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**CIVIL RIGHTS  
CORPS**

# Vision for Justice

A New Paradigm for Public Safety

Organizing Toolkit

2024



ENOUGH

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# Introduction and Acknowledgments

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This organizing toolkit accompanies “Vision for Justice: A New Paradigm for Public Safety” — a comprehensive platform that provides actionable policies aimed at transforming our criminal-legal system and changing the way we approach public safety in this country.

Vision for Justice has been endorsed by more than 40 civil and human rights and social justice organizations — a number worth noting because of the breadth of reach it represents. The platform, initially released by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and Civil Rights Corps in September 2019 ahead of the 2020 election, has now been updated and re-released and presents 18 important planks addressing reforms like amending the pretrial process, public defense, prosecution, policing, and the criminalization of poverty.

We want to thank [JusticeLA](#), the [Coalition to End Money Bond](#), and the [Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety](#) for supplying the case studies in this toolkit and for their excellent work building safer and more equitable communities. Thanks to their contributions, we believe this resource will be both educational and inspiring.

Staff assistance on this organizing toolkit was provided by Bree Spencer, who oversaw its development, and Cedric Lawson, who reviewed and edited. Additional staff assistance was provided by Reginald Belle, Sabina Dorville, Rachel Hooper, Shalonda Hunter, Patrick McNeil, and Chloé White. Dave Clarke oversaw the design.

Special thanks as well to former Leadership Conference staff — including Brandon Chapman, Sakira Cook, and Vanessa Gonzalez — for their wisdom and expertise.

We would like to thank The Campaign Workshop for their tremendous work in the conceptualization and drafting of this toolkit.

We also want to acknowledge the impact of volunteers on these and so many other projects. Volunteers connect the community directly with your campaign and deserve sincere gratitude for their time and efforts. We advise that any campaign make constant efforts to show appreciation for their volunteers. Budget should always be set aside for meals, family days, outings, etc. Ensure the space people come into is a space filled with joy — it must inspire people and remind them why they are there while also striving to accomplish the campaign’s goals. Lastly, we advise that volunteers be consistently recognized for their hard work and achievements. This is often easy to overlook, but it’s a well-needed breath of fresh air when working on these difficult issues.

Finally, always remember that the work that has brought you to this toolkit is likely difficult and slow. It’s also incredibly important and impactful for your community. Never forget that the change you are seeking is worth fighting for — not just for your current campaign or organization and for those you are working on behalf of, but for the community as a collective. We thank you for your efforts in the ongoing struggle for justice and progress in our nation. It matters.

## About this Toolkit

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**Vision for Justice**, a joint campaign of **The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**, **The Leadership Conference Education Fund**, and **Civil Rights Corps**, have created this guide alongside **The Campaign Workshop** to serve as a resource for national, state, and local organizations and coalitions working on transforming the criminal-legal system around the country. Often referred to as the “criminal justice system,” we use the phrase “criminal-legal system” in this toolkit and the broader Vision for Justice platform because the system as it is currently constituted and operated does not deliver true justice.

**Vision for Justice** is based on a new, non-carceral paradigm for public safety that respects the humanity, dignity, and human rights of all people. This new paradigm prioritizes safety and justice over profit with the goal of keeping all communities safe. This approach will invest in schools, health, democracy, and people — not in jails. In a country where 6.6 million people are confined or under correctional control, this vision requires transformational change.

The case studies used in this toolkit are reflective of the relationships that **The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights** maintains with state and local partner organizations across the country. Each case study serves as an example of how grassroots organizing, composed of various stakeholders and community members, can succeed in efforts to move the needle forward toward a more just system of public safety. By sharing their experiences, we hope to equip and empower more groups across the nation who are committed to doing this vital work.

This toolkit can help you build organizing efforts from start to finish, in addition to functioning as a reference guide as your team navigates its most pressing challenges. In certain sections, we also reference a “Companion Guide” document that acts as an addendum of detailed instructions for particularly helpful tools. Finally, the toolkit ends with a glossary to promote further understanding of terms used.



## Case Study 1: JusticeLA

# Campaign Goals

The Justice LA Coalition (JLA) has its roots in fall 2017 from the community-based advocacy of countless families separated by the largest jail system in the country.<sup>1</sup> In partnership with grassroots organizations, advocates, directly impacted communities, and stakeholders, they work to reduce the footprint of incarceration by stopping jail expansion and reclaiming, reimagining, and reinvesting dollars away from incarceration and into community-based systems of care. Since launching, they have successfully stopped LA County's \$3.5 billion jail expansion plan and led the development of [LA County's Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup report](#).

JLA prioritizes an intersectional approach to movement building that uplifts the communities most impacted by incarceration in Los Angeles County, including: immigrant and undocumented people; Black, Brown, and Indigenous people; people with mental health and substance use needs; young people; women; LGBTQ people; and — importantly — anyone who experiences life at the intersections of two or more of these identities. Building on nearly a decade of advocacy, they call for a robust decarceration plan for Los Angeles that fully realizes the promise of diversion and re-entry through a justice reinvestment strategy.

JLA won their Proposition 25 campaign, a statewide ballot measure voted on by the people of California to stop a reckless bail reform measure, with 56 percent of the vote<sup>2</sup> — *even though* they were outspent \$15 million to \$150,000. This victory is an important reminder that organized people power can, and oftentimes does, present a powerful foe to money power.

