

# **The Medical Cannabis Advocate's Handbook**

## **ORGANIZING A PROTEST OR RALLY**

*Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.*

—Barack Obama



# ORGANIZING a DEMONSTRATION or RALLY

The people's right to peaceably assemble and to "petition the government for a redress of grievances" is one of the most important freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution's Bill of Rights. The right to freedom of association is a bedrock requirement of a functioning democracy. Without this right, the people lose one of the best tools for making their views known to those who hold power. Marching in the streets, holding demonstrations, staging protests—these are some of the most effective ways of at once showing support for a cause, drawing new people to that cause, and attracting the attention of those in positions of power.

The street march and the corner demonstration have a proud place in US history and in the history of social movements around the world. The abolitionist movement, the women's suffrage movement, the labor movement, Gandhi's anti-imperialist movement, the civil rights movement, and the movement against the Vietnam War all made good use of marches and demonstrations. Today, that tradition is alive and well, from the streets of Seattle to the avenues of Washington, DC.

## A. SOME TYPES OF DEMONSTRATIONS:

- **Vigil.** Candelight vigils are a well-known way to remember lost lives or commemorate other kinds of victims. They are generally solemn and reflective and intended as a way to honor a person or a group of persons. Community members and media feel a natural kinship and sympathy for these events.
- **Picket Line.** This type of demonstration consists largely of a group of people holding signs and chanting and marching



outside a building or office. If you have ever seen workers on strike, you have probably witnessed a picket line. Some picketers try to physically prevent others from entering the targeted facility, while others simply try to persuade them not to do so. Regardless of your tactic, ASA always advocates for peaceful picketing. You may be engaging in peaceful civil disobedience (breaking the law) if you block a sidewalk or entrance. Read more in "How to use the Tools in Your Toolbox."

- **March.** A march is much like a picket line—people hold signs and shout chants—except that the crowd is walking from one designated point to an agreed upon destination. Marches are usually a good idea when you are expecting a particularly large crowd or when you want to convey a message in the selection of your route or your destination. An example of a march is any of those that occur on the National Mall in Washington, DC such as the Million Man March.
- **Sit-ins and Other Types of Civil Disobedience.** When an injustice becomes so great that people of conscience can no longer tolerate it, non-violent civil disobedience can be a crucial tactic. Pioneered by American author Henry David Thoreau and made popular by Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., non-violent civil disobedience offers a way of taking direct action without resorting to force.



Probably the most well-known type of civil disobedience is the sit-in. Typically, protesters occupy the space of a decisionmaker—a corporate executive, a university president, or an elected official—make a demand, and refuse to leave until the demand is met or negotiated.

In recent years, civil disobedience has become more creative. Sometimes protesters chain themselves together to block an intersection or lock themselves to a building's entrance. Sometimes protesters scale down buildings to unfurl giant banners.

Important note: Civil disobedience is by definition unlawful. If you plan to organize a sit-in or similar demonstration, we encourage you to obtain legal advice in advance. We suggest the American Civil Liberties Union or the National Lawyers Guild.



## B. ORGANIZING A DEMONSTRATION OR RALLY

Identify why you are having an event is the most important step: An effective protest or rally must have a clear target and message (see the worksheet in this section). A clear target and message will help with the following steps:

o Identify and reach out to supporters/Create a coalition: As with organizing any event—whether a house party, teach-in, or protest—it is essential to bring together a key group of people who are committed to the project. It is also useful to reach out to other groups to see if they would like to contribute to the demon-

stration. Campaigns work best when they are anchored by a coalition of groups and individuals. Who else might be interested in helping to plan the demonstration? What natural allies do you have in the community? Try to find coalition partners sooner rather than later. Coalitions work best when everyone is involved in the process from the beginning.

Building coalitions among different constituencies is not only key to organizing a big demonstration, it is also essential to forming an energetic and broad-based grassroots movement.

- **Assign tasks and determine roles.** It is useful to make sure everyone knows their assigned tasks. When organizing a demonstration, you probably want one person responsible for MCing the protest itself; one person in charge of getting the required permits and, if necessary, being in contact with the police; one person responsible for working with the media; and one responsible for signs, art, and chants. Everyone should be responsible for spreading the word to the general public.
- **Location-location-location.** Permits and officials: You want to hold your demonstration where there is a lot of traffic—auto traffic, pedestrians, or both. Because you want to connect with as many people as possible, visibility is the key. A lousy location can undermine even the most well organized demonstration.

It is important that you know your rights regarding the use of space, whether you are organizing a demonstration on a college campus or along a public street. Many towns require permits for demonstrations, especially if you will be using amplified sound such as bullhorns. Permits are almost always required for marches since they may disrupt traffic. Talk to the campus or community police about your demonstration and determine what permits you will need. You may not need a permit for a protest or rally on public land, but there may be other laws that impact your assembly. It is almost always illegal to

trespass on private property, block entrances to buildings, or impede traffic on a sidewalk or street.

