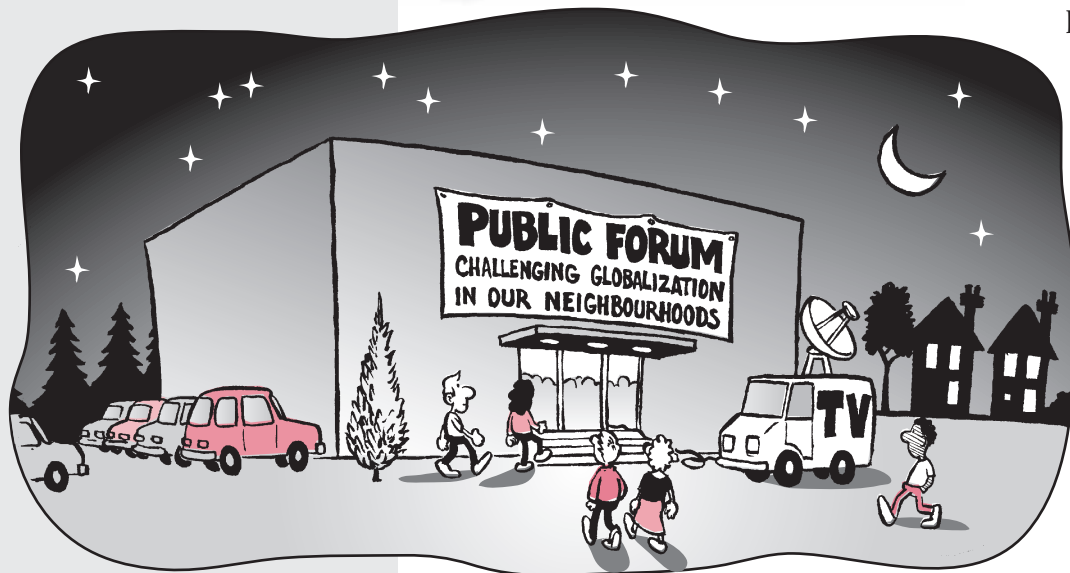


Staging an event



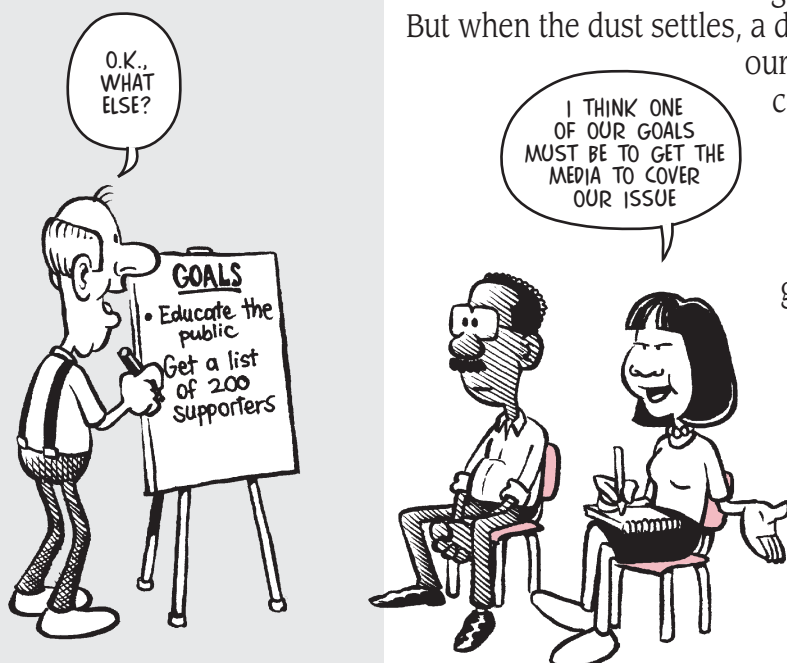
Holding public events is one way to build public interest and support on an issue. Public events include rallies, speakers, protests, potlucks, spectacles, entertainment, etc. A great reason for holding a public event is to educate people about a particular issue. Public events can also be useful for getting people from the commu-

nity to work on the issue, and for creating a list of supporters. You can use those names to put together a fax list or an e-mail list—a good way of furthering your cause. One goal of your event might be to bring media attention to your issue. Whatever the goals, it is important to hold your event at a time and in a way that it will be a success, particularly in moving the issue ahead. And that requires good planning.

