

# Get Busy. Get Equal

ACLU LGBT Project

<http://gbge.aclu.org/organize>

Also see the history of the Gay Rights Movement

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/stonewall/player/>

1. Which type of policy should you propose, domestic partnership or civil rights;
2. Will the campaign be noisy or quiet;
3. Will LGBT people do the campaign or will it be done by a broad coalition; (when you decide this, you may be deciding whether the campaign will be about LGBT rights, or other civil rights as well);
4. Will you have a large grass roots campaign or will the campaign be done by a small closed group; (in either case, you'll need to think about how to build a core group to run it).
5. Will your organization be created just for the campaign, or will it be designed to continue after the campaign is over.

important basic  
decisions you  
should make  
about your  
campaign right  
at the start.

- The most basic campaign decision is which kind of policy you are going to propose—a domestic partnership policy or a civil rights policy.
- Most people think that a civil rights policy is ordinarily the first step. The idea is that basic protection against losing a job or a home is almost essential before you can meaningfully work to make relationships more visible.

## Civil Rights or Domestic Partnership

- Most Americans think that people who are qualified should be hired and people who do their work shouldn't be fired.
- It isn't a great leap to say that if people are being denied jobs or fired for other reasons, they need legal protection.

Civil rights is also  
usually an easier  
first sell.

- The idea of domestic partnership—recognition of non-marital relationships—is somewhat foreign to many people, as may be the idea that LGBT people have partners at all.
- If your institution’s civil rights policy doesn’t cover sexual orientation and gender identity, and if there is no overriding state law which forbids discrimination, civil rights will usually be your first choice. But not always.

Which comes  
first?

- Consider Flint, Michigan. There were no public hearings. The organizers asked lesbian and gay organizations not to write letters to council members or the media. Council members were lobbied in private. When the bill came up for a vote, only its number was read aloud (truly, this was the bill that dare not speak its name). There was no debate. There also was no opposition. The bill passed on a voice vote.
- The case for a quiet campaign is simply put: you are more likely to lose if there is a public fight over the policy. If your campaign is quiet, it is possible that potential opponents won't even know about it until it is over. Some people who might vote for you if the policy is unopposed will abandon you if the opposition turns out.

## Noisy or Quiet

- The case against the quiet approach is also easy to lay out. Once your opponents do find out about it, your policy can be repealed by the board which passed it, amended to death, or even put on the ballot. You are likely to have a tougher time convincing people to support your policy if it looks like you tried to sneak it through.
- Perhaps more importantly, stealth campaigns don't get much real progress even if they do win. Quiet campaigns are almost always done by a very small group of activists (it is virtually impossible to keep a grassroots campaign quiet), so they don't do much to get the community organized. Since they don't put civil rights or relationship recognition for LGBT people on the public agenda, they don't start the public debate and they don't begin the process of changing the way most people think about LGBT people.

## Noisy approach

- Every campaign should try to get support from throughout the community. The issue here is not whether the campaign should have a broad support base, but whether it will be directed by LGBT people or by a broader coalition.
- If you plan to propose a domestic partnership policy, the campaign will almost surely be run LGBT people.
- Lots of heterosexual couples choose not to marry, and society's failure to recognize their relationships has consequences as tragic and unfair for them as it does for same- sex couples.
- Nonetheless, the availability of marriage, and the fact that most straight couples decide to get married at some point, has made it virtually impossible to get large numbers of unmarried heterosexual couples involved in domestic partnership campaigns.

## An LGBT Community Campaign or a Broad Coalition?



- But campaigns in which broad coalitions take a direct, “hands on” role are possible with civil rights campaigns.
- If you want a broad civil rights policy which either covers other groups for the first time, or which improves coverage for everyone, you will have to do a broad coalition campaign. You cannot hijack some one else’s issue. If you try it, you are likely to get their opposition, not their support (you are also likely to lose).
- By the same token, if you want a campaign to which other groups in the community will fully commit time, money and effort, it will have to be a campaign for their policy as well.

## Broad Approach

- So far, this section has assumed that LGBT people ought to be at the center of any campaign. That seems almost self evident. A campaign can't convincingly make the argument that LGBT people are entitled to equal treatment if we are invisible. As one Chicago organizer put it, "it's your law, and your lives and your stories the campaign will be about."
- A few organizers disagree. They feel that campaigns are most likely to succeed if the most visible proponents are heterosexuals. These organizers particularly favor having the public parts of the campaign promoted by individuals who, because they are either clerics or ethnic minorities, can easily refute some of the common opposition arguments.

## The Straight Strategy

- Size isn't really the critical difference between a grassroots campaign and a small group campaign. Grass roots campaigns are open; their meetings are public, as publicized as possible, and people are encouraged to join.
- You won't be able to have a large campaign if you don't run a grassroots campaign. But having an open campaign doesn't guarantee that it will be big.
- The greatest advantage of an open campaign, in addition to the potential that it could become large, is that it will help organize the LGBT community and teach as many people as possible how to make change. That, of course, is one of the primary goals of a policy campaign.

## The Campaign Organization: Symphony or One- Person Band?

- It is probably impossible to avoid creating a small group and giving it the authority to make certain important decisions. Negotiations and unforeseen events can't be managed without them.
- Politicians frequently insist on working with single individuals or at most small groups. While secrecy shouldn't be a big issue, you need to be careful with information if, for example, you want to time its release for maximum effect, or if you have a supporter who is nervous about being publicly identified.

## A Core Group to Run the Organization

- Should your campaign organization be an ongoing organization or a special organization created just for the campaign, to be disbanded when the campaign is over (or some hybrid of the two)?

The Future of the  
Organization – A  
One-Short or an  
Enduring Player?

1. Find a LGBTI issue
2. Find a place (city, state, country)
3. Keep the Rothman Models of Community Social Work intervention in mind
4. Develop an Action Plan for organizing and visualize it taking place with an outcome.
5. Use a space on the blackboard to draw your visualization, be **creative**, take a risk, any drawing is good.
6. Choose one person in your group to do the main presentation using your drawing while allowing others in your group to chime in when they want.

**Class Exercise**  
**Synthesize the**  
**articles in your**  
**group you**  
**brought to class :**