”](#). Available at your local bookstore or library.