



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GUIDE FOR ZERO WASTE



ecocyclesolutionshub.org

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

– Margaret Mead



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hether you're passionate about mitigating climate change, building healthy soils, keeping plastics out of the ocean or creating green jobs, Zero Waste strategies can support your efforts and improve our world.

Zero Waste is one of the fastest, easiest and most cost-effective local solutions to some of the greatest challenges facing our planet. As a nation and world, we need to stop wasting and start recovering materials quickly, prevent greenhouse gas emissions immediately, and redesign our community systems for sustainability NOW.

And to make this change, the Zero Waste movement needs citizen advocates and grassroots initiatives to transform our throwaway society.

From climate change to plastics in the ocean, there is an urgency to our environmental, social and economic challenges that calls to each of us to move beyond just changing our behavior as individuals and to get more involved with our community decision making.

This organizing guide empowers everyday citizens to become successful advocates by offering the basic skills needed to create change in your community.

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**// We live in a web of ideas;
a fabric of our own making.**

—Joseph Chilton Pearce

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ORGANIZING FOR COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Community organizing is different than a community education program. Community organizing is a process by which people investigate and act together to change their communities and society. It is the targeted, strategic work of a small group of dedicated citizens working cooperatively with city staff and elected officials to effect change. Through community organizing people meet others who share similar values and interests. Together they identify common goals and learn tools to build a group and participate in public life.



→ **Learn more about the principles of community organizing.**

Community organizing is an art and a science in and of itself. Our goal is to walk you through, step-by-step, how the fundamental principles of community organizing can apply to Zero Waste actions and outline a game plan for success. This short guide doesn't do justice to the great work of community organizing groups across the country and the world, but it's a strong foundation to get you started.

So, what does the road ahead look like? Here's the overall plan:

- **THE GOAL:** Convince local elected officials to adopt a Zero Waste policy or program, or invest in infrastructure.
- **THE STRATEGY:** Find like-minded citizens and organizations to support the goal. Find successful examples and compile the facts. Understand the hurdles that need to be overcome. Identify opportunities for compromise.
- **THE PUSH:** Engage municipal staff. Speak with elected officials. Educate the whole community through positive media. Hold a community event to demonstrate the support of the public. Appear before the city council.
- **THE WIN:** Be vigilant. Have integrity. Show civility. Harness the power of people to create democratic change. Count the votes and support the city council in making the right decision. Celebrate your accomplishments and recognize your partners.

Together we can help you find or create a community group, partner with your local government, create momentum in your community, and work together to make real progress toward Zero Waste. Let's get moving!



YOU'RE NOT ALONE. Share stories and challenges, get expert advice and find tools and tips for advocating for Zero Waste initiatives at the **Eco-Cycle Solutions Hub.**

WORKING TOGETHER AROUND SHARED INTERESTS

You have an idea about how to improve your community. Maybe it's a recycling program at your apartment complex, a composting program for businesses, a fee on plastic bags, or a community Zero Waste goal. If your vision involves a new policy, program or infrastructure, you'll need community support to turn your idea into reality.

Zero Waste is a community effort. This guide is intended to help citizens work with each other and their local government to adopt Zero Waste strategies. It can also help elected officials and city staff work with citizen groups by being transparent about the process and everyone's role. Let's look at what each group can do:

CITIZENS	ELECTED OFFICIALS	CITY STAFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ empower local government to take action by organizing and standing up in public as a group to ask for change;→ keep the process on track and hold government accountable to take measurable action;→ include young people, local business leaders and social or environmental organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ hold the most power to create change;→ need the community's support to adopt new initiatives;→ want to hear from educated, organized citizens with sound proposals that support the community's established goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ handle the technical content details of the proposed initiative;→ work closely to answer the questions of elected officials;→ implement or oversee the change.

The key to successful community organizing to advance Zero Waste goals is to understand how these three groups come together and move forward. To do so, you need to understand each group's self-interest in coming to the table. Self-interest isn't a bad thing—it's what drives people to participate. The more you know about their motivations, the better you can work together to create change.

Self-interests are the "why" behind our actions. You need to keep them front and center in order to maintain energy and momentum through the process of creating new policies, programs and infrastructure. When the going gets tough, it's our motivations that will pull us over the obstacles.

The motivations may be different for the different sectors in your community, and that's okay. One of the strengths of the Zero Waste vision is its mass appeal across a broad range of social, economic and environmental issues.

SELF-INTERESTS IN ZERO WASTE

We all know and understand financial self-interests, and there is a lot of that in the \$400 billion waste industry. It's safe to say that if the free market were working to create a Zero Waste world, this guide wouldn't be necessary. Since that's not the case, we need to explore the community's other motivations in creating a Zero Waste future. There are a lot of them:

- **Mitigate climate change**
- **Create local jobs**
- **Develop new business and entrepreneur opportunities**
- **Reduce air and water pollution**
- **Protect limited natural resources & ecosystems**
- **Promote social and environmental justice**
- **Replenish soil to grow healthy food**
- **Extend the life of existing landfills**

As you build relationships with your citizen, government and business partners, start first with understanding their self-interests and use your shared or complementary self-interests as the foundation for a strong relationship.

INSIDE-OUTSIDE PARTNERSHIP

The Zero Waste journey should ideally be spearheaded by at least two Zero Waste champions working together. We call this the “inside-outside” partnership strategy. The inside champion is from the public sector (either staff or elected) and the outside champion is a citizen or citizen group. Let’s call them the Government Champion and the Community Champion.

