

CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT AND ACTION

Many NOW activists become very "task" oriented as we go about the work of changing the world. If a piece of legislation needs to be passed, we plan a lobbying campaign to pass it. If an individual or a group comes to us because they've been denied their civil rights, we set about targeting elected officials or corporation heads to right the wrong. If the chapter is asked to join in a national action, we swing into action with buses and sign-making parties. But all too often, we pass up the chance to set and to achieve chapter development goals and objectives at the same time!

Every action or project in which a chapter participates, in addition to the goals of the action -- numbers of people, diversity objectives for the crowd and speakers, good press for the issue -- should also have the following chapter development objectives:

- 1) Building your membership and activist base - how many new members will join the chapter around this action or project? How many chapter members who haven't been very active in the past can we inspire to become more involved? Being able to report "We got X new members" is a real "win" for any chapter.
- 2) Building your financial base for this and future actions - Few chapters have a financial cushion that enables them to participate in actions without doing fundraising, and many chapters don't do actions because they feel they can't afford them. Issue fundraising (selling message-specific buttons, bumper stickers and T-shirts) as well as asking non-active chapter members for contributions to fund the event will not only pay most of the bills, but also increase the number of people who have a stake in the action.
- 3) Increasing the chapter's visibility in the community - Set goals for the amount of publicity you want to get and don't give up because one kind of media isn't an option (the local newspaper editor may be unfriendly, but a local radio station might welcome the chapter president on a talk show, or the TV station might do a story). If all else fails, fundraise around visibility for the action, so you can buy ad space in/on the best form of media for the event.
- 4) Strengthening community contacts and coalition contacts - This is a good time to look at how the chapter might work on diversity goals - making certain that all possible allies are represented in a coalition, and/or involving groups with which we haven't had much opportunity for contact. This goal could also involve simply finding a good feminist-owned copy shop that will work on "NOW" time schedules, or finding out that a member of the school board also supports reproductive freedom and will work with us on that issue in the future.

All too often, our actions and projects don't result in clear cut "wins." The legislation passed isn't all we wanted, the crowd at the rally falls short of expectations, or the court case we're supporting comes down against us. Setting clear and specific chapter development goals will often give the chapter the "wins" we might not have gotten otherwise, and a sense of power to try again.

This page is an internal document for NOW chapters.