1. James, K. (2020, July 15). *Care First L.A.: Tracking Jail Decarceration*. Vera Institute of Justice. Retrieved March 3, 2023, from <https://www.vera.org/care-first-la-tracking-jail-decarceration>.
2. "California Proposition 25, Replace Cash Bail with Risk Assessments Referendum (2020)." *Ballotpedia*, [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_25,\\_Replace\\_Cash\\_Bail\\_with\\_Risk\\_Assessments\\_Referendum\\_\(2020\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_25,_Replace_Cash_Bail_with_Risk_Assessments_Referendum_(2020)).

Measure J was another effort in which **JLA** played a crucial role. This measure would guarantee that 10 percent of LA County’s discretionary budget every year is dedicated to funding various alternatives to incarceration. **JLA** turned out their supporters, and Measure J passed with more than 57 percent of the vote.<sup>3</sup>

History has shown us that some people will tell you to settle for less, or to take the path of least resistance. Embrace your political imagination. Do not allow others to say you are "too radical" in your thinking. Long-term goals can give way to big ideas. Demand better for your community — because you deserve it.

In the case of **JLA**, these wins were made possible by powerful ballot measures. It is important to note that nationwide this is not commonplace. The practice of conducting ballot measures, where a law or question appears on the ballot for voters to decide rather than elected officials, is relatively rare. California is just one of 24 states where voters can attempt to create laws by petition.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Note. From Who We Are, The JusticeLA Coalition (n.d.), <http://www.justicelanow.org/about/>.

4. *Report initiative and Referendum Processes*. National Conference of State Legislatures. (n.d.). Retrieved March 6, 2023, from <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/initiative-and-referendum-processes>.



# Winning Tactics

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## **Tactic: Using a Consensus Model**

The JusticeLA Coalition also worked on a consensus model that focused on building broad support over simply meeting a cut-and-dry 50+1 voting threshold — but not one that prioritized process over outcomes. The coalition set clear deadlines for when decisions needed to be made and ensured everyone understood that unnecessary delays were to be avoided. It's important to ensure your campaign doesn't lose momentum. This doesn't have to be mutually exclusive with a consensus model approach as long as expectations are managed in advance. There are challenges in using consensus methods, as all people bring their various lived experiences and values to the work — but by being committed to living shared values from the beginning of the campaign, the work will be richer, and everyone will feel more ownership and pride in each step of the campaign.

## **Tactic: Providing Space for Emotional Support**

Organizing around criminal-legal system transformation can be an emotionally challenging process. JLA incorporated a healing justice program to ensure that the impacted individuals they were working with could access support when they needed it throughout the course of the campaign. The coalition also engaged and worked with both public health and mental health professionals throughout the process. According to JLA, ignoring the complicated and challenging emotions that arise is never a good idea. It's always most productive to create and facilitate space to unearth, unpack, and work through all the trauma that will inevitably show up when doing this kind of work. There are often service providers who will provide pro-bono services or social work students who may be looking for an opportunity to engage.

## **Tactic: Creating a Secondary Goal**

Because primary goals can often be difficult to achieve in the short term, and outcomes won't always be in our favor, secondary goals can be especially meaningful. A secondary and shorter-term goal for JLA was raising awareness around their issue and the community support behind it. They did this by organizing direct actions to force a dialogue with elected officials. The coalition would periodically mobilize hundreds of supporters — from all different class backgrounds, including previously incarcerated and student activists — to attend Tuesday morning county board of supervisors meetings. Everyone wore matching orange t-shirts to create an impactful visual demonstration of robust community support and solidarity. Supporters were prepared with the coalition's main talking points, as well as informational printouts they could distribute while talking to legislators or signing up for public comment.

This sea of orange, with everyone sharing the same core message through the lens of their own story, was an effective secondary goal to help shift the narrative, communicate urgency, and even persuade a few decision-makers along the way. This act was the result of meticulous planning to get every participant prepared, fired up, and ready to take a very public stand.

The opposition will always accuse you of not having an alternative plan to replace the status quo, so it's vital that you're able to articulate precisely how you think things should be run and to provide a blueprint that helps ensure you get there. Concrete secondary goals can aid you in this effort. Reflective evaluation of your past efforts can also be a great way to help identify secondary goals for future efforts.

### **Tactic: Developing Accountability Metrics**

You will need to decide what metrics and mechanisms you'll use to hold yourself, your team, and your coalition partners accountable. It is important to set up an onboarding process for organizations and team members joining the campaign to ensure all relevant expectations are clearly communicated. As your organization grows, it is important that you have prepared an engagement campaign complete with timelines and objectives clearly defined for new contacts.

JLA even advocates for building a meritocracy that measures individual success by the tangible work put into the campaign — because when your campaign falls short and these metrics aren't in place, it can lead to misplaced blame. The metrics can be numerical (meetings attended, petitions acquired, events held, etc.) or relational (the conducting of one-on-one meetings, an ability to recruit, individual work culture, etc.). Ultimately, everyone involved is accountable to the community you're organizing for — and it's important that no one forgets that.

Successful metrics will also help you keep the public and volunteers engaged and can make your chosen targets pay attention. Additionally, you'll want to be able to tell the story of your success to potential supporters, to the press, and in some cases, to funders.

### **Tactic: Conducting Community Education Campaigns**

At times, you'll need to focus less on passing or stopping specific policies and more on efforts to shift public opinion. You may identify this need to shift after conversations with those in the communities impacted. Do they know how it affects them? Is it something that they can see as a priority in their lives? Could it be something that can make their lives better? If you do need to shift, this can be accomplished by combating misleading media narratives, or even by reframing the entire conversation around your issue.