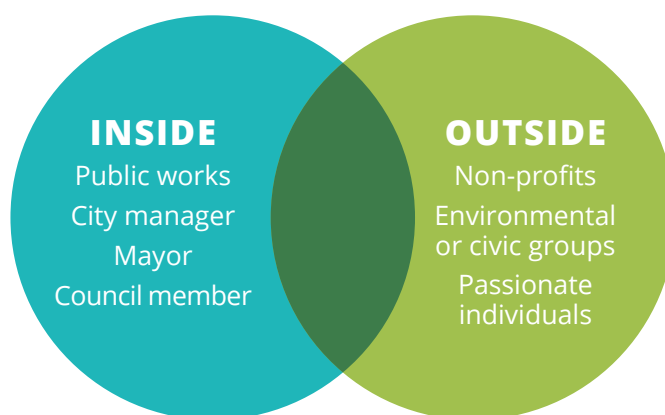
Eco-Cycle has used the inside-outside partnership strategy successfully for decades to grow our local recycling programs in a region where the economics are truly stacked against us—in Colorado, our costs to landfill are among the lowest in the U.S. at less than \$20/ton. It certainly wasn’t the free market that helped us achieve success in diverting material from the landfill. Our success has come from the partnerships between citizens, Eco-Cycle and our local governments.

WE RECOMMEND THE INSIDE-OUTSIDE STRATEGY FOR FOUR REASONS:

- 1** We have first-hand experience in how successful it can be.
- 2** It is one of the most effective ways to bring together the two largest proponents for change in a community—citizens and government.
- 3** It is a powerful community organizing tool because each side brings to the table a unique power and ability to create and communicate a new vision for the future.
- 4** It establishes a platform for creating change that helps sustain momentum over time as the community progresses toward Zero Waste.

On the inside, government officials and staff can craft the public policies, pass the ordinances and implement the programs. On the outside, citizens can build community support for the initiative, demonstrate to the government the many benefits of choosing this path, and help city staff and council members feel good about leading the community in this direction.

The inside-outside partnership is an important long-term relationship for creating change in your community. When the citizens and the government representing them are working together, the best interests of the community are kept at the forefront and prioritized above private profits that create social or environmental harm.



It's best to establish this inside-outside partnership early on in your effort to create change in your community. So, as a citizen or community group, how do you find your inside partner? There is no one answer to that question. It depends on your networks, your relationships and your community dynamics. Start first by talking to the people you know about local government leaders and staff, and look for those who share a common self-interest in improving your community. Maybe there's a city council member who's already championed an environmental issue. Maybe it's a staff member in the public works department or a sustainability coordinator.

Your inside partner plays a critical role in supporting your community group and transforming your idea into action. Meet with them often and keep them well-informed of your efforts. We'll identify the key opportunities for you and your inside partner to work together throughout the organizing process.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

As a citizen, one of your main roles is to build public support for your initiative. The best way to do that is to create a community group, and the process of building one is called community organizing. First we'll talk a little bit about why this is so important, and then we'll guide you step-by-step through the process of forming your group and empowering your group to create change.

POWER OF SMALL GROUPS

As an individual, you don't have the power to change the world, but groups of individuals do. Groups are a stronger reflection of the community's interests and have more power to collaborate with public officials and staff. Plus, groups help you maintain the momentum in creating change when you hit the bumps in the road.

We know that a community group sounds like a big undertaking, but before you throw the idea out the window, consider this: just seven people can move your community toward Zero Waste.

That's it. We're not talking about an army, just seven passionate advocates for Zero Waste.



Green teams, like this one in Wayne, Nebraska, are a great example of citizens working together to improve their community.



Just **seven people can move your community toward Zero Waste.**

Seven isn't just a magical number. It's backed by experience and proven results—small groups of about seven members are the most effective at making change in their community. Successful small groups create an atmosphere that affirms each participant's contribution, provides the time for individuals to share, and makes it possible for participants to listen carefully to each other. We'll use seven as our baseline number, but don't worry if your group is a little smaller or larger. A good rule of thumb is somewhere between five to nine dedicated citizen leaders.

You probably already know seven people in your town who want a Zero Waste future, or you can at least imagine that these people are out there. With this guide, we can help you discover your group, engage your elected officials, and move your community toward Zero Waste.

POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Community organizing comes down to one defining principle: There's power in relationships. Your one-on-one interactions are pivotal to your success. We cannot emphasize this enough—emails may reach thousands of people, but they rarely make the personal connections that bring people out to public events. **Your phone calls and personal connections are what matter most to your success.**

Here's why personal interactions are so key—people are inherently motivated to act for two fundamental reasons:

1. THEIR SELF-INTEREST IN THE OUTCOME. They want a recycling bin in their school or composting at their business. They stand to directly gain from the action, so they're motivated to be involved.

2. THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS. Volunteering to join a group is a social act. People want to be connected to others who share their values in the community. And people are much more likely to get involved, stay committed and actively participate if they have a personal bond with any or all members of the group. This is why your one-on-one relationships are the foundation for building your group.

Organizing is about people, and people are about issues. You can discover people's self-interests and motivations by listening. Listen to the issues that people care about and then tie those issues back to your idea. The secret to recruiting people to join your group is to relate your initiative to their values. You are turning their frustrations or dreams into action. Their emotional connection back to what they want is what keeps them involved and motivated.

Your group will thrive when you have people vested in both the cause and the relationships. Your core group starts with those most heavily invested in the outcome—your passionate Zero Waste advocates—but your strength in numbers comes from your ability to build relationships.

One-on-one conversations are the best tool to recruit people to join your group.





Your community group is an inclusive effort where everyone's ideas are welcome and all members contribute to the group's success.

BUILDING SUPPORT: FORMING A GROUP

Now that we've covered the reasons why a group is critical, let's put this into practice and move from an individual with an idea to a group with a campaign goal.