Setting goals and planning your event

Public events are often thought up during inspired brainstorming sessions. But when the dust settles, a difficult question must be asked: “what are our goals for this event?” Your group should set concrete goals for attendance and intended impact. This will give direction to your planning, as well as criteria for evaluating the event’s success after it’s over.

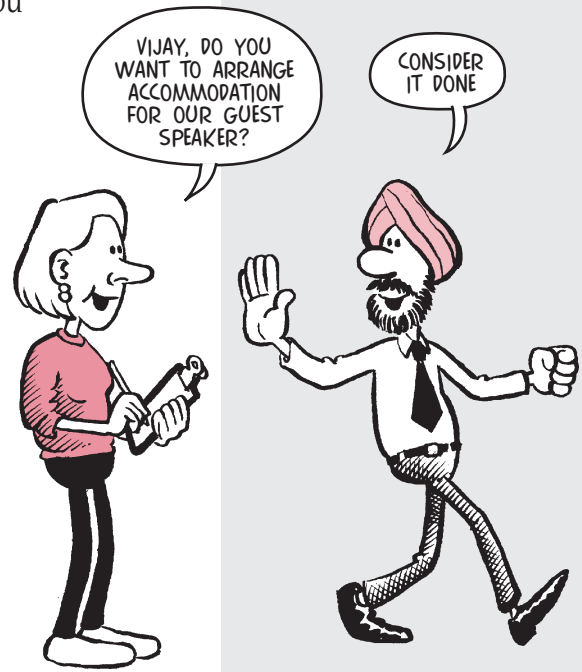
Once you have an idea and a set of goals, you should define your event. Why are you doing it? Who is it for? Where is it? When is it? Your resources, such as people, money, time, etc., will determine how elaborate your event can be. How much money is available from the chapter coffers, the national office, or other organizations you know of that are keen on the issue? Will charging admission to the event turn too many people away?



Or will it help generate revenues? What about time? Do you and others in your group have enough time to organize a successful event? After planning thoroughly you may want go back and to revise your goals.

Dividing up responsibilities

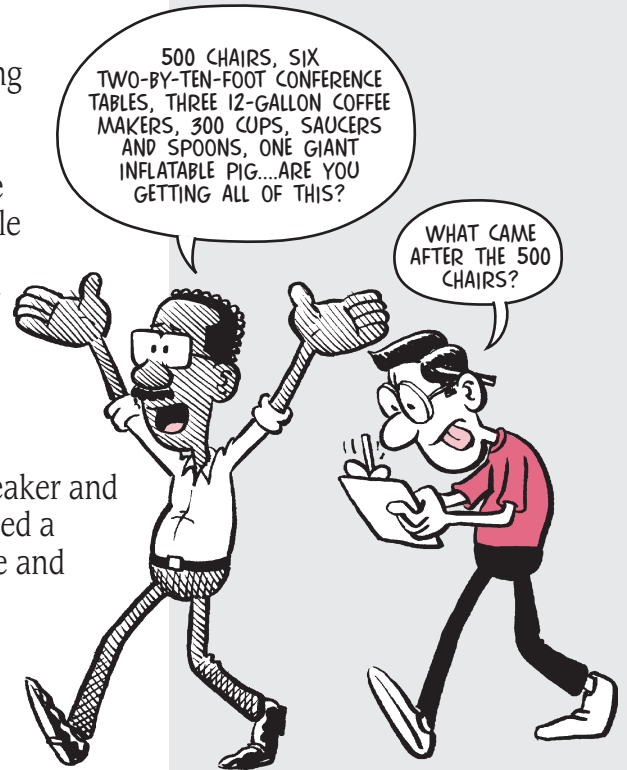
Make a list of everything that will need to be done and divide up responsibilities among members of the group. These will include things like getting a rally permit, reserving rooms, making food, etc. Core members should be sure to delegate tasks so that one small group doesn't end up burning themselves out. If possible, come up with a system of back up for people in case they can't follow through on their assigned task.