Before you'll be able to make changes to the system, it's often necessary to ensure your target audience understands exactly how the current system functions and why. This can be a great opportunity for issue champions and other experts to share their experiences and knowledge. While it may not be your current need, community education work should be an ongoing component of your more policy-focused organizing strategy, as you will want to meet the community impacted where they are and take them on a journey to supporting the issue. These tactics proved to be quite important for **JLA** while trying to rewrite the mainstreamed story of the U.S. criminal-legal system. It was critical that they engaged trusted messengers who knew the issue firsthand and publicly addressed and corrected the narrative every time the Los Angeles Times mischaracterized their issue.

**Tactic: Establishing a Texting Program**

**JLA** cultivated their very own Virtual Action Team that served as a combination of text-banking technology and ongoing base building efforts. **JLA** not only coordinated this Virtual Action Team, but they also provided a deeper level of training to ensure everyone stayed on message. This more authentic and relational approach to text-banking will also facilitate much better conversations with the audience you're trying to reach. **JLA** recommends cultivating this kind of Virtual Action Team because of how efficiently *and* effectively you can mobilize a large group of supporters quickly. Texting is effective for reaching younger populations who are used to using their phones frequently. It may be worth considering using WhatsApp as well, which is a popular communication tool within some immigrant communities. For more information on texting programs, see the "Companion Guide."

**Tactic: Building People Power to Boost Momentum**

Organizations like **JLA** commit upfront to holding at least two virtual actions per week to sustain momentum. You want to make sure your targets are hearing from your supporters as often as possible — and that won't happen unless you schedule it in advance. **JLA** was committed to mobilizing voters during relevant elections (i.e., for district attorney). Although they couldn't explicitly tell people who to vote for (a limitation of their status as a 501(c)(3) organization), they were still able to have conversations with voters to provide them with the information they needed to make an informed choice. To learn more about the difference between 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations, see the glossary — but please be sure to consult an attorney to ensure you're in compliance with federal and state laws.<sup>5</sup> Time and again, **JLA** has invested in building this kind of people power that ultimately carries them from one victory to the next.

**Tactic: Creating Working Groups**

**JLA's** coalition was divided into working groups. One group worked on pretrial policy, another on judicial accountability, and still another group focused exclusively on base-building. Coalition members were also allowed to engage only where their interests and capacity intersected with the goals and needs of the coalition at any given moment in time. Not everyone has to work on everything and be involved in every decision. Create space for coalition members to engage according to their ability and their resources and provide opportunities for potential organizers.

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5. While it is encouraged to engage with a willing attorney in your area, Bolder Advocacy, a project of Alliance for Justice, is a national resource for local leaders that promotes active engagement in the policy making process by giving nonprofits and foundations the confidence to speak out courageously and protecting their right to do so. Bolder Advocacy provides nonprofits with the knowledge they need to become confident advocates. See more information: <https://www.afj.org/our-work/bolder-advocacy/>

# Lessons Learned

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## Have a Detailed Understanding of the Landscape

The **JusticeLA Coalition** has stressed the need for having a detailed and nuanced understanding of the landscape you're working in — or conducting a landscape analysis. Although Los Angeles is often assumed to be similar to places like New York City, the political structural history of the West Coast is quite different from that of the East Coast. In fact, working in LA shares more similarities with working in places like Texas, Nevada, and Arizona because of their unique and distinctly western institutional and historical makeup. Truth be told, LA's county government functions differently than NYC's because it was built with a different vision in mind — and that was certainly not a vision for centralized civic governance or efficiency. In fact, it was specifically built to extract, consolidate, and hoard the resources of the West, which was different from the goals of the institutions created in the eastern context. It was also important for **JLA** to recognize that — despite the high incarceration numbers in the state — California holds a hyper-liberal reputation that had to be addressed in campaign messaging and approach. California is also the birthplace of the neo-conservative movement and served as the incubator and workshop for militarized policing, three strikes laws, mandatory minimums, drug sentencing disparities, and mass surveillance. This kind of rigorous and thorough understanding of the environment in which you're working is key to launching a successful campaign.

You may also need to combat misleading assumptions about your political context, especially if you're working in a big “liberal” city like Los Angeles or New York City. **JLA** reminds us of the messaging dissonance their organizers had to address in a city with a reputation for being progressive but, at the same time, has police helicopters harassing people with bullhorns all night in South Central LA. Even a so-called “liberal” city can be guilty of hyper-criminalization and of perpetuating and enforcing other myths surrounding public safety.

## Ask Up Front

**JLA** reminds us that asking for everything you want up front can actually create a domino effect of incremental steps, which are often a result of your advocacy for transformative solutions — not the other way around. While you may not always have control over the compromises that decision-makers make that still leave some people behind, you *can* commit to not taking shortcuts in the name of “expediency” yourself. For tips about meeting with decision-makers, see the “Companion Guide.”

## Reframe “Loss”

According to **JLA**, even losses — no matter how frustrating — can be successes so long as you're moving in the right direction. Any shift in thought that could lead to different actions or outcomes in the future is also a victory. Campaigns are often more complex than fitting into being “successful or unsuccessful.” Progress is not easy and rarely linear. “Losses” are not the end, but rather they are necessary experiences in getting closer to victory every time.

### *Focus on Impact over Ownership*

Be sure to address any open questions, sooner rather than later, about who will take credit for what. JLA reminds us that you don't always need every coalition partner to have their branding plastered over everything they do or touch. It's important to keep the big picture in mind, focusing more on impact than ownership.