If you are planning to risk arrest, you should make extra arrangements. It is a wise idea to have trained legal observers on hand to take notes and document the event. The National Lawyers Guild can provide suggestions on finding legal observers: [www.nlg.org](http://www.nlg.org) or 212-679-5100. Never engage in violence (verbal or physical) or vandalism. This will upstage your message and complicate your legal situation.

- **Get the word out:** Turnout is crucial. Having a large number of people at your protest demonstrates broad public support for your cause. Both the media and the decisionmakers you are trying to influence will be looking closely at the number of people at your protest to see if you have real community backing. Develop a specific strategy for outreach and publicity and set a goal for the number of people you want at the demonstration. Then create a plan for reaching out to 10 to 100 times as many people as you hope will be there. Assume that only a fraction of the people you contact will actually show up.

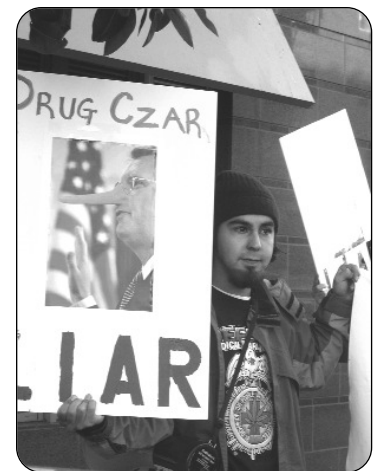
Key to a successful outreach strategy is the production of materials like event fliers, direct mail invitations, email invitations, and public service announcements. Distribute the fliers as much as possible among friends and colleagues to be disseminated publicly at coffee shops, community centers, bulletin boards, cultural centers, other events, churches, schools, universities, etc. In this day and age, you should also be using web pages, social networking sites, and email to promote your event.

You can use the press as a tool to get the word out. Write a press release and send it to campus and local media to get the media to cover the event. Send a flier or public service announcement to radio stations and community newspapers to get the event announced on the air or in the events section of the

newspaper. The sooner you have materials ready, the better, especially in regard to media.

- **Speakers and Schedule:** Whether you're holding a solemn vigil or a loud march, you will want speakers at your event. Gather a group of people representing a wide range of constituencies—young people, old people, people of color, working class people, professionals, etc. Just as a large number of attendees illustrates support for your cause, so does a diverse range of speakers. Decide on the order in which you want your speakers to address the crowd. Give each speaker about two or three minutes and ask them to keep it short. Remember that this is a demonstration, not a teach-in.

Also, always make sure you have an emcee who is in charge of the speakers' order. It's this person's responsibility to bring a bullhorn or amplifier and to keep the program moving smoothly. Letting an uninvited speaker address the crowd is risky. You never know what an unvetted speaker may say. Try not to let strangers, sartorial nonconformists, or malcontents get control of the microphone unless you have given the matter very careful consideration.



- **Slogans and Chanting:** Don't assume that you will suddenly think up chants in the heat of the protest. This won't happen, so you need to prepare chants beforehand. A few days before the demonstration, set aside some time to brainstorm catchy slogans that can be learned quickly by a crowd. Be as creative as you can. Even if you're working on a

very serious issue, it's always a good idea to come up with a chant that might make people smile. Keep in mind that the passersby are people you want to educate, not alienate. Do not use profanity or otherwise offensive language.

Make copies of the chants to give out to fellow demonstrators. If you are not an extrovert, have someone in charge of leading people in the chants.

- **Signs and other materials:** Colorful signs are essential for capturing people's attention. Make signs that have bold letters and clear messages—the fewer words, the better. You can paint your signs by hand or enlarge photos that illustrate your issue. Make sure your signs are legible from far away and make for good photo-ops. As with chants, the use of sarcasm or a play on words can be an effective way of communicating (see Art and action section below).



your demonstration more fun for those involved. Plan ahead to make art and visual aids before the event (see Art and action section below).

- **Creative actions, skits and songs:** It's always a good idea to think of new ways to express your point of view. Maybe you don't want to have another protest with people chanting and shouting. Perhaps you want something more original.

Skits and other kinds of performance provide an excellent way to grab people's interest. Write and perform a short play that explores your issue. For example, anti-sweatshop activists have organized "sweatshop fashion shows" to show people who the real fashion victims are. A song and dance performance is another fun way to attract attention and get your point across.