Managing the logistics

In order for things to go smoothly, you need to be on top of all the logistics of your event. Here are a few things to consider:

- ➔ Reserve rooms and get permits well in advance.
- ➔ Make sure that speakers know what they will be speaking about.
- ➔ Make sure that the venue, or location, of the event is the right size to hold the number of people you expect. While you don't want to turn anyone away by having a place that's too small, nor do you want a huge place with only a handful of people showing up. The venue should be easy to get to for the people you're trying to attract. It should have parking and bus routes close by.
- ➔ Hopefully, the acoustics are good enough so that the speaker and any entertainment can easily be heard. Decide if you need a podium or a microphone and speakers for the event.



TIP Try to borrow equipment

If you need equipment like microphones, podiums and speaker systems, try borrowing them from a supportive group such as a labour council. If you're renting a facility, like a hall for example, try getting the equipment thrown in for free as part of the arrangement.



- ➔ Make the venue attractive before the event by putting up posters or notices. You can get children to make simple and colourful pieces of art about the issue on bristol board or an old sheet.

Publicizing your event

There are many ways to get the word out about your event, some of which are listed below. Whatever methods you choose, try to target them to the communities or groups most concerned about the issue.

TIP Target the most affected groups

To get lots of public participation, you should make a list of all those groups and key individuals in the community who are most directly affected by the issue, and who have the most personally invested in the outcome of the campaign. For each group you identify, you will find a specific way of contacting them. For example, to contact students, classroom speaking or going door-to-door in residences is useful. If you're looking for recent immigrants, a logical place to start would be immigrant services organizations, cultural organizations or a local coalition.

Leaflets and posters

Doing up a simple flyer which highlights the issue and promotes the event can be an easy and fairly cheap way of getting people's attention. In order for this to be a good use of time, your group should be realistic: do you have the capacity to distribute them widely enough, and to target them to the audience you're looking for?

Stick up posters in areas frequented by people who are affected by the issue, but keep in mind that many communities regularly take down posters from places like utility polls (see the chapter *Producing written materials* for more on leaflets and posters).