### *Don't Stray from the Message*

JLA in particular stresses the importance of posting digital content consistently and never straying from your message. And if you focus on telling the truth, people won't feel like you're trying to sell them something they might not want to buy. Your posts should be — above all else — honest, clear, and precise. The focus of JLA's posts was often: "This is what's happening, and here's what we need to do about it."

### *Practice Authentic Basebuilding*

Transforming the criminal-legal system is going to take a lot of people power, so it's vital that you focus on and incorporate basebuilding into every step of the campaign process. Basebuilding is the foundation of any organizing effort, and in the case of **JLA**, it is the ongoing practice of recruiting and empowering impacted individuals and their supporters to help imagine and fight for alternatives to the criminal-legal system. It is not simply trying to convince them to advocate for tiny reforms that barely scratch the surface of solving the problem.

With each passing day, your team needs to be taking concrete steps to strengthen the support you already have and to turn more and more of your target audience into a base of active and enthusiastic supporters. Whether you're organizing a large-scale protest or trying to pass a ballot measure, you need as many boots on the ground and voters in the booth as possible to get your campaign over the finish line. **JLA** also reminds us that it's often harder to base-build with people and in communities that you're not familiar with or that you don't share common experiences with and have empathy for. You might confront your own biases working with partners who many view as unaffected by these problems, like white residents in a gentrifying neighborhood or wealthy college students. At the end of the day, basebuilding isn't about making friends — it's about recruiting and mobilizing as many supporters as possible to achieve your campaign's goals. This is done by building relationships based on trust. The more people and groups following through on what they say they will do — and actually showing up — the stronger and bigger the base grows. But it's also important to give yourself space to process and work through these difficult emotions throughout the campaign, as well as empower organizers who are more comfortable and effective in those communities to take the lead there. Organizing can be very personal, so it's important to pay attention to your own emotional and psychological wellbeing and needs as the campaign progresses.

### *Avoid Tokenization*

It's important to ensure that inclusion doesn't become tokenization. JLA cautions against inadvertently exploiting someone's trauma for the benefit of the campaign or the optics of your coalition. Sometimes you have to do things differently than the way you were taught, or the way things are "normally" done, in order to avoid replicating harm. It's vital that you aren't taking someone's story or continuing to tell the stories of others that are not your lived experience without giving due credit. Allow the space for people to speak for themselves and to fully participate at all levels and in all pieces of the campaign.

### *Build Trust*

JLA has built a massive base, but they are only successful at mobilizing them because of the trust they've been able to build with their supporters. Consistency and transparency are key here. Provide your supporters with accurate and reliable information on a consistent basis, and they'll be more likely to show up for you when you need them to. Playing the long game when basebuilding is always the best way to secure short-term victories via large-scale mobilization.



## Case Study 2: The Coalition to End Money Bond

### Campaign Goals

The **Coalition to End Money Bond** (“the **Coalition**”) was formed in May 2016 as a group of dues-paying member organizations with the goal of stopping the large-scale jailing of people due to their inability to pay a monetary bond.<sup>6</sup> Money bond, or monetary bond, is a form of bail required to be paid in advance of trial, where those who are unable to pay are held in jail while they await trial. In other words, this organization brought together thousands of people across Illinois with the goal of preventing people from going to jail because they can’t post bail — despite having every intention of attending their trial.

In addition to ending the determination of who is imprisoned or free pending trial by their access to money, the **Coalition** also has the goal of reducing the number of people who are under pretrial supervision or are incarcerated in the Cook County Jail in Chicago, Illinois. The **Coalition** emerged from the aspirations of its member organizations’ larger efforts to achieve racial and economic justice for the residents of Cook County.

The **Coalition** chose to focus on Illinois statewide bail reform because it was a problem that many different communities were facing, and there seemed to be a strong interest in addressing it among multiple organizations throughout the state. Pretrial incarcerations come at enormous personal costs, leading to lost jobs, lost housing, and more. Individuals detained pretrial are also more likely to be convicted — and once convicted, they receive even longer sentences compared to those released pretrial.<sup>7</sup> Pretrial incarcerations also unfairly affect Black people. Black people in Illinois receive higher monetary bonds that they are disproportionately unable to pay, and they make up 73 percent of the incarcerated population in the Cook County Jail despite only comprising 25 percent of Cook County’s population.<sup>8</sup>

6. “The Coalition to End Money Bond | About Us.” Coalition to End Money Bond. Coalition to End Money Bond, December 9, 2022. <https://endmoneybond.org/about-us/>.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

The **Coalition** was instrumental in helping to pass a new Illinois state law, the 2021 Pretrial Fairness Act, which was challenged by Illinois law enforcement officials soon after its passing. The Act was officially upheld by the Illinois Supreme Court on July 18, 2023, and it went into effect September 18, 2023. The Act overhauls Illinois' pretrial justice system by changing eligibility standards for pretrial incarceration and ending the use of money bonds in its entirety. The **Coalition** is working to defend the law and ensure its successful implementation. The **Coalition** is also continuing to fight to end mass incarceration by supporting a proposed Illinois Supreme Court rule that would require an evidentiary hearing and a finding by a judge that an accused person can afford monetary bail before one is imposed.

# Winning Tactics

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## Tactic: Building a Strong Coalition

Early on, the **Coalition to End Money Bond** asked their partners a very important question: Do we have the luxury of not working in coalition? If your answer to this question is a resounding ‘no,’ then you’ll more likely have to learn to work with people or organizations you don’t normally work with (or even necessarily want to work with). The grassroots organizing adage stands true: “There are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.”

