



Community Action

Overview

Crisis and tragedy often ignite a sense of outrage, sorrow, and concern that can unite citizens in support of a common cause. Emotional or physical harm to a community member may serve as a painful reminder that no individual is immune to such tragedy. A highly publicized violent crime often motivates community members to take extra measures to protect themselves and their families or to enact or extend crime victims' rights.

Effective community activism must be structured and organized. Specific goals must be outlined; resources must be assembled and used effectively; and the progress of the movement should be monitored and managed.

Managing community resources is one of the keys to successful community activism. The community must first be made aware of your issue and how it relates to them. Then, by learning how the problem affects your community, people must come to recognize the need for action. At that point, they may decide to become involved in social change.

The Process

Paramount to any community effort is the ability to *define the objective or goal* of the movement. Some community activists may focus on changing a state law or instituting a new policy in a public agency. Others may work to locate a missing child, implement neighborhood watch programs or establish local crime prevention efforts.

The initial definition of this goal leads to the next step in community activism—to *decide upon a plan of action*, which will require specific steps to successfully implement. These may include:

- Establishing a meeting place;
- Creating a means of financial support; and
- Locating and training volunteers.

The Media

The media often provide the greatest means of exposure for issues. A press conference following a local tragedy or crisis can provide a forum to share critical information about what occurred and how the victim's family and community are reacting. A greater degree of public awareness may be achieved through the following:

- News releases;
- Public awareness events;
- Public service announcements;
- Community forum programming;

- Social media outreach (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube).

Community Outreach

Communities can keep the spotlight on their issues by conducting a variety of outreach, such as:

- Petition drives;
- Marches;
- Community speak-out meetings;
- Speakers' bureaus;
- Booths and displays
- Corporate and business outreach.

Financial Support

Advocates may achieve financial support for community activism in a variety of ways. They can establish a trust fund for monetary contributions made directly to the victim's family, or community members may donate funeral expenses or meals. Local businesses can donate printing services, postage, office materials, or T-shirts in support of a cause. Similarly, local organizations may provide a meeting place for community activists. Potential meeting places include:

- Libraries;
- Religious institutions' meeting rooms;
- Civic organizations;
- City facilities;
- Restaurants; and
- Hotel meeting rooms.

It is essential not only to elicit community support and a strong pool of volunteers but also to retain these contributions long-term. One suggestion for maintaining this involvement is to help local members feel that they are components of a larger effort, sometimes nationwide, to reduce crime.

Networking with similar organizations in neighboring communities also provides an opportunity to share information and opportunities to contribute. Educating both the public and volunteers about the issues and goals of the movement helps clarify why the purpose and mission are so important and why their continued support is needed.

Volunteers

Community efforts are most often carried out by volunteers who care about the issue and want to become involved in improving their community. Volunteers can perform a number of functions, including:

- General office duties;
- Media relations and public awareness;
- Fundraising;
- Court monitoring;

- Public education;
- Legislative action; and
- Victim' services.

Keeping volunteers occupied with meaningful tasks and acknowledging their work will help sustain their commitment while also increasing the productivity of the movement.

Conclusion

While communities confronting tragedy may struggle with their sorrow and suffering, such pain often unites members and moves them to take action. Community activism may provide some of the most effective tools to address community crises—to find a missing child, redress an injustice endured by a victim, and mobilize communities to prevent future crime.

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