

STEP 11.

Letting the World Know: Planning and Executing Your Campaign Launch

TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 MONTH MINIMUM, LIKELY 3 MONTHS

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Youth decarceration is a bold goal. Achieving this goal impacts your entire community and cannot be accomplished “behind the scenes.” You will likely want to do some of your planning and information gathering out of the public eye, but once you have completed the other steps outlined in this Toolkit and your campaign is ready to go, you will want a highly visible launch.

A successful launch will demonstrate strong support and put pressure on your targets. The launch will allow you to raise awareness and generate additional support for your campaign. It also will bring your opposition out of the woodwork, which should be accounted for in your planning.

Tip: Having a highly visible public campaign launch offers community members an opportunity to take action to end youth incarceration. It also puts policymakers on notice that there are people who want change, and it lets the media know that there is a community resource on this issue.

You should develop a plan for your launch similar to your campaign plan, with tasks, timelines and responsible parties. You will need to decide **when** and **where** to launch, as well as **who** should be involved.

When the campaign will launch will be determined largely by your overall campaign plan and timing, but avoid major holidays. Try to hold the event mid-week (Tuesday through Thursday) and in the late morning (e.g., 10 am - 12 noon) to increase media participation. Also, factor in the timing of your legislative session and any key legislative or executive branch elections or events.

Tip: Leave extra time in your planning process to allow for any changes or issues that arise, and make sure to factor holidays and key dates into your planning for all of the steps leading up to the launch, not just the launch itself.

Where you hold the event can signal the tone of your campaign going forward and should reflect your value/principle statement and theory of change. Locations and types of events could include:

- A press conference in front of a youth prison to illustrate what the problem is
- A rally at the state capitol to demonstrate who should fix the problem
- A tour of a community-based alternative to incarceration to show what we should be investing in instead of incarcerating youth

Tip: To ensure your event is well-attended, ask partner organizations around the state to organize buses or caravans of supporters to attend.

Who will participate will vary depending on the strategies you’ve decided on, but it should include directly impacted youth and their families. Other individuals and groups could include community-based organizations, faith leaders, youth service providers, and juvenile justice system stakeholders. Look back at the power map you created for other individuals who could be invited to attend or participate.

Tip: Consider whether you want to have organizations or key individuals (e.g., legislators) sign on to the campaign—or a letter supporting its goals—in advance, to be shared at the event.

Launch of Wisconsin and New Jersey Prison Closure Campaigns

On March 22, 2017, *Youth Justice Milwaukee*, a campaign to close Wisconsin’s Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Youth Prisons, launched with an event at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum. Speakers included YJM’s leadership, national experts on youth incarceration and community-based alternatives, and a young man who was incarcerated in Wisconsin; there was also a roundtable with policymakers. Participants learned about an ACLU of Wisconsin lawsuit challenging the conditions at the prisons and engaged in a community visioning session. The event generated community support, as well as press coverage, which included information on how others could get involved.

On June 28, 2017, advocates in New Jersey launched their campaign to close Jamesburg and Hayes prisons with hundreds of people rallying in front of Jamesburg on the youth prison’s 150th anniversary, tied to the theme “150 years in enough!” Media accounts of the event highlighted the racial inequities and high costs of New Jersey’s juvenile prisons and noted that the campaign was led by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, with support from more than 40 other organizations.