The **Coalition** included both grassroots abolitionist groups and more mainstream policy organizations. This range of political orientations was also matched by strategic diversity, including disruptive and confrontational community organizing alongside more formal electoral and advocacy work. One organizing team can only do so much, so your campaign will be stronger and more powerful when you work with others in pursuit of a common goal. At the end of the day, an active and engaged coalition often makes all the difference between success and failure.

## Tactic: Setting Explicit Goals

The **Coalition** had a very specific goal in 2016, which was to end money bail and decrease pretrial incarceration in Illinois. The **Coalition** also set forth six detailed principles to guide their member organizations toward accomplishing this, including setting new standards for data collection, data usage, and bond issuance that would limit harm to individuals. They were then able to pass a bill that corresponded with these goals in 2021 and write an amicus brief in support of the Illinois Supreme Court upholding the law. The choice to focus on money bail specifically was an opportune one grounded in a firm understanding of the political context in which the coalition was working. It was also a choice that represented a strategic intervention into the broader criminal-legal system.

Having a specific and measured goal to work toward enabled greater cooperation among the **Coalition’s** member organizations. The level of detail they used also ensured that everyone involved was able to contribute to the campaign based on their unique strengths and access to resources. For more information about setting goals, see the “Companion Guide.”



### **Tactic: Using a Power Map**

Organizers have traditionally used power mapping as a visual tool to help identify and target the necessary individuals or groups to promote social change. Power mapping is a great way to determine which decision-makers or influencers will be key to achieving your campaign goals. It's always helpful to map out exactly who has voting or decision-making power over the issue you're trying to address — *these campaign targets will be where you focus your resources.*

When J. B. Pritzker was running for governor in Illinois and expressed interest in ending money bail, the Coalition immediately started targeting the now-governor with their own statewide policy proposal. If you're as lucky as the Coalition, you'll also be able to map any former campaign staff members or coalition members who have gone on to join the governor's policy staff or who were appointed to the state senate.

Once you've completed your power map, you'll need to determine exactly who you want to talk to and when. This can include both decision-makers and community members whose support you can already expect, in addition to those you might be able to persuade along the way. You won't have the time or money to talk to everyone, so you must be strategic about how you use your resources to both mobilize supporters and to make your case to those who are persuadable. Whether at the ballot box or in the capitol, it's important to know exactly how many votes you'll need to pass your policies and what advocates need to do to reach that number.

Additionally, the Coalition reminds us that targets will often shift depending on how the political landscape changes and other factors both inside and outside of your control. Originally, they targeted county-level decision-makers in Cook County. They then changed gears and focused on state-level legislators throughout Illinois. Remaining adaptable to shifting targets can be a great asset to accomplishing your campaign's long-term goals. For more information on power mapping, see the "Companion Guide."

### **Tactic: Writing a Campaign Plan**

Having a concrete plan for your campaign can be invaluable. This should be developed in consultation and collaboration with your team and other coalition members. The Coalition reminds us that it's easier for present and future coalition members to buy into a campaign when a clear path to victory has been charted in advance. A detailed and thorough plan lets everyone involved know that you really do mean business. Investing time in this step at the outset will almost certainly set your campaign up for success. Once it's polished off and everyone is on board with it, your campaign plan is your roadmap. Be sure to consult it regularly to both keep your team on track and to make ongoing adjustments as needed.



### **Tactic: Creating an Explicit Budget**

The **Coalition** recommends being as transparent as possible about campaign fundraising expectations from the outset, including which coalition members are responsible for raising what amount and by when. This increases responsibility while managing expectations from other members of the coalition.

When it comes to cash, you'll need to account for both intake and outflow. Set weekly or monthly fundraising goals and write down exactly how you'll achieve them. Your campaign budget and fundraising strategy should work cohesively. You'll want to make sure whatever rough budget you sketch out has a corresponding fundraising plan that accounts for all the money you intend to spend.

A truly thorough budget will include everything from the salary of your lobbyist(s) down to paper clips. It's also a good idea to have several budget levels — from shoestring to pipedream — that are each paired with specific fundraising goals. Knowing what you're spending versus what you're raising will help you manage and maximize your resources. You should also assess whether you can get assistance from an attorney who can ensure you're following federal and state laws when it comes to fundraising.<sup>9</sup>

### **Tactic: Working with Lobbyists**

If you have the resources to do it, hiring a lobbyist is a great way to get some additional muscle behind your legislative efforts. According to the **Coalition**, the contract lobbyist they decided to hire was an incredibly helpful investment. A good lobbyist will have the experience, expertise, and relationships that members of your own team or coalition may not. Good lobbyists will be effective at both the grassroots and grasstops (i.e., constituency leader) levels, and they often know the ins and outs of how work gets done at the capitol.

A lobbyist will work with your team to help identify who your targets should be and what districts should be the focus of your communications and mobilization strategy. They can also help build an organizing timeline and will keep your team updated on the progress of any relevant bills moving through the legislature so that you're never surprised. A good lobbyist is also helpful in identifying the types of stories and issue champions who will effectively persuade your targets so you can start recruiting them. They'll also help set up any meetings you need to have with legislators or their staff. Perhaps most important of all is a lobbyist's ability to use their personal relationships in the legislature to convince lawmakers and other influencers to help advance your goals.

As an important note: Grassroots or grasstops advocates can often accomplish anything a lobbyist can — operating with some limitations. It's important to weigh these limitations against the financial considerations when deciding if you would like to work with a lobbyist.

