

Chapter Skill-Building: Working in Politically Challenging Communities



Welcome from National NOW Action Center



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Agenda

- Working in a Red State
- Types of Challenging Communities
- Finding Allies
- Your Chapter in Your Community

Benefits of Working in Politically Challenging Communities

- If your chapter doesn't speak up, who will?
- Your chapter brings an important angle to conversations and debates – even hostile ones.
- Your chapter can help progressive minded individuals and/or organizations know they are not alone.
- The work you do does make a difference (even if results are slow!).



Case Study: Richmond NOW

- Richmond is a challenging area to work in. There are very strong divisions along class and race.
- The chapter started up in again in 2010 after being dormant for a number of years.
- To figure what how to reach out to different people in your community, you have to understand the psychology of your community and your chapter.
- The chapter started coalition building in the area by going to Occupy meetings, which encompass a lot of groups.
- The NOW president informed the group about what the VA State Legislator was doing to women.
- The chapter also works with the VA New Majority and the Alliance for Progressive Values.
- Think outside the box and be creative, the traditional ways and structure do not always work. For example, the chapter only has two traditional officer roles and three committees.
- Give young women a leadership role. In chapter, three young women, two are VCU students, run the three committees: social outreach, political advocacy and community outreach.
- Reach out to your local university. This chapter works with VCU students.



Case Study: Charlotte NOW

- Charlotte NOW has been dealing with anti-abortion rights terrorist group Operation Save America.
- The chapter has a very strong relationship with clinic staff, law enforcement and the community to ensure that the antis do not break the law.
- The chapter works with various allies in the community, such as the ACLU, Planned Parenthood and NARAL.
- The chapter does fun things in the community, such as a block party for recruitment purposes and to get their name out in the community.
- Connections can happen from anywhere, for example one of the chapter's members husband serves on the city council.
- Always make sure that new members feel welcome and have what they care about included in the next steps of the organization. One new member was interested in equal pay, so the chapter is planning to work on that.



Frequent Challenges in a Red State

- No or very few allies in legislature
- People may be afraid to speak out against the majority
- The laws in your community may be particularly severe
- If the biased media covers you, they may just ridicule you

Lobbying in a Red State

- Establish relationships with your representatives and their staffs -- even if they are generally hostile to women's issues.
- New chapter leaders should have introductory meetings at local offices, so you have a staffer to call on later. Emphasize a point or two you can agree on. Who knows -- maybe it could produce a benefit someday.
- Be realistic with your more natural allies. Ask for ways you can support each other and open a dialogue.
- Don't expect your allies to talk exactly like NOW.

Be Visible

- Actions are critical to getting your message out to the community. Do not be afraid to do something creative and fun to get people involved. Controversy can work to your favor.
- Utilize online organizing tools, such as Twitter and Facebook. If they don't like you at home, well, other feminists will have your back there.
- Outreach to different components in your community, such as your local university or community college.
- Hold events that can educate the community on women's rights, like a discussion on International Women's Day or Women's Equality Day.
- Hold a voter registration drive or a voter education panel.

Raise Your Hand

- Do you live in red states?

Discussion Questions

- How does your chapter lobby local officials?
- What actions does your chapter do to be visible in the community?
- What challenges does your chapter face?

Types of Communities That Are Often Challenging

- Small Communities
- Conservative Communities
- Apathetic Communities
- Religiously Conservative Communities

Small Community

- People know each other, so you are more likely to know other activists and possible allies.
- It is very easy to spread information about meetings, actions, events, etc.
- Going to community events and local hot spots can be a big bang for your buck.
- The potential for burnout from membership is higher, so try to make sure that the work is divided evenly and try to keep recruiting.
- Continue to outreach to different groups in your community, such as colleges, progressive partners, etc. You never know who you will find.
- Always have your NOW brochures/cards available, because you never know when your connections will give an opportunity for recruitment.
- Try to really get to know your community for recruitment and programming purposes.



Conservative Community

- This can be difficult but you can make it work.
- Your chapter represents another side of the conversation that people may not be used to hearing---you may be able to sway some standing in the middle.
- You will be able to address progressive issues that may have never had a voice before---giving your chapter media exposure.
- Remember your chapter is not alone; you represent the majority of the country and an important aspect of your own community.
- Try to be on the look-out for allies, they can come from an unlikely places.
- Be open and try not to shun the community as a whole.



