How to Set Goals and Develop Effective Strategies and Tactics

Goals are what you are trying to achieve. Strategies are approaches you plan to take to reach your goals, while tactics are activities you undertake as part of your strategy/approach.

I. Reasons to set goals and develop strategies/approaches, and tactics/activities

Setting goals and developing approaches and activities to reach those goals are essential to working with others effectively, and to being effective overall. Everyone in the group should participate in the development of goals for the group.

Using a good decision-making process (involving brainstorming and evaluation steps) will ensure that everyone in the group is committed to working together to achieve the group's goals.

Setting short-term and long-term goals and developing approaches and activities to reach those goals also creates a "road map" that allows the group to gauge its progress in achieving the goals (and to celebrate and learn from victories and defeats along the way), and to anticipate and block moves by others who may try to stop the group from achieving its goals.

II. Process for Setting Goals and Developing Effective Approaches and Activities

The following are recommended steps to take to develop achievable goals, and effective approaches and activities for reaching those goals.

1. **Research your area(s) of concern, and potential supporters and opposition**

   The more you know about the "political landscape" in which you are organizing, the more effectively and realistically you will be able to set goals and develop effective approaches and activities.

2. **Brainstorm goals** - Remember, during a brainstorming session there should be no criticizing of any goals people propose.

3. **Evaluate and re-work goals taking into account *all* of the following factors:**

   (a) To what degree does the proposed goal fit in with the "kind of things your group does" and with the group's overall goals, methods, and policies? Is it in the public interest? Will it increase our strength, resources, profile, reputation?

   (b) Can the group make a difference? There are dozens of important issues about which you can do little, and many issues on which many other groups are already working. Choosing issues/goals by this standard rather than taking on issues just because they are "in the news" or important to members of the group is important for viability of the group. Always ask "Can the group make a difference?"

   (c) Civic culture - Are the underlying ideas behind the goals basically ones of

getting people involved, making it easier for citizens to participate, and/or making social change that will allow citizens to understand their relation to history more clearly and thereby motivate them to become actors rather than spectators?

(d) Group and public interest - Is the goal one in which members of the group and the public are interested?

(e) Resources - What resources (financial, staff, volunteers, expertise) are needed to work toward the goal? Will working toward the goal affect existing group goals, projects or programs?

(f) Winnability - Is it winnable? Does the organization have the capability and the will to win it? Try to shape an issue so that it is winnable, at least in part. In order to maintain our effectiveness instead of charging head-on into the cannons of certain defeat, we should look for a way around the obstacle, even if it means in the short run only a partial victory.

(g) What is it costing you -- and whom does it really serve?

When goals are evaluated and finalized taking into account all of the factors set out above it will set a strong basis for develop effective approaches and activities for achieving the goals.

4. Strategies - brainstorm and then evaluate strategies/approaches for reaching your goals taking into account the following factors:

(a) Define the goal/issue so that it is winnable - Goals and issues can be defined in various ways, and this is a very important first step in setting strategies. For example, your goal could be to get parks cleaned up in the city, but it could be defined as ensuring that every child in the city has a clean, green place to play. The public and city council may not respond positively to an appeal to clean up parks, but may be more likely to respond positively to an appeal to ensure every child has a clean, green place to play. Always try to define your goal/issue in a way that will appeal to the most people, and politicians.

(b) Group interest - Is the strategy supported by members of the group? Will it increase the group's strength, resources, profile, reputation? Is it fun?

(c) Resources - What resources (financial, time, staff, volunteers, expertise) are needed to use the approach?

(d) What is the timetable for the approach? How long will it take?

(e) Allies and opponents - Who cares enough about the issue to help (either individuals or groups)? Who are your opponents?

(f) Decision-makers - Who has the power to give you what you want? What means can you use to influence them? Who has power over the people who have the power to give you what you want? What means can you use to influence them?

(g) Choose from among main strategies, and choose short-term and long-term strategies - Community organizing, advocacy, service delivery, and community

development are the main strategies used by citizens and citizen groups to work on issues

5. Tactics/Activities - For each strategy, develop short-term and long-term tactics/activities that do the following:
- follow the aims of the goals and strategies;
- build support;
- influence the decision-makers that can give you what you want;
- are steps forward no matter how the decision-makers react;
- are flexible and creative.

Set out below is a list of tactics/activities that many groups use, from simple to more complex in each category:

(a) Public education
- networking with other groups
- calling or sending emails to radio or TV "talkback" lines
- writing letters-to-the-editor for newspapers
- writing opinion pieces for newspapers
- distributing news releases to the media
- holding news conferences
- events (speeches, debates, forums)
- distributing petitions for sign-on
- producing and distributing pamphlets, action alerts
- producing and posting posters
- producing research reports
- handing out mock awards
- newspaper, radio or TV advertisements

(b) Organizing
- distributing petitions for sign-on
- mass letter-writing efforts (either many people send a letter, or many people sign on to one letter)
- building a coalition of groups
- holding mock elections
- mass boycotts
- recruiting new voters

(c) Lobbying
- letters to politicians, government departments and agencies
- meetings with politicians and other public officials
- testifying at hearings
- developing and releasing position papers

(d) Direct Action
- pickets and strikes (including hunger strikes or mass fasts)
- vigils
- marches
- blockades and sit-ins
- hanging banners at government meetings
- street theatre (e.g. mock funeral procession for social welfare programs)
- overloading government offices with requests