STEP 1: START SHARING YOUR IDEA

- **Start talking.** It's as simple as that. Share your idea with your family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, worship community, and everyone or anyone in between. This doesn't have to be anything formal: Chat up your idea over a beer or while you're watching your kids play soccer. At this point you are simply looking to gauge interest in the idea and see if it has the legs to grow into something more.
- **Listen to feedback and refine your vision.** Maybe your idea is too broad and you need to narrow down to a smaller first step. Maybe your idea should be bigger. Listen intently to the concerns and input of others, and work to clarify your vision and explanation of how it can benefit the community.
- **Jot down who supports your idea and who doesn't.** Start to think through how this might play out in the community at large.
- In all your conversations, portray yourself as educated, supportive, open to ideas, curious, helpful and friendly.


STEP 2: FIND PASSIONATE PEOPLE AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

You're becoming more comfortable talking to others about your idea, you're refining your vision based on the feedback you've received, and you're gaining support for your initiative. Now it's time to take your message to a broader audience. Set up coffee meetings with potential leaders, people you know have an interest in your issue. And, just like with your friends, ask them who they know who would be interested in getting involved.

Look toward community groups, too, starting first with the most receptive—existing groups advocating environmental and/or social causes:

- Look into meeting with a member of your local government green team, environmental board or other quasi-governmental board. Ask your government partner if there are town or county committees that you should make aware of this effort. Conservation commissions typically have responsibilities that overlap with Zero Waste goals, but there may be new groups focused on sustainability, resilience or energy that should be briefed as well.
- Contact environmental and social non-profits to see if their mission might intersect with your effort. Look beyond environmental groups to organizations that promote jobs training and economic development.
- Ask to give a presentation to a local community group like the Rotary Club, Keep America Beautiful or Sierra Club. Even if these groups as a whole cannot support your idea, work to build relationships with individual group members who may be interested.

TIP



Getting another local group to endorse your campaign is great, but don't just rely on them and their email list. Remember, people very rarely turn out because of emails—they respond to a personal connection to the group and the cause. Your interactions are the most important part of finding the people who will actually show up when you need them most.

Here are a few ways to find others who might share your passion and vision:

- Look for Meetup groups, Facebook groups or other community forums for like-minded people working toward sustainability, social justice or other great causes.
- Reach out to green businesses.
- Don't assume someone is not interested. Take the chance to talk to everyone you meet about your idea. The greater the diversity of your support base, the greater your chance of success, so try to engage community members from all sectors and walks of life.



ONLINE RESOURCES AT [ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG](https://ecocyclesolutionshub.org):

Principles of community organizing
Meeting one-on-one guide

Creating a community group—phone and coffee meeting scripts

STEP 3: DETERMINE THE SIZE AND SCOPE OF YOUR EFFORT

You're gaining momentum and interest in your idea. Before things start moving too quickly, now is a good time to take stock of the size and scope of your effort, so you have a better understanding of the challenges at hand.

- **Talk to your early supporters about who might oppose this effort.** The strength of your opposition will play into your overall campaign strategy and messaging, so that no one (including your community leaders) is blind-sided by any opposition.
- **Brainstorm hurdles that you might encounter.** What are the downsides to your action? Pay particular attention to who is financially vested in the status quo. Are there ways to mitigate any negative side effects?
- **Discuss these issues with your inside partner** and ask about the other factors at play including other policies under consideration, election campaigns, state-level actions, contract renewals, etc.
- **Consider logistical issues**, such as how many homes or businesses might be affected and whether current facilities can support the change or if new infrastructure is needed.

Campaigns for community change may take a few months or they may take a couple of years, depending on the complexity of the issue, the interests of your elected officials, the need for infrastructure or other factors. A good rule of thumb is to allow at least six months between the formation of a group and when the ultimate action takes place.

If you think you'll be in the campaign for more than a year, you'll want to break your action steps into measurable chunks. This way your group can take concrete steps forward and see the change happen. By celebrating these interim successes, you can keep everyone engaged over the longer haul.

WHAT TO EXPECT FOR OPPOSITION

Most of the opposition to Zero Waste initiatives falls into these categories:

- ➡ **Citizens opposed to any level of government involvement or mandates**
- ➡ **Trash haulers who have a financial interest in the status quo**
- ➡ **Citizens opposed to potential cost increases**

In all these cases, your job is to show there is more community support for the initiative than opposition. This is why your community group and organizing efforts are so important.

You need to prove that your initiative provides the greatest good to the greatest number. Talk about successes in other communities and the specific benefits of the program you're proposing. This can be to improve services, create equity, lower costs, meet sustainability goals and any other benefits.

Use the [Eco-Cycle Solutions Hub](https://ecocyclesolutionshub.org) to find success stories in other communities, connect with other community groups to hear about how they overcame any opposition or similar obstacles, and find experts to help strategize around your specific community circumstances.



Every community has passionate people who are already working to make a difference.



STEP 4: HOLD AN EXPLORATORY GROUP MEETING

You've met with people around town and talked up your idea. The next step is to hold your first formal meeting. This is where you'll bring all your connections together to present the campaign idea, outline the vision, goals and roles in community organizing, and ask for their commitment to the campaign. People become energized by being part of a group that shares a common vision, and this starts to build momentum and excitement for your campaign.

- **Your goal is to find seven committed leaders to be your core group.** To get there, aim first for 15 or so people at your exploratory meeting, so you can identify those who are the most committed.
 - » In large cities, you might hold exploratory meetings in a few major neighborhoods, so that you can form a few groups of seven committed leaders. This builds upon the personal connections in the smaller “neighborhood communities” in most major cities, and also helps to keep your groups a manageable size.
- **Focus your initial meetings on the big picture goals** of your project and how it will benefit the community. Take caution not to get bogged down in the details of the process or the implementation. You will investigate and learn together as you go forward.
- **Ask participants to share their personal self-interest in the issue.** It is important that these leaders understand each other's passions for the issue and practice sharing their personal stories.
- **Cover the basics of community organizing** and then introduce the goal of holding a community action meeting in the coming months. This will be a public meeting, hosted by your group, to show the community-wide support for addressing the issue at hand and to publicly ask your decision makers for a formal commitment to the proposed change. The community action meeting is your big moment to show that you have broad-based community support for your initiative, so having a large public turnout is crucial. Your organizing efforts should be geared toward making this event an overwhelming success.
- **Cover the details of the organizing effort**, so everyone understands their level of commitment. Talk about your timeline—you're seeking a specific action in a specific timeframe, not an ongoing, open-ended commitment.
- **Name your group** to establish credibility, build camaraderie, and deepen people's personal investment to the initiative.
- **End your initial meeting by scheduling a follow-up meeting** to train leaders on conducting house meetings. Each leader will hold a house meeting with about 10 friends, family members, neighbors and colleagues to discuss the issue and recruit people to come to the action meeting.



