

# STEP

# 12.

**Thinking Ahead:**  
Planning for Success  
Post-Launch

—  
TIME TO COMPLETE: ONGOING

Town Hall / Community Event  
- Reentry Task Force (Phil)  
- List + Serve  
- Social Media

- "Organizing Work" (Vanessa)  
- Film Screening  
- Partner w/groups  
- have food  
- have the event where the people are  
- have a speaker (i.e. new Jim Crow)

Community Media  
- Who's my interview  
- Who is my audience



This Toolkit is intended to help you prepare for and launch your campaign to close the youth prison(s) in your state; it does not address the day-to-day work of carrying out your campaign once it has started. There are some activities you will want to undertake during the pre-launch phase, however, that will position you for success during the active phase of your campaign. This includes understanding and planning for direct actions, documentation, and thinking about how you will ensure successful implementation once your campaign is successful.

## Essential Strategy: Direct Action

As discussed earlier, *direct actions* are events in which community members take action to effect change, and they will be a major way that your campaign achieves its goals. Direct actions can range from signing an online petition or participating in a coordinated social media push to holding a mass protest rally in front of a youth prison. The Midwest Academy’s *Organizing for Social Change* explains that in direct actions, “the people directly affected by the problem take action to solve it.” It notes that, out of all of the possible forms of community organizing, direct action is most concerned with challenging existing power relationships.

Even though you won’t be carrying out direct actions as part of your campaign planning, the work you are doing now will dictate the direct actions you build into your campaign and organizing plans. For example, your power mapping activity will inform which strategies might increase your campaign allies’ power (or help them realize their own power) or threaten the power of your opponents. You also may wish to include a direct action as part of your campaign launch (e.g., a rally or a petition).

Direct actions give your campaign supporters a chance to make their voices heard, call public attention to an issue, and put pressure on public decision-makers to make changes. Direct actions should be creative but also clearly related to the problems you are fighting and/or your proposed solution. Here are some examples of direct actions successfully used by other campaigns to close youth prisons, from the Youth First Initiative publication *Breaking Down the Walls*:

- In Louisiana, Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children held a New Orleans Jazz Funeral during which protestors mourned the lost freedom, dreams, and futures of their imprisoned youth.
- Youth from New York City’s Make the Road’s Youth Power Project were fighting the expansion of youth prisons. They spent their spring break showing up at the Mayor’s public events, asking him why he was spending \$65 million on 200 new youth detention beds. When he finally tried to answer, they recorded his fumbling response, and then used that video in their other campaign efforts.

- Community organizers in Mississippi who were working to close the Columbia Training School arranged for young people to play at a blues festival. In between sets, youth campaign members read letters from the girls at Columbia describing the physical and sexual abuse they experienced. The organizers asked the audience to sign petitions and to write letters to the girls at Columbia so they would know they were not forgotten.
- 18 years after the *Jerry M* lawsuit called attention to the deplorable conditions at the District of Columbia’s Oak Hill Youth Center, conditions were still terrible. The Justice for D.C. Youth Coalition held “Unhappy *Jerry M* Birthday” events to call attention to the lack of progress and to support their campaign to close Oak Hill permanently.

*Tip:* Although direct action organizing is a distinct strategy within your campaign, it also can support the other campaign strategies. For example, your legislative strategies can be bolstered by a “call-in campaign” where constituents phone their representatives to support (or oppose) a bill.

Some commonly used direct actions that can support campaigns to close youth prisons include:

- Action alerts
- Call-in days
- Petitions
- Coordinated social media action, e.g., Tweetstorms, Thunderclaps
- Events/rallies
- Educational forums
- Legislative action days (visits)
- Postcards

For sample materials and other ideas, please visit [www.youthfirstinitiative.org](http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org).

*Tip:* Websites like [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) and [www.colorofchange.org](http://www.colorofchange.org) can be platforms for your own direct actions, and they also highlight direct actions from other types of social justice campaigns, which may spur ideas for your own work.

## Essential Strategy: Documenting Your Campaign

As you start to plan your campaign, begin documenting your work and cataloging the actions you've undertaken, the people involved, and your successes and challenges. When you are ready to recount the story of your campaign's successes, as well as the challenges you've faced in doing this work, it will be much easier if you have documented your work all the way along. It is also crucial for fundraising purposes. And you will help to grow the movement by sharing the steps you undertook and your campaign's major accomplishments. More information on documenting and evaluating your campaign is available at [www.youthfirstinitiative.org](http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org).

*Tip:* Build documentation into every campaign activity by including it as part of your plan for the event. Invite campaign participants to document and share events from their own perspective and on their own platforms. (Ask for them to tag you, use a specific hashtag, send you copies, share to a group album, or otherwise enable you to see and track their documentation.)

## Essential Strategy: Implementation and Achieving Lasting Change

Once you achieve some or all of your campaign objectives, you will want to be involved in their implementation. Goals for this implementation stage—and steps you can take to prepare during your pre-launch and early campaign phases—include:

- Holding your state and decision-makers accountable for actually enacting promised changes

- \* *Invite key decision-makers to your events, starting with your launch, and try to get them to make public statements about the issue.*

- Ensuring that directly impacted youth and families are engaged in implementation

- \* *Ensure that youth and families are a key part of your campaign from the earliest planning stages, and that they get whatever training (media, leadership, etc.) they need to successfully engage.*

- Raising public awareness about the reform

- \* *Build media and community lists and relationships early and sustain them throughout your campaign.*

- Reviewing the practical steps planned for implementation to make sure changes are happening in the right way and at the right level

- \* *Make sure that policymakers, agency officials, and others charged with implementation know that you are watching them closely and are not afraid to publicly criticize actions that are harmful to youth.*

- \* *Bring in successful campaign leaders from other states—early on they can assure people that this can be done, and later on they can help figure out how.*

- Ensuring data is collected and shared on how the implementation is going

- \* *During your information gathering, note which information should be collected but isn't and push for that to happen.*

- \* *Develop relationships with the researchers who collect the data, and educate them about the issues so they can ensure you'll have what you need.*

- Recognizing the hard work that went into the changes and setting the stage for more reform

- \* *Celebrate small wins along the way, and create a culture of always looking to the next improvement that can be made.*

Just as you used multiple strategies in your campaign, the implementation of the changes you have won may require multiple strategies as well. The Youth First website includes examples of how past campaigns have accomplished this.