Media releases

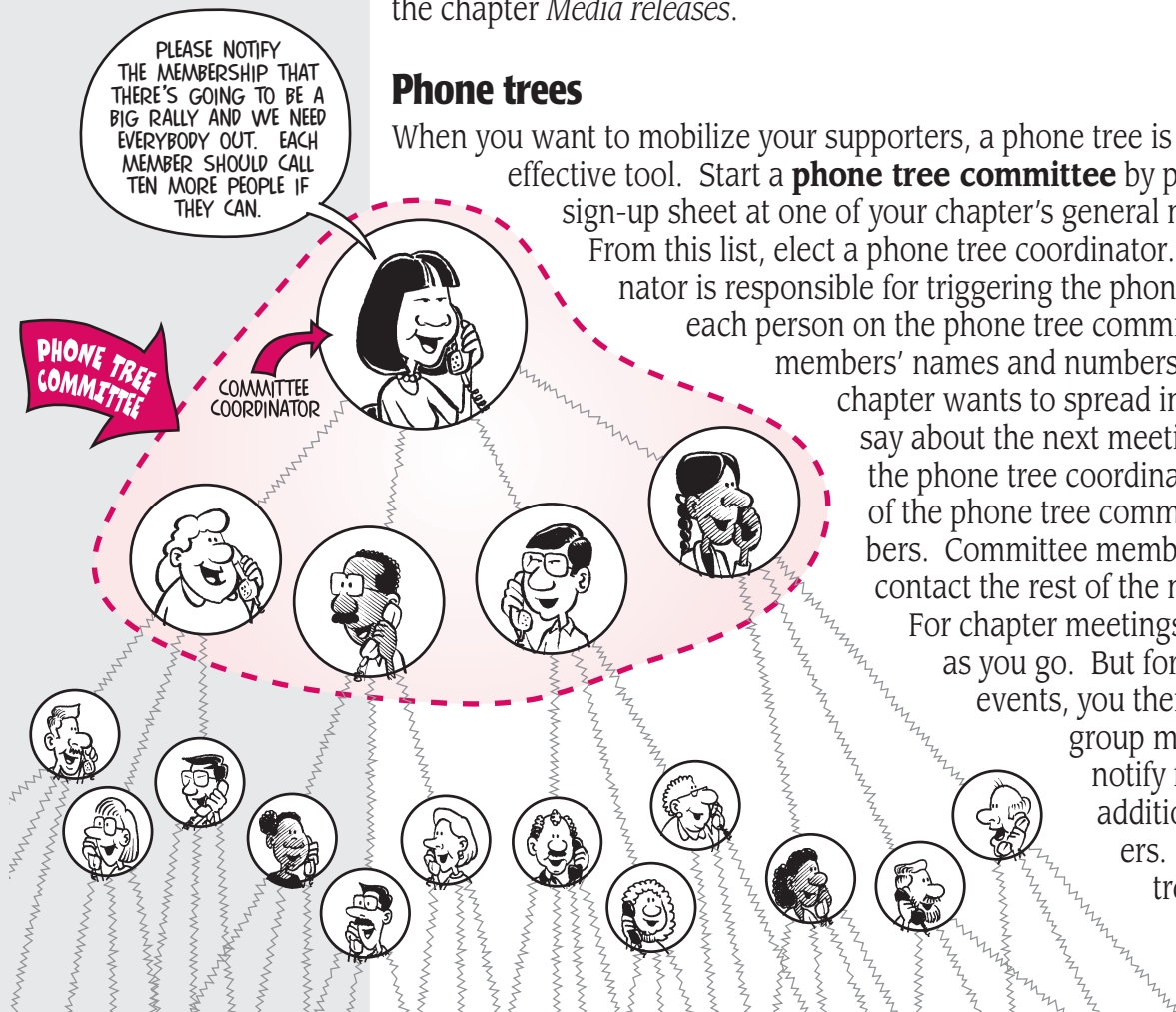
Getting media coverage is a good way to get publicity. To get your event mentioned in the media, try sending out a media release. For details, see the chapter *Media releases*.

Phone trees

When you want to mobilize your supporters, a phone tree is a fast and effective tool. Start a **phone tree committee** by passing out a sign-up sheet at one of your chapter's general meetings.

From this list, elect a phone tree coordinator. The coordinator is responsible for triggering the phone tree. Give each person on the phone tree committee a list of members' names and numbers. When your chapter wants to spread information, say about the next meeting or event, the phone tree coordinator calls each of the phone tree committee members. Committee members then contact the rest of the membership.

For chapter meetings, that's as far as you go. But for large public events, you then get each group member to notify five or ten additional supporters. The phone tree coordinator should always check



with committee members to see if they've made their calls, and be prepared to take up the slack if they haven't.

Paid and unpaid advertising

For large meetings and public forums, see if you can use unpaid advertising. Send a notice to community newspapers, radio stations and cable channels that offer free community notice boards, or to alternative media such as campus radio stations and entertainment weeklies.

If your chapter has the funds, you can consider buying ad space in your local paper, or buying air-time on a local radio station for an ad. In smaller communities and rural areas, the costs of placing ads in community papers and on the radio is often quite low.



Contacting allied groups

Announce your event at meetings held by allied groups. Consider asking them to endorse your event and promote it to their membership. Give them some flyers and posters to distribute. You may even be able to get allied groups to actually help with the organization of the event. See the chapter on *Building networks* for more information on contacting allied groups.



Attracting media attention for your event

For best results, always try to think like the media. If you hold the event in the morning or early afternoon, the story can make the supper time newscasts or the next day's paper. If you have great visuals for the event, the television cameras have something interesting to record. If you have practised your speech and can discuss the issue in punchy, lively "soundbites" of five to ten seconds, then the reporters have a nice quote they can put on the television or in the newspaper. If you hold the event in a spot that has lots of parking and electrical outlets (for camera equipment etc.), you'll make it easier for reporters to show up. And, if you hand out media kits, complete with all relevant information, the reporters will have an easier time writing an accurate story about the event. You don't have to make things easier for the media. But doing so puts you in their good books, which means they'll be more likely to cover your next event, to read your press releases and to answer your phone calls.