ONLINE RESOURCES AT **ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG:**

Imagine the victory exercise
Sample timeline for campaign action steps
Sample exploratory meeting agenda

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT: HOUSE MEETINGS

Congratulations! Now that you have a new group (with the name of your choosing), your next goal is to expand your reach into the community. This is where you can take the power of seven people and turn it into a community network.

House meetings are a great tool to amplify your message and build support for your community action meeting, which is your main action goal once your group is rolling. Each initial leader who attended the exploratory meeting starts to talk to their friends and recruits about 10 people for a house meeting about the initiative, where they then ask attendees to commit to coming to the community action meeting. After the first house meetings, those attendees then talk to their friends and ask them to commit to coming to the community action meeting. Suddenly, you have a solid network of community support! Here's how to get there:



STEP 1: PREPARE FOR YOUR HOUSE MEETINGS AS A GROUP

- **Focus your first group meetings on three key areas:**

- » Give more background and history on your campaign topic, so everyone in your leadership group feels like an expert.
- » Promote the basics of community organizing—how to talk to people, how to get them involved, and the importance of your one-on-one conversations.
- » Outline your campaign plan to build a larger network, meet with elected officials, and hold a community action meeting before asking city council to take action.

- **Meet frequently to maintain momentum**, at least every two weeks and more often if necessary. Keep meetings brief and constructive—be respectful of people's time and specific in what you're asking them to do.

TIP

Even though you're meeting as a group, it can be helpful to continue to meet or touch base with group members one-on-one to strengthen their commitment. When in doubt, one-on-one conversations are the cure.



ONLINE RESOURCES AT [ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG](https://ecocyclesolutionshub.org):

Community group sample meeting agenda
Sample agenda for first meeting
Sample agenda for second meeting
House meeting agenda and organizing principles

- **Share and rotate responsibilities** at the meetings to strengthen the group and promote leadership roles. Dividing up tasks, no matter how small, can empower the other members of your group and give everyone a greater sense ownership in the campaign. Designate someone to take notes, be the press contact, reach out to city council, schedule meetings, send emails, create a Facebook group, design flyers, etc.
- **Conduct a training** on house meetings and practice running a house meeting as a group before everyone hosts their own meeting.
- **Hold each other accountable to the tasks assigned.** Check in with each leader on their progress with house meetings and on getting commitments from others to attend the community action meeting.

STEP 2: HOLD HOUSE MEETINGS TO EXPAND YOUR REACH

House meetings are a powerful tool to achieve these three goals:

- 1) expand your network reach;
- 2) deepen the engagement of your community group; and
- 3) set the stage for your larger citizen's community action meeting.

Aim to hold your house meetings 2-4 weeks before your community action meeting to keep the momentum strong. Encourage group members to invite about 10 friends, family, co-workers and neighbors. Group leaders can buddy up to hold house meetings as well.

It can be helpful to use your group meetings to practice recruiting people to the house meetings. Here are some tips on how to help your group leaders reach out to their networks and attract people to their house meetings:

- **Empower group members to hold face-to-face conversations** with their friends, neighbors, co-workers and anyone willing to lend an ear. Their goal is to understand how and why someone feels about particular topic. The group can use this information to then gauge community sentiment about an issue.
- **Ask for action from everyone you meet** and customize it to the individual and their level of comfort. Ask people to commit to:
 - » Attending your house meeting to learn more about the campaign
 - » Attending your community action meeting
 - » Hosting their own house meeting
 - » Staying informed about the campaign on your email list



TIP

Group members are often tempted to rely on posters in the community, emails to friends and other passive outreach strategies. Emphasize the importance of one-on-one connections as your primary strategy. Passive efforts can never substitute for one-on-one interactions.



ONLINE RESOURCES AT [ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG](https://ecocyclesolutionshub.org):

How to hold a house meeting
Meeting one-on-one guide
Creating a community group—phone and coffee meeting scripts

HERE'S HOW TO MAKE YOUR HOUSE MEETING EFFECTIVE AND FUN:

- **Timeline:** Keep the meetings brief and informal. Share light snacks or happy hour together. Aim for no more than one hour.
- **Welcome and education:** Gather everyone together and thank them for coming. Talk about the background of the campaign and the larger community group.
- **Personal connection:** Talk about what the campaign means to you. Make a personal connection to the action and encourage others to think about whether they feel the same way. Talk more to values than facts and data. Ask people to talk about how this problem affects them, how it makes them feel and whether it's important to them.
- **Questions:** Discuss the campaign as a group and answer any questions that arise.
- **Action:** Finish the meeting with a concrete call to action. This can range from asking people to sign up to receive emails to asking guests to host their own parties, but be clear that you're asking for action.
- **Follow-up:** Reach out to everyone within 2-5 days to thank them for coming and resolve any unanswered questions. Repeat your call for action and your personal connection to the campaign.