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9. While it is encouraged to engage with a willing attorney in your area, Bolder Advocacy, a project of Alliance for Justice, is a national resource for local leaders that promotes active engagement in the policy making process by giving nonprofits and foundations the confidence to speak out courageously and protecting their right to do so. Bolder Advocacy provides nonprofits with the knowledge they need to become confident advocates. See more information: <https://www.afj.org/our-work/bolder-advocacy/>.

### *Tactic: Crafting a Strong Campaign Message*

According to the **Coalition to End Money Bond**, your campaign message is the “voice of the coalition.” And the key to crafting a good campaign message is ensuring it reflects the Seven Cs:

- Clear
- Concise
- Contrastive
- Consistent
- Connected
- Coordinated
- Creative

The campaign message you develop can help keep your organization or coalition united and on task. The **Coalition** reminds us that everyone will bring their own message frames and familiar language to the table at first. They incorporated message training into their onboarding process to help new members become oriented. The **Coalition** also produced messaging guides for individual campaign actions to help keep everyone on the same page, whether it was someone’s first action or thousandth action. It may be helpful to practice messaging using the Tully Message Box technique. For more information about the Tully Message Box technique, see the “Companion Guide.”

### *Tactic: Attending Town Halls*

The **Coalition** used public hearings as an opportunity to work with local partners in each community to identify spokespeople to provide testimony. They also turned out supporters for pre-hearing rallies that would generate earned media (i.e., press coverage), help amplify their message, and even spread awareness of their campaign. Town hall events are a great opportunity to demonstrate your cause publicly and to also show a network of support.

Organizing members to attend events and provide testimony demonstrates that you are dedicated and committed to making change. These may be organized by elected leaders themselves monthly or quarterly, or by community groups that represent neighborhoods that are directly affected by the issues on which you advocate. Many times, these events are either streamed live or recorded and available for later viewing, which expands your audience and can help drive interest. Be sure to research upcoming town halls, whether virtual or in-person, and familiarize yourself with the process for signing up to deliver testimony.



# Lessons Learned

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## *Make Targeting Expansive*

The **Coalition to End Money Bond** emphasized the importance of expansive targeting. They initially focused solely on the Chicago area in their efforts to end monetary bonds and needed to work to widen their networks once they expanded their focus to the entire state of Illinois. Beyond the limits of budget and scale realities, targeting people outside of the demographic that you imagine your organization will need to accomplish your mission can help tackle long-term goals — especially if the scope of your organization’s mission grows over time.

## *Be Willing to Work with Unlikely Allies*

The **Coalition** sought to focus on bail reform in Chicago, and to do so, they had to collaborate with individuals and organizations who had directly harmed their community — such as sheriffs and elected officials. These uncomfortable situations are not unique to the **Coalition**, and it can be difficult to accept that your organization may need to do the same. This kind of discomfort can be painful and require discipline, but it may be necessary to accomplish the goals your organization set out to achieve. Again, it’s important to remember that “there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.” This does not mean that you need to compromise the values of your organization, but rather that you should approach the problem from a variety of perspectives that you might not have otherwise considered.

## *Understand Your Landscape and Political Context*

The **Coalition** initially chose to focus on Cook County and the Cook County Jail because of the disproportionately large number of people imprisoned there — accounting for one third of all incarcerations in the state. This is also where the **Coalition** had the most political influence with county-level decision-makers who were already interested in bail reform. No matter what kind of campaign you’re running, you’ll likely need to do some research to assess the political landscape you are operating in to determine how best to advance your goals. What your own research strategy looks like and how much money you’ll spend on it ultimately depends on the size and nature of your campaign, as well as your overall goals.

This research may involve work by members of your organization, or it may require outside help. It is also useful to do an impact analysis to better understand the impact of a policy on your community. This can often sway public opinion for (or even against) an issue. Policy or topic experts— who might conduct an economic or public safety impact analysis — are best suited for this type of work. This research and data can often help you craft a stronger message, identify new targets, or even open the door for new coalition partners.

*Use Both 'Inside Game' and 'Outside Game' Tactics*

Beyond face-to-face meetings, there are two distinct approaches to organizing around specific policies: the “inside game” and the “outside game.” The more traditional inside game focuses on providing resources and information to decision-makers. The outside game focuses on working with your supporters to put pressure on your targets. The **Coalition** recommends a healthy mix of both inside *and* outside tactics. They worked with grassroots organizers who focused on more confrontational direct actions, as well as more established policy organizations who had influence over decision-makers. They even worked with groups focused on electoral organizing.



## Case Study 3: Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety

# Campaign Goals

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The **Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety** (the “**Task Force**”) is a community-based initiative that began in the aftermath of the tragic killing of George Floyd by police on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis and the subsequent nationwide Black Lives Matter solidarity protests demanding the structural transformation of policing. Consisting of more than 50 community organizations and countless individuals in cooperation with Denver city government, the **Task Force** is the result of conversations from town halls with community members, faith leaders, service providers, elected officials, and the Denver Department of Public Safety to move toward action and healing.<sup>10</sup>

A problem can sometimes be so overwhelming that a path toward a solution seems out of reach. Denver’s **Task Force** had a very broad goal: “To identify the best ideas and practices both from Denver and around the nation, and develop a comprehensive community-based approach to policing and public safety.” They found themselves having trouble determining which goals to focus on and in what order — so they simply asked fellow community members what *they* wanted to focus on. Once the **Task Force** finished gathering input from Denverites, they spent their time on tangible and important goals like increasing access to better housing and education, as well as minimizing interactions between the police and community members.

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10. Note. From *About the Task Force*, Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety (n.d.), <http://www.denvertaskforce.org/about-the-task-force.html>.