Apathetic Community

- Not every community will have passionate opinions about NOW's priority issues.
- This can be good, because you can help shape the opinions of the community members. But you will have to work extra hard at getting people to turn out.
- Talk to people, see what is important to them and what is likely to bring them out to a meeting or an action.
- Try to find an issue that speaks to a majority of members in your community---there are some issues that make everyone want to get involved, even it is something small like doing an event explaining what the Love Your Body Campaign is. It can make a difference and get the conversation for more activism going.



Religiously Conservative Community

- If your community has a more progressive religious aspect, such as large Unitarian Universalist population, then advertise NOW up at places of worship, maybe even attend a few services and meet with members of the congregation---you never know where you will find a NOW leader.
- If your community has an especially conservative streak, try out issues that have common ground with faith communities, such as economic justice. For example, people will care that your local Wal-Mart underpays workers and discriminates against women.
- Some faith communities are strongly rooted in social justice. Your chapter may find common ground there in terms of economic justice and equality.
- Take the extra step to see what the concerns of your community are while planning programming and see if there is a way to tie NOW's priority issues in.



Raise Your Hand

- Does your chapter reside in one of these types of communities?

Discussion Questions

- What made it difficult to work in your community and how do you overcome it?
- What strategies have you found that made it easier to connect with members of your community?
- Has being a certain community changed the original goals of your chapter?

Finding Allies In the Community

- At first, it may be hard to find allies, but be sure to look into what other progressive groups represent.
- If there is a local Sierra Club, AAUW, Planned Parenthood, YWCA, Democratic Community, ARA, etc., see what they what they have done in the past and how they stand on women's issues.
- If they have not done a lot on women's rights, but are a major component of the group or affected by the issue, then try to host a joint event or invite them to one of your events to make sure women can be brought into the conversation.
- Notice all community events and see what groups are a part of what coalitions that your chapter can get involved in.
- Knowing how different areas of your community are will help you plan strategic places for meetings and actions. For example, if a certain area of your community is full of college students; it may be a great idea to have a few meetings near there and flyer the campus beforehand.



Bridging Gaps in the Community

- Your chapter really does make a difference for the women of your community.
- Try to have events open to the community like Love Your Body events, voter registration drives, etc. These issues are very critical, while at the same time they are not very polarizing.
- If there is a nearby NOW chapter, try to outreach to them for support and see if they need support, especially if there is a chapter in a more liberal area and a chapter in a more conservative area. These chapters can learn a great deal from one another.



Raise Your Hand

- Does your chapter work with allies on a local level?

Discussion Questions

- How did your chapter find allies within your community?
- Do you ever work with nearby chapters for additional support?
- On what types of issues do you partner with allies on?

Outreaching to the Community

- Post meeting and action info on community bulletin boards at popular local spots.
- Follow local coalition groups on twitter and like their facebook fan page.
- Make sure to post info also on local facebook pages, tweet, etc.
- Have your chapter table at local events.
- Go to allied organizations' events.



What Your Chapter Can Bring to the Community

- NOW members often are reflections of the community; your concerns are the concerns of the community as a whole. So making the community become further involved with NOW may be easier than you think.
- Your chapter can make a difference in the lives of women in your community through action and the help of local allied groups.



Your Chapter and Your Community

- No matter what happens, remember your chapter is doing good things for your community and it may take a while for the majority to come around.
- In the end, do not sacrifice your chapter's overall goals just to get more members. The mission and priority issues of NOW must remain.
- Remember, you are not alone and we are here to help.



Resources from National NOW

- Check our Chapter Organizing Manual on our Chapters' Only site
- Also, see what chapters are close to you by going to www.now.org/chapters
- Check out our new Online Organizing Toolkit on the Chapters' Only Site



Next Chapter Skill-Building Session

- Gearing Up for the 2012 Election Season
- Wednesday, Sept. 19, 2012, 8 p.m. EST
- Contact Anita Lederer at fieldorg@now.org if you have any questions.
- Give us feedback at:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TDDDC6Z>