TIP

Pledges, surveys and petitions are another great tool to demonstrate public support and help you attract a strong base of followers. They also help support your inside champion by demonstrating the larger community interest in your proposed action. **Make sure your pledges, petitions and surveys both engage your community and support your efforts with these tips for success.**

STEP 3: MAKE PRESENTATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

Along with bringing people to your house, you can bring your message to community groups. Some of this work may have already been done to build your community group, and that's okay. You can look for new groups to meet with or follow up with existing groups about your progress and community action meeting. Just as before, you want to find the personal connection between this group's values and your campaign so they are motivated to be involved. And you want to be clear in your call for action. Here are the actions you want to ask for from outside community groups:

- Group representative attends your community action meeting.
- Group representative attends the city council action.
- Individual members host a house party.
- Members stay informed about the campaign on your email list.
- Group writes letter to the editor (LTE) in support of your campaign.
- Group endorses your campaign in a letter to city council.

STEP 4: DEEPEN THE INSIDE-OUTSIDE PARTNERSHIP

Your community-organizing work is in full swing, and you're ready to move into more public-facing action by generating a media buzz and holding a community action meeting. But, before you cross that threshold, it's important to align your group's actions with the internal work of your Government Champion. Meet with your inside partner and discuss where opportunities exist:

- **Gain an understanding** of any efforts that are underway that will complement your citizen action.
- **Determine whether there is internal support for the initiative.** Find out if the city manager or town administrator is supportive, or if more work needs to be done to gain internal support.
- **Check in on the timeline** for action.
- **Ask for advice** on meeting with the city council members (see next section).
- **Identify concerns, issues or details** that need to be addressed as you move toward the community action meeting.

Meet regularly with your Government Champion so you are being fully transparent about your community group.



MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Once you have a group and start building community support, you need to strengthen political support for your initiative. The best way to do this is to meet with your city council members, educate them on the problem, and present a positive solution. This step is important even if you appear to have widespread support for your idea. Council members can back down when opposition arises, so don't assume anything is a done deal. Here's how to make the most of your meetings with local officials:

STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

- **Pick two people to represent your group** who will speak with the council members. This creates a clear point of contact for council members and ensures each council member receives the same information.
- **Be organized and educated** so council members take you and your request seriously. Think ahead about what questions they may ask you and be ready with answers. Your inside partner can help you identify what concerns might come up for discussion.

STEP 2: SCHEDULE MEETINGS

- **You can meet with council members individually or in pairs.** (Many communities have laws that prevent you from meeting with more than two council members in private.) If your council is divided on your issue, it's better to meet with each member individually to better understand their interests and concerns.
- **Council members represent the public, so they should be amenable to meeting.** But they're also busy people, so be patient in setting up the meetings. Try meeting over coffee—it's a neutral location, non-threatening and non-committal.
- **Start meeting with those members most likely to be your allies.** Ask your government partner who they would recommend as a favorable council member. Former council members are also a great resource.



Your elected officials want to hear from you!

“ Too often city council or county commissioners only hear from citizens when there is a problem like too many potholes or the neighbor's fence is too close. The public comment period at each meeting is an incredible opportunity for citizens to share their vision and constructive ideas on how to improve the community. As a public official, I look forward to hearing great ideas from community members, either through public comment, informally over coffee, or at other public events.

Tom Quinn, Former City Council Member, Lakewood, CO

”



STEP 3: GET TO KNOW YOUR COUNCIL MEMBERS

- **Begin the conversation by getting to know the council members** and how they feel about environmental or recycling issues. Ask lots of general questions and set yourself up to get their input on your proposal, rather than trying to sell it to them. If you have inside information about their questions or concerns, explore these issues directly. Here are some good lead-ins and conversation starters:

- » A group of community members has been researching this topic and would like your input.
- » What is most important to you in our community?
- » Why did you run for council?
- » Do you recycle at home or at work? Do you find it convenient? Are there ways you think it can be improved?

TIP

It's important to frame your argument around what appeals to the council member about this issue, not just what appeals to you. Do your homework and have some background knowledge on each council member, so your conversation can be more personalized. If you can find their self-motivation in the issue, you will have found a powerful ally in the process.



STEP 4: PRESENT YOUR PROPOSAL

- **Show your community support by mentioning your community group**, your petition (if applicable) and any positive press. This helps remove some of the contention around the issue and can help you erase any doubts around this being a divisive issue or an uphill battle. This helps you build your credibility with council and strengthens your burgeoning inside-outside partnership.
 - » By being organized and supported by other community members, you can answer their questions, allay their fears, and gain their support for this issue.
 - » Ask how this proposal fits into other initiatives the council is working on currently. Ask if there is anything else going on in town that might impact the proposal or affect your timing.
- **Bring sample language to the meetings**, so council members have a feel for what you're asking. Talk specifically about how this action would benefit your community, including how it affects particular residents or businesses.
- **If strong opposition is voiced, always ask what it is that might change their perspective.** Be an engaged listener, and use their criticism to strengthen your campaign.

STEP 5: ASK ABOUT NEXT STEPS.

- **Ask favorable council members about next steps**, including who to work with to get the proposal on the council's agenda and how to work with staff to approve the language. Processes will vary from town to town depending on whether you have a full-time mayor or council or volunteer elected officials, so make sure to ask and be educated.
- **Follow up in the next day or two** on any unanswered questions—don't let things lag.
- **Establish yourself as the contact for council members** and invite an open dialogue; if they have questions on this ordinance or other environmental issues, they can contact you.

STEP 6: SCHEDULE FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS, EMAILS AND PHONE CALLS.

- **Aim for a short lag time** between when council and staff are educated and when the proposal moves forward, so that the information is fresh in their minds. The more council members know, the better they can respond to any opposition about your initiative.
- If substantial time has passed, meet again with council members or provide them with an update on your campaign. Don't assume you're on their radar if you haven't been in touch.

STEP 7: MEET WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- Your elected officials will want to know if other stakeholders support this initiative. Identify and meet with stakeholders to understand their position and opposition. Explore room for negotiations to garner support or at least neutrality if support isn't possible.
- If the government prefers to hold its own stakeholder meetings, be an active participant and don't be afraid to meet with other groups outside of the meetings to further discuss your positions.