TIP Hold your event on a slow news day

When you're planning an event weeks in advance, it's not always possible to tell if your chosen date will be a slow news day—big "news" can pop up any time and can eclipse your event. But try to avoid the big "news-makers" you do know about. Don't hold your event on the same day the Pope is due to arrive, or the day the finance minister plans to announce the federal budget, or on the deadline for a planned U.S.-led bombing raid on some country.



Last-minute preparations

It's important to think in advance about all the things that need to be done on the day of the event. Make sure that all volunteers know what they need to do, everything from calling the media, to setting up microphones and sound equipment, to preparing food, to organizing tables for sign-up sheets, literature displays and donation boxes etc.

A sample planning outline

IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO MAKE A DETAILED PLANNING OUTLINE LIKE THIS SHOWING ALL THE TASKS THAT NEED TO BE DONE AND WHEN



COMPLETION DATE	TASK	VOLUNTEER
Sept. 18	reserve church basement for planning meeting.....	May-lin
Sept. 20	invite people to the march planning meeting - phone, fax, email....	Saleem
Sept. 29	initial planning meeting - set time line for march, brainstorm all tasks that need to be done, assign tasks. Are there others who should be involved?.....	everyone
Sept. 30	try to secure donations for march -- financial or in-kind.....	Harold
Sept. 30	inform more potential volunteers of march and planning meetings.....	Saleem
ONGOING	stay in touch with volunteers, make sure tasks are getting done.....	Janice
Oct. 13	second planning meeting - report back on tasks, ensure time line and task list are still satisfactory to all. Are there tasks we've forgotten?.....	everyone
Oct. 15	solicit "high profile" people to join the march and make speeches at the end.....	May-lin
Oct. 18	secure sound system—try finding group with a system to donate... ..	Eduardo
Oct. 23	secure parade licence.....	Janice
Oct. 27	third planning meeting—report back on tasks, make sure no tasks have been forgotten.....	everyone
Nov. 1	invite people to painting party.....	Harold
Nov. 3	secure spot for painting party and get supplies.....	Laura
Nov. 9	painting party to make signs and banners.....	everyone
Nov. 9	finish poster and have copies ready for distribution.....	Ron
Nov. 10	fourth planning meeting—establish advertising plan and give out poster for people to put up in their office.....	everyone
Nov. 11	poster like crazy! All community bulletin boards, all neighbourhood organizations and businesses.....	Laura, Ron, Carl
Nov. 14	final event planning meeting—approve media advisory, confirm all tasks done.....	everyone
Nov. 18	second round of postering, in case posters have been taken down..	Laura, Ron, Carl
Nov. 19	phone and remind potential marchers.....	Saleem, May-lin
Nov. 20	Send out media advisory and public service announcements.....	Saleem
Nov. 24	Call media contacts and remind.....	Saleem
Nov. 24	THE MARCH!.....	everyone!
Nov. 30	Celebration potluck and evaluation.....	everyone!

Types of events

In order to get a lot of people to your event, it should be informative, current and fun. Here are a few ideas on different types of public events.

Panel discussions

Panel discussions are an excellent way to get a dialogue going around a specific issue. In a panel discussion, invited speakers each make a five or ten minute presentation on a topic, then take questions from the audience and fellow speakers. It is important for panel discussions to be well framed, topical and facilitated by a skilled mediator.