From the outset, there were significant barriers around which the **Task Force** needed to build goals. They couldn't work directly with a more traditional and long-standing allied organization because of its close ties to the same decision-maker who the coalition was trying to hold accountable. This more established organization was trying to garner support for some of the **Task Force's** targets as part of its electoral strategy. This mirrors an ongoing phenomenon where many national Black organizing groups have started focusing more on voting rights and less on criminal-legal system transformation because of which policies are (or are not) popular with the decision-makers they're trying to help elect. The **Task Force** initially invited many such groups to participate in their efforts, but they were eventually turned down. Despite these challenges, the **Task Force** eventually released 112 concrete policy proposals — and they are still actively working today to ensure their successful implementation.

# Winning Tactics

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## *Tactic: Launching a Community Questionnaire*

Think about the groups and individuals whose voices you sincerely want to make a part of your campaign, particularly those who represent or can speak to specific subsets of your target audience. And when in doubt, you can always launch a digital community questionnaire asking for their input. The **Task Force** to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety did just that, and they then included coalition members who were recommended directly by impacted community members. In addition, when the **Task Force** realized they were missing AAPI, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ voices, they worked intentionally to identify and include these groups to ensure proper representation.

## *Tactic: Determining the Right Moment to Launch Your Effort*

Sometimes an unforeseen event can springboard your efforts — and being prepared will give wind to your sails. In the wake of George Floyd's murder and subsequent public outrage, the **Task Force** understood that was a critical moment to work with the Denver Police Department to form a use-of-force advisory committee. This committee focused not only on use-of-force policy, but also on public safety as a whole — leveraging the national attention focused on many of these interconnected issues.

As a note of caution: It is crucial to ensure you first have the trust and support of the community. During these dark moments you want to be credibly viewed as a dependable partner and not as an organization looking to take advantage of or capitalize on a tragedy.

## *Tactic: Organizing a Community Education Campaign*

At times, you'll need to focus less on passing or stopping specific policies and more on efforts to shift public opinion, combat misleading media narratives, or even reframe the entire conversation around your issue. Before you'll be able to make changes to the system, it's often necessary to ensure your target audience understands exactly how the current system functions and why. This can be a great opportunity for issue champions and other experts to share their experiences and knowledge. In fact, community education work should be an ongoing component of your more policy-focused organizing strategy. A subgroup of the **Task Force** is specifically focused on doing community outreach, including monthly community forums online. Their goal is to meet and share their message with about 200 local neighborhood associations. These conversations are an effective way to engage the public, keeping them informed about new developments in the movement as well as what the **Task Force** is doing to address them. These forums are also a chance to educate about specific aspects of public safety. You could do an entire community workshop, for example, on how to resolve conflict with your neighbors without calling the police. After all, many of us who have grown up in the United States have been trained since childhood to immediately call 911 in the face of any perceived danger — and it may take some time to unlearn this.

### *Tactic: Bringing in Outside Researchers*

Research is also something you can fully outsource if necessary — and, of course, if you have the resources to do so. The **Task Force**, for example, decided to hire with grant money a researcher from the University of Colorado. If you're facing a well-funded opponent or multiple special interest groups, hiring an opposition researcher can be a smart move. They'll help you figure out where the funding and support for your opposition is coming from, the other issues or causes these funders are involved in, and any public statements they've made.

### *Tactic: Bringing in Issue Experts*

The **Task Force** sought to engage issue experts to help educate around how precisely the current system functions. They anticipated that decision-makers would need this kind of foundational information with concrete data and statistics coming from voices of authority before they could begin considering the kinds of solutions proposed by the **Task Force**.

### *Tactic: Building a Strong, Diverse Coalition*

The **Task Force** started coalition recruitment by precisely defining what they wanted their coalition to focus on: not just policing, but public safety more broadly. This necessitated exploring the impacts of housing, jobs, education, mental health services, and other sectors on safety throughout the community. Such a broad focus required a robust and diverse coalition to ensure everyone who needed to be “in the room” for those conversations was present.

The **Task Force** excelled at outside-the-box thinking, remembering to include interfaith and youth-based organizations in their coalition. They also sought recommendations from both impacted community members and fellow coalition members. Their rule of thumb? Any organization that received multiple recommendations was invited to join. In many ways, coalition-building and goal setting were ongoing and reciprocal processes. As their primary and secondary goals emerged and developed, coalition members who could help reach them were recruited — and as new coalition members joined, they were able to help shape the primary and secondary goals in development.

### *Tactic: Agreeing on a Shared Coalition Framework*

The **Task Force** also recommends getting on the same page with your coalition partners about your philosophical approach to the issues that your campaign is addressing. Some partners will be interested in a reform framework, others in defunding and reinvesting, and some will be abolitionists. Make sure you reach an agreement on which framework the coalition will use for this specific campaign. Not everyone will know which framework they bring to the table, so you must have deeper conversations to unearth what their specific philosophical orientation to criminal-legal system transformation is. Agreeing on this framework upfront will prevent problems and incongruities down the road, particularly when it comes to developing your message.

### *Tactic: Clarifying Partner Roles*

It's important to explicitly clarify the role that each partner in your coalition will play. The **Task Force** framed national partners as advisors and consultants to the **Task Force**. Impacted community members and groups were given the lead on developing the goals and proposed solutions. Make sure everyone understands why they're being invited, and what you expect their contribution to be, to help avoid any tension between coalition members. Knowing who will have the final say on all decisions is key. Clear working parameters are everyone's friend.