STEP 8: EVALUATE YOUR NEXT ACTION

After meeting with your council members, you'll have a better idea of the degree of political support for your initiative. Based on what you learned, you have two potential action steps:

- **Some or all council members are in support:** Your next step is to hold a community action meeting. Even if you have strong political support, it's still critical for citizens to support your council through the decision-making process. Even great ideas can get lost in the process.
- **Few or no council members are in support:** You will need very strong community support to start to sway council's opinion. Invest more time and energy into collecting signatures, talking to prominent community leaders, and exploring alternatives to your idea. Consider a smaller action that moves you toward your larger goal like a pilot project or study. Hold an open house to give the community more information about your vision. Find other partners in the community to help amplify your message.

Informal opportunities to meet with council members, such as coffee chats, are a great time to share your ideas with your representatives.



CREATING MOMENTUM: YOUR MEDIA STRATEGY

There are several different types of media your group can use to tell your story and build public support for your community initiative. These include print media such as newspapers and magazines, broadcast media such as TV and radio stories, and internet outlets such as blogs, websites and social media. Here we focus on how to get your local newspaper and broadcast media to cover your campaign.

Media coverage alone does not make you successful—it has to be meaningful and impactful coverage. Think of your media goals just like your one-on-one relationship building: Make the personal and emotional connection back to how this problem affects people in your community through stories. Stories are far more motivating than facts, although you should identify one or two of your most compelling facts to use consistently.

Here's how to create a buzz around your initiative and group:

STEP 1: TELL YOUR STORY

- **Write up specific examples** of how this problem affects your community and who is impacted. Show the positive benefits of your solution. Interview specific businesses or groups of people that will gain new services, save money or help improve the environment. Share those stories with reporters. Ask to meet with local reporters to brief them on the issue, so they see you as an expert resource as the campaign unfolds.
- **Get creative!** Videos, art projects, flash mobs or any other creative ideas go a long way in attracting media attention and creating a positive community vibe around your initiative.
- **Ask for an interview** on your local or independent radio or TV station. Bring some of the people in your community to tell their stories about the issue.
- **Write letters to the editor** (LTEs), ideally two letters over 1-2 months. Ask a prominent community leader to sign onto one of your letters—you can write a draft for them to make it easier. Make sure the LTEs are accurate and to the point.
- **Utilize social media** as a free or low-cost tool. Create a public Facebook group, website or other means to give the group credibility and an online presence to share more information with the community about your initiative.

TIP

Be strategic about your publicity, particularly early on in your campaign. While public awareness is a good thing, you don't want to give your opposition time to organize. Trash haulers, in particular, can be resistant to change.



Creative and fun ideas are more likely to get the attention of your local media. Here, a valentine was presented to the mayor to show how much the community loves composting.



TIP

News reporters read social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, so whatever you post publicly online could be included in your story.

STEP 2: ATTRACT LOCAL MEDIA TO YOUR COMMUNITY MEETING

- **A great way to lure media is a good photo opportunity.** Try to set something up on-site before the meeting. For example, find an overflowing trash can in an alley near the meeting place where you can hold a brief press conference about the problems and solutions that will be discussed at the community meeting to follow.
- The media will often just drop in and stay for only a little while during your meeting. Have a few good spokespeople lined up for interviews on-the-spot when the media shows up.
- Assign one of your leaders to be the media liaison.

STEP 3: PUBLICIZE THE COUNCIL ACTION

- **Make your council members the heroes** in your story by giving them the recognition for helping the community solve a problem. Be specific about how the community is benefiting and link it back to personal stories when possible.
- **Ask prominent community leaders for quotes** in support of your success. Write up a draft quote to help them get started.



RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS AT [ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG](http://ecocyclesolutionshub.org):

The media strategy for community change deserves its own guide, but here are a few great sites with excellent information about strategic communications, specifics on social media, how to handle a crisis, and much more.

- The Goodman Center
- Resource Media
- Spitfire Strategies
- Community Organizer 2.0

TIPS FOR REACHING OUT TO MEDIA

- ➡ **Designate one person to be your media contact.** Make sure they are the first person to talk to the media. If your spokesperson can't answer all the reporters' questions, be ready to direct them to other experts that you've identified in advance. Clarify who your spokesperson will be with the rest of your group, particularly before/after your meetings and events.
- ➡ **Your media spokesperson should know what you want to say** and stick with your main messages. Be proactive when talking with media. Start with your main messages. You want to be responsive to the reporters' questions but keep in mind that you want to get your messages across to the public regardless of what reporters may ask.
- ➡ **Always send reporters background in advance of the event** or meeting to frame the issue. Talk to reporters afterwards to summarize what happened in the way you want them to report it.

When contacting the newspaper, a local reporter or environmental reporter is best. Business reporters also cover recycling stories. If you don't have a contact, call the newspaper and ask who is likely to cover a local story on recycling. Reach out five days in advance and not on a Friday or weekend.

- ➡ Tell them briefly who you are, what is happening and ask where you can send the press release.
- ➡ Follow up later that day to see if they have questions, will come to the event or will post the story.
- ➡ It never hurts to send a press release or photos after the event.
- ➡ Keep your press release brief. Aim for one page max.



Designate one person as your press contact and have just a few main points you want to emphasize to the media.

If this is a hot button issue, be sure to do your homework before contacting the press. Be strategic about choosing the best, most credible spokespeople. Use values-based messages that are truthful and tap into values you share with your audience.

The best way to shape media coverage is to be proactive. Don't wait for a controversy to stir up trouble.

If the press rejects your story, ask for another media suggestion such as online resources, blogging, etc. If you are totally snubbed, write a LTE about your victory or the progress you've made so far in your group efforts.



DEMONSTRATING PUBLIC SUPPORT: THE COMMUNITY ACTION MEETING

You have a group—check.

Your group is growing into a network—check.

Some or all of your elected officials are on-board with your action—check.

You're almost there! The next step is a community action meeting.

Your community action meeting is your defining moment. It's when you showcase the strong public support for your initiative and accelerate the positive momentum to carry you through the city council proceedings.

At the city council meeting, the council controls the meeting agenda. There may be opposition to your initiative, and there will be other items on the agenda. All these factors dim the spotlight on your community group. That's why it's so important that you hold your own event. At the community action meeting, your group controls the agenda and the energy. When you set the tone and you generate the buzz, you win big.

Your meeting should be a 60-90 minute public event in a packed room. Invite all your city council members and encourage them individually to attend. We recommend 50-150 people total depending on your community size. Choose a venue that fits the size of your group, so the room is full, the energy is high and everyone is engaged.

Be sure to practice running this meeting in advance with all your group leaders—you can't over-prepare for this important meeting! Script and practice your introductory presentation(s), your testimonies during public support, and how you are going to ask your public officials for a commitment. Also, talk through as a group how to respond to negative comments from either the audience or elected officials.

Here's how to structure your event for success:

STEP 1: PRESENT YOUR INITIATIVE

- Your group leaders tell the story of why this change is important to your community. This is your chance to make your best case and to be passionate, informed and inspiring.

STEP 2: SHOW PUBLIC SUPPORT

- **Have a few group leaders talk first to break the ice.** They should speak to why this issue is important to them—their personal self-interest. Align everyone's testimony, so you can show how this action benefits the community in several ways.
- **Invite attendees to express support** and voice any concerns.
- **Designate someone to wrap up the testimony on a positive note.** It's always good to have a strong speaker go last, just in case they need to address any concerns that may have come up during the public input time.

Your community action meeting is your defining moment to show your elected officials that the community is supportive of your initiative, which makes them feel more comfortable about implementing a new program or policy.



STEP 3: ASK COUNCIL MEMBERS TO COMMIT THEIR SUPPORT

- **Give each council member the opportunity to voice their support** or concerns about the initiative. Then push them for a public commitment to support the campaign. (You should meet with them in advance so they know you'll be asking them for a public commitment.)

STEP 4: CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PROVIDE FOLLOW-UP ACTION

- **Acknowledge what you have accomplished so far**—the number of public supporters, council members showing their support, positive press, petition/pledge signers, etc.
- **Spur the crowd to attend the upcoming city council meeting** when your issue will be discussed and/or decided.
- **Thank council members** for their commitment to the initiative. This helps to solidify their support again before the council meeting.
- **Reach out to council members** who didn't attend or did not pledge their support.



ONLINE RESOURCES AT [ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG](https://ecocyclesolutionshub.org):

Planning a citizens' community action meeting
Sample community action meeting agenda
Sample community action meeting program

COMMITTING TO CHANGE: THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Your big event has finally come—your initiative is going to be discussed by your city council. You’ve been working really hard over the past several months, so the meeting is about putting it all together. Here’s how to secure your win:

STEP 1: SHOW STRONG PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

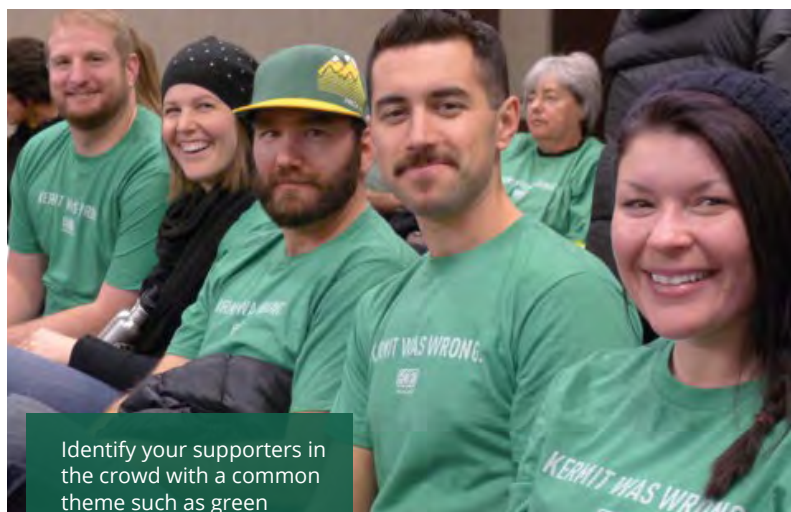
- Turnout is critical! And, you definitely need to outnumber any opponents in attendance. Here’s where your one-on-one contacts are critical. Make face-to-face contact, or at least phone contact, and get people to commit to coming to the meeting. Reach out to all your supporters again, and don’t underestimate the value of talking to everyone you know. Emails can be a great reminder, but they won’t bring people out like a personal ask.
- Create a visual group identity so all your supporters stand out in the crowd by wearing similar color shirts or hats, or pass out ribbons or buttons. Avoid signs or posters as they tend to be distracting.
- If there are other groups that support your campaign, be sure to get at least one representative from the group to attend and speak at the meeting.
- Create a sign-in sheet for supporters to keep track of how many supporters were there and to be able to contact them after the meeting.
- Create a “packet of support” that demonstrates the community support for your initiative. Submit the information to your city offices early enough that it will be in the council packet for the meeting. The packet should include:
 - » A cover letter summarizing all your actions to build support for the initiative with the number of people reached and the positive feedback
 - » A summary of your community action meeting
 - » All newspaper clippings and letters to the editor supporting the campaign

THE CITY COUNCIL PROCESS

City councils and town boards have different processes for adopting policies. Sometimes a motion can pass in one reading; other times it needs at least two readings. You’ll want to strategize with your main government partner on which meeting is the most important for your community group to attend, or if support is needed at all the readings. You’ll definitely want to be there in full force whenever there is public comment.

Sometimes the second reading is on the consent agenda, meaning unless something has changed substantially, the council just approves it and moves on to new business.

If you think you’ll win on the first reading, this is the time to call upon all your supporters to attend the meeting and voice their support. It’s also time to contact media. If the ordinance is a maybe at the reading, spend your energy bringing community members out in support of the issue and don’t focus on the media.



Identify your supporters in the crowd with a common theme such as green shirts or stickers.

Be strategic in your public testimony so your council hears from many perspectives about the broad community benefits of your initiative.



Photo: Tony Webster

STEP 2: PROVIDE CONCISE PUBLIC TESTIMONY FROM MANY GROUP MEMBERS THAT INCLUDES THE BENEFITS OF THE DESIRED ACTION

- Meet with group members prior to the council meeting to divide up, prepare and practice talking points. Choose one person per talking point and encourage speakers to make a personal connection to the issue. People should be encouraged to speak at the meeting, but not everyone needs to talk.
- Make sure you're addressing all the benefits of the action. Provide local examples and concrete data, such as the costs, number of jobs created, environmental benefits, or number of people affected, whenever possible.
- If you have more people than points, make it someone's job to point out the other people there for support. Tell council you're doing this out of respect for their time.
- Designate a press contact for the group. Have them introduce themselves to reporters as any press arrives and give a final summary statement to the reporter after the meeting.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T WIN

Creating change can be hard, and success is not guaranteed. Many great initiatives take several attempts before they are officially adopted. Treat this as a setback, not a defeat, and focus on these three steps to keep building toward success:

1. **Regroup with your Government Champion** and talk through the lessons learned. Brainstorm ways to address the major concerns of the opposition, such as the cost impacts. Talk to other communities about how their approaches have worked.
2. **Discuss other potential actions.** Break down success into smaller steps that can build toward your larger goal. Pilot projects or studies can help provide the data and experience to ease people's initial concerns.
3. **Continue building public support** among both government officials and the larger community. Explore new partnerships in the community to help amplify your message. Continue your media efforts and focus on promoting the successes of other communities similar to yours.



CELEBRATING AND FOLLOW-UP

Congratulations on moving your community closer toward Zero Waste—now it's time to celebrate! Your post-action celebration is more than just a party—it's another key step in relationship building and maintaining momentum. And, if appropriate, it could be a good time to begin the discussion about the group's next Zero Waste campaign.

Here's how to make the most of your good time:

STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR EFFORTS AND YOUR PARTNERS

- The celebration can be an open house, a happy hour or any informal event.
- Invite allies, but not necessarily council members, to celebrate.
- Recognize everyone for their contributions, no matter how large or small.
- Make sure to recognize your inside partner and any internal government staff that helped this initiative succeed.

TIP

Many people have a hard time being acknowledged for their part, often feeling like they didn't do enough. Set an informal tone for the event to make everyone feel welcome. Follow up one-on-one with key people and personally ask them to come.

STEP 2: SHARE A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Give people the opportunity to envision the community they want to see and live in, and discuss how they can create that change.
- Your vision doesn't have to be formal at this point. It's good to brainstorm and create positive energy.



STEP 3: SEND THANK YOU NOTES

- Ask your group members to send emails or make phone calls to council members who voted for the measure and thank them for their support. Ask council members to share their vision for the future to cultivate a relationship beyond just this campaign. Do the same for your inside partner if this is a government staff person.
- Hand-written notes signed by the group deepen the personal relationships with council and staff, particularly with your champion council members.

STEP 4: THROW A KICK-OFF EVENT

- Even though the city council signed off on your campaign, it may still be a few months before the new program begins. When the program does start, create a positive community buzz with a kick-off event, something similar to a groundbreaking ceremony. For example, start off a new composting program by giving away free finished compost to residents. Or create a photo op when new recycling or composting bins are installed in a city building or school.
- Invite city council members to the kick-off event to share in the success and publicly thank them for their support.
- Reach out to media to cover your event. Provide personal stories and photos of how the community will benefit.

STEP 5: TRACK AND PUBLICIZE YOUR SUCCESS

- Gather data on the impact of your new program for a specific timeframe (3, 6 or 12 months) and report back to your supporters and to city council on your success. Demonstrate your success both quantitatively with measurable data and qualitatively with community stories. This follow-up helps to maintain and further develop your relationships with local elected officials and government staff. By building trust in your group's ideas and reliability, you increase the willingness of public staff and elected officials to listen to and support future citizen efforts.
- Follow up with the media at the six-month or one-year anniversary of the program. Provide data on your success and a list of benefits and positive outcomes that have occurred. Sharing stories and pictures from specific individuals and businesses that are benefiting from the program is a powerful way to demonstrate your success.
- Nominate the program for awards at the local, state or national level. This is another great opportunity to specifically recognize your inside partner on the council or the government staff.



ONLINE RESOURCES AT **ECOCYCLESOLUTIONSHUB.ORG**:

Use the **Crawford Slip Writing Method** to brainstorm ideas at your celebration and make sure everyone's ideas are heard.

STEP 6: STAY CONNECTED

- Create an avenue for members to stay in touch, either through a main contact person, group email list or a social media platform like Facebook.

STEP 7: BUILD ON YOUR SUCCESS

- Positive media coverage, an anniversary celebration or an awards ceremony can all bring renewed energy to your community group. Think about how you might use this momentum to get the ball rolling on your next Zero Waste initiative.

MOVING FORWARD

Zero Waste is a multi-year journey, and there are many steps a community needs to take along the way. Each community is different in how they choose to move forward, but there is a core set of policies, programs and infrastructure that every community needs.



Download Eco-Cycle's *Community Zero Waste Roadmap* for a complete vision of the road ahead and join fellow Zero Waste change-makers at the Eco-Cycle Solutions Hub.