Public forums/meetings

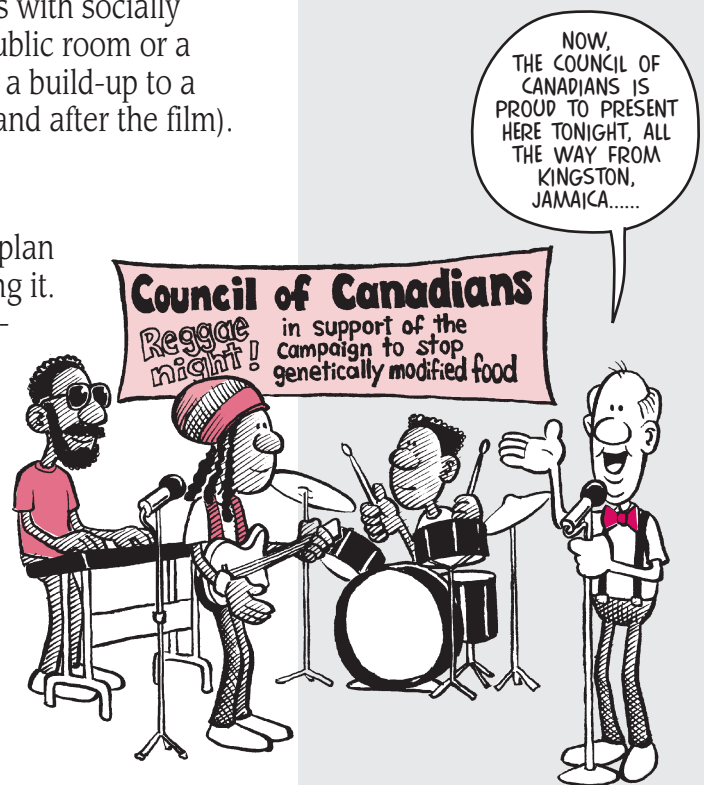
A public forum is an excellent way to educate a wide audience about an issue. Invite people who are both knowledgeable on the issue and good at public speaking to give a public address. The further in advance you try to book speakers, the better your success will be at having them come. At the end of the evening it is always good to have someone who's known in the community make a pitch to get more people involved in the issue by promoting upcoming events or actions. Having a petition or letter to sign at the meeting itself is a good way to directly involve the audience in the issue.

Film showings

You can show political documentaries or feature films with socially conscious themes, either on a large-screen TV in a public room or a community movie theatre. The film could be used as a build-up to a larger action (be sure to announce the action before and after the film).

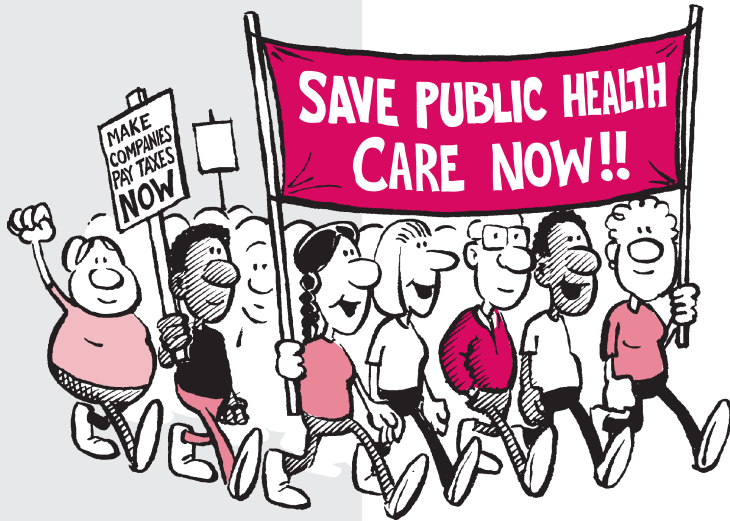
Benefit concerts

The important general rule for a benefit concert is to plan to make much more money than you spend organizing it. Try to get everything donated: the stage, sound equipment, bands, food. If a club owner or musician is reluctant to donate an evening, then talk with them about the important work that you are doing and how social justice groups can't function without money. Tell them that it's what they can do for the movement! During the show, schedule short and punchy political speeches while the bands are setting up, and make a pitch to raise more money (but don't forget that people are there to have fun!). If you can, put up a large banner above the stage that advertises the Council and the issue for which you are raising money.



Information pickets

This is a very low-tech type of event. All you need is a dozen or more participants with signs and leaflets. Banners and other brightly coloured visual props are also a good way of attracting the attention of the public and the media. Check with your municipal government to find out the local laws on picketing. Hold signs, pass out literature, but most of all, talk to passers-by in a non-threatening and informative way.



Outdoor rallies