# Lessons Learned

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## *Ensure Your Base is Driving Campaign Direction*

The Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety recommends ensuring your community is in control of the change-making process as much as possible. Impacted individuals and your supporters should have the upper hand — not decision-makers. You need the kind of robust base that can drive the campaign in a direction of *their* choosing. Don't let decision-makers try to take over the process.

## *Confirm Political Support for Your Issue*

Politicians can be fickle. When the Task Force in Denver released their 112 policy recommendations, many politicians paid a lot of lip service. The good news? One of those recommendations was actually implemented: The independent monitor in charge of public safety oversight and accountability is now appointed by a citizen's oversight board instead of by the mayor. The bad news? Many politicians used this as an excuse to take a victory lap — then promptly hemmed and hawed at or outright ignored the rest of the Task Force's recommendations.

## *Consistently Engage Your Supporters*

One of the Task Force's biggest regrets was not intentionally developing and nurturing their supporter network from the beginning. At first, about 80 people were showing up to committee meetings excited and ready to get to work. But once the initial phase of recommendations was over, that dropped to only 25-30 people on their calls. Moving forward, they'll have an ongoing strategy to consistently track and engage with supporters — making it easier to address this participation drop-off and better preparing them for future campaigns.

## *Make a Detailed Strategic Plan*

According to the Task Force, their biggest misstep was developing 112 concrete policy recommendations without a strategic plan to ensure they were implemented. Releasing a robust, academic policy report is a good start — but it's not enough. You need to have a comprehensive plan for what the campaign is going to do *after* the report goes public. Crafting a detailed campaign plan in advance is one of the best things you can do to ensure the work you're doing will have a real impact on the world outside of your computer. In fact, many of the challenges the Task Force faced could have been avoided if they had prepared a media strategy, community outreach strategy, and lobbying strategy in advance.

### *Recruit Issue Champions Committed to Your Issue*

The Task Force reminds us to be wary of big names with big personalities when recruiting issue champions. Yes, a big name can result in lots of earned media and greater visibility for your issue — but these big personalities can also often come with their own agendas and can actually serve as a distraction from the important goals of your campaign. Be sure to recruit people who are already doing the work in the community who are often directly or indirectly impacted by your issue. You want people who are committed to centering attention on the community and your campaign — not on themselves.

### *Build Your Social Media Presence Early*

The Task Force reminds us how important timing and preparation are. They didn't begin engaging online and on social media until after their policy recommendations were made public. In hindsight, they would have invested the time and energy in building a robust online presence before the recommendations came out to better leverage their supporters' energy. After all, posting on social media is free — so make sure it's included in your campaign strategy from the outset.

### *Tell Your Stories*

The Task Force recommends beginning the storytelling process as soon as possible. Share as many stories as you can and share them as often as you can — whether it's at neighborhood association meetings or webinars with decision-makers and the community. There are many methods for sharing your story and creating opportunities for conversations. For more information on common organizing methods, see the “Companion Guide.”



# Closing

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We hope this toolkit and accompanying “Companion Guide” serve you in your important work to create the transformations our communities need and deserve. This toolkit and the stories shared within it are just brief examples of what the Vision for Justice mission embodies. To learn more about the Vision for Justice platform, consult the Vision for Justice report, which outlines 18 critical planks across three major themes that bring us closer to our vision of just and safe communities everywhere.

# Glossary

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- **501(c)(3) & 501(c)(4)**: This is a classification system used to refer to nonprofit organizations. A 501(c)(3) organization is prohibited from supporting or opposing candidates, so if they engage in advocacy it must be nonpartisan advocacy. A 501(c)(4), on the other hand, cannot be primarily focused on partisan activity, but can engage in some.
- **Basebuilding**: Your base refers to the volunteers, individuals, and partner organizations who would benefit from your political goals. This is where your power lies. Basebuilding can be done through one-on-one meetings with interested individuals, reaching out to folks you don't yet know, and engaging with organizations and businesses. The goal is to build a large, organized base of people.
- **Direct Action**: Best defined by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., nonviolent direct action "seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored."
- **Earned Media**: This term is often used interchangeably with free media. It refers to publicity or exposure that is gained through efforts apart from advertising.
- **Grassroots**: Bottom-up approach to advocacy in which organizations get in touch with their constituency to connect further with legislators and spread the word about issues.
- **Grasstops**: The grasstops are opinion leaders, community leaders, heads of organizations, or even elected officials. They are individuals or organizations that already have established political power in your community or issue area.
- **Issue Champion**: Refers to a partner or spokesperson with the resources and credibility to help amplify your stance on issues. Champions are a major asset when it comes to getting out your message or simply being an ally to aid efforts.
- **Landscape Analysis**: Refers to an organized and structured way of identifying and researching political opponents. This involves taking a detailed look at their campaign and political career in order to develop an effective counterstrategy.
- **Lobbying**: Refers to communicating with a government official directly about your concerns or interests. This is an effective way for individuals or interest groups to influence legislative actions or decisions.
- **Power**: The ability to help or hurt. In other words, the ability to get an elected official to do something you want or to get an elected official to not do something you don't want. There are two sources of power: organized people and organized money.
- **Target Audience**: Demographic of people who your campaign or organization is trying to reach with their message.
- **Tokenization**: The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to be inclusive of members of marginalized groups, especially by recruiting people from these groups in order to give the appearance of racial or gender equality within a workplace or educational context.
- **Tully Message Box**: A tool used by campaigns to create specific themes, messages, and strategies. Named by Democratic strategist Paul Tully, this message box helps campaigns craft their communications.



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