- **Literature and handouts.** A bright, colorful sign may catch someone's attention, but then what? Most people won't have the time to stop and chat about your cause. That's why it's important that you bring educational materials to hand out—some sort of postcard, fact sheet, or flier that discusses your issue. The average person on their lunch break may not be able to hang out and learn about the issue, but if you give them something to stick in their back pocket, chances are that they will read it later.
- **Invite the media/prepare press packets:** A well-organized demonstration on a busy street corner can communicate with hundreds of people. But if the media covers your demonstration, you can reach 1,000 times as many. Make sure you designate someone to be responsible for doing outreach to the media. For details on how to do effective media outreach, see the Media How To in this guide.

On the day of the demonstration, make sure you have plenty of press packets prepared. A



- **Puppets and other props.** Life-size puppets offer a fantastic way to dramatize your issue, and they make a great visual for television cameras. Other kinds of props like giant banners will also enliven your demonstration. Making art a central part of your protest will help you attract more attention. Art will also make

press packet should have all the background material a reporter would need to cover your story. Include your original press release about the event (which should explain why you are protesting) and also any fact sheets or other campaign materials you may have. At least one person should be responsible for handing out press packets to reporters and also getting the reporters' names so you can contact them about future events.

(excerpted from Global Exchange "how to organize a demonstration" [www.globalexchange.org/war\\_peace\\_democracy/oil/howtodemo.pdf](http://www.globalexchange.org/war_peace_democracy/oil/howtodemo.pdf))

### C. UNDERSTANDING CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Make sure you understand the difference between non-arrestable actions and civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is any action that involves breaking a law in order to change the law. Protesting in public is not civil disobedience. However, forming a human



blockade to disrupt entrance and exit from a government building is. Specifically, civil disobedience constitutes

incommoding, disorderly conduct, or trespassing. Civil disobedience has a long and sometimes controversial history in the United States-- a tactic used frequently during the Civil Rights Movement, anti-war activism, global justice and HIV/AIDS advocacy.

Let's be clear on one point—any individual in possession of a state medical marijuana license that authorizes the use, acquisition, cultivation or distribution of marijuana is committing an act of federal civil disobedience. Under the right circumstances and when it is appropriate, ASA encourages peaceful and non-violent acts of civil disobedience. ASA does not endorse or engage in any acts of violence or vandalism.

Any tool you use—direct or symbolic—can be lawful activism or civil disobedience. It is important that you are clear on which tool

## Organizing A Demonstration CHECKLIST

1. Fill out action planning worksheet
2. Identify other groups who may want to co-sponsor
3. Determine roles and assign tasks.
  - a. MC
  - b. Logistics coordinator: (Permits, water, bull-horns)
  - c. Police Liaison
  - d. Art committee
  - e. Outreach and promotion committee
  - f. Media liaison
4. Prepare a press kit and why we are here flyers for the event
5. Get the word out
  - a. Emails
  - b. Social Networking
  - c. Posters and fliers
  - d. Press advisory
6. Compile day of demonstration materials (Leaflets, sign-in sheets, copies of slogans and chants, signs, props, and banners)
7. Have fun!

you are using, when, and why. Direct action incorporating civil disobedience is a relatively confrontational approach to activism. You can be cited, arrested, even go to jail for engaging in civil disobedience. Some activists never use these tools because they do not fit with their values or comfort levels. And, that is OK.

## D. ACTION PLANNING WORKSHEET

### 1. Action Targets

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Key Messages

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 6. Slogans

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
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### 3. Action Themes

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- d. \_\_\_\_\_  
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### 7. Chants

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. \_\_\_\_\_  
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### 4. WHEN AND WHERE:

Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date and time: \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Visuals (Signs, Banners, Puppets, etc.)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. \_\_\_\_\_  
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## **E. CREATING ART FOR ACTIONS**

### **1. Art Should Communicate Your Message...Not Blur It.**

When organizing an action, make sure that your political message will be understood in every possible photograph that can be taken of your action. Make sure that signs, leaflets, banners, and t-shirts are all on message.

For example:

- If we are asking for compassion, does it make sense to have a sign that says "F\*\*\* the DEA"?
- If we are saying that medical cannabis is a separate issue from legalization, should we wear shirts that say "legalize pot"?

It is helpful to 'think backwards'—imagine what the picture is you most want to see on the front page of the paper the next day and tailor your message toward that end. Accept it: You're not going to be able to communicate all the points and shades of gray about the issue you'd like to. Figure out the most important point and how to convey it concisely.

Examples of Effective Messages:

- Hands off our medicine!
- Safe access: It's the law
- We are Patients, Not Criminals

### **2. Types of Action Art**

#### **a. Leaflets**

One of the most important tasks that is often overlooked is leafleting the public during demonstrations and actions. Activists too often end up leafleting other activists about other issues of possible interest, instead of concentrating on communicating to the as-yet-unconvinced or not yet organized. A good leaflet should include a number of elements:

1. Visual appeal. Make it pretty and legible and people will want to read it.
2. Explain clearly what the demonstration is about, in as few words as possible. People either read a leaflet immediately upon receiving it, or not at all. Try and make it as 'catchy' as possible. If more explanation is desired, put that on the back or include

a web address, and those that are drawn in will read the details.

3. Include what our arguments are to our opponents; give information and facts that they can use themselves.
4. Include your group's contact information and any action that allies could take: i.e., your next meeting time and place, names and numbers of representatives that should be called, etc. Use leaflets as a tool to organize, not only to inform!

#### **b. Signs**

There are a variety of ways to make signs. Here are some possibilities:

1. Choose your canvas. Poster board works well, but cardboard cut from old boxes can be just as useful and is much more cost effective. Not all signs have to be square; think about shapes that can further your message, like stop signs, a pill bottle etc.
2. Lettering. Use paints or thick markers. Choose bold colors (red, black, dark green) or bright colors (yellow, orange, pink) outlined in black.
3. Messaging. Keep it simple and short! Your audience will lose interest if you write a novel.
4. Images. These can add to or take away from your message. Again, simplicity is often more effective. Use images that are obvious, such as a marijuana leaf with a red cross or a picture of a well-recognized public official.

#### **c. Making Protest Banners**

1. Choose strong material. Paint drop cloth works great. You can usually pick this up at a hardware store for about \$20, which buys you a 9X12 canvass.
2. Cut the 9x12 canvass in half and tie (or sew) together the pieces to form a longer 4.5x24ft long banner.
3. Attach grommets, which are also available at a hardware store. It's best to place the grommets about 3 feet apart from one another along the top of banner.
4. If the banner is to be hung, use rope or zip-ties.

5. Remember, it is illegal in some places to affix timber or metal poles to protest banners or signs in street marches. This can be overcome by using the cardboard tubes from rolls of cloth.
6. Paint your lettering! Keep it simple and short so that it can be seen from long distances. Black or red on white background is the easiest to see.
7. If the banner is to be out in the weather for some weeks, then it is advisable to paint all the material with a coat of paint before adding the text to prevent mildew.
8. **Weights:** You want to attach weights to the banner to prevent it from flapping or blowing in the wind. The cheapest solution is to attach plastic bags filled with some rice or sand to the bottom of the banner. **WARNING:** Make sure these weights are securely attached. It is a felony to drop or throw something from an overpass into moving traffic.
9. If you are making several banners at the same time, it may be advantageous to make a stencil and use a small paint roller. Banners made using a stencil usually look better but it still takes time to make a stencil and then touch up the banner where the paint has run under the stencil.

#### **d. T-shirts**

Labor Unions have used matching t-shirts for years as a way to highlight their numbers in a crowd and give participants a sense of solidarity. Matching t-shirts make good action visuals because they identify each individual as a part of a large group and provide another opportunity to display messages. You can have t-shirts made, but if cost is an issue, you can also just write on plain t-shirts with markers or use paint and stencils.

#### **e. 2D Effigies: Making giant puppet-head likenesses of specific people**

*by David Solnit*

Instructions for making a two-sided flat head with cardboard hands, a standard frame, and basic tunic costume.

1. Find & clip a photo of person you want to puppetize. A head-on shot that is black & white and clear is best.
2. Enlarge image at copy shop with oversize printers. Enlarge repeatedly on regular machine until you fill the space of an 11 x 17 sheet.
3. Then enlarge this sheet on an oversize printer to the desired size. For a ten to twelve foot puppet we usually enlarge the head as big as will fit on a 36 inch wide paper. Make two.
4. Cut the image out. Round out the hair. Trace around the edge of the face onto 2 sheets of cardboard without folds. Cut out with sharp utility knife.
5. Wheatpaste the face onto the cardboard, trying to avoid wrinkles.
6. Make a cardboard tube to fit the puppet frame. Glue & staple or tape the tube vertically on the back of your face, wheatpasted to cardboard once it is dry. Now glue & staple or tape your second piece of cardboard onto the back, stapling and gluing around the edges.
7. Paint, like paint by numbers, using watered down latex or acrylic paints. Highlight the light areas and darken the shadows. Leave the texture of the photocopy visible through the paint.



#### **Puppetry & Street Theatre Resources**

The Puppeteers Cooperative

[www.gis.net/%7Epuppetco/index.html](http://www.gis.net/%7Epuppetco/index.html)

This web page has tons of sketches showing how to make various kinds of puppets.

Wise Fool Puppet Intervention

[www.zeitgeist.net/wfca/wisefool.htm](http://www.zeitgeist.net/wfca/wisefool.htm)

Wise Fool Puppet Intervention make beautiful puppets, as well as masks, stilts, and other street theatre props. A handbook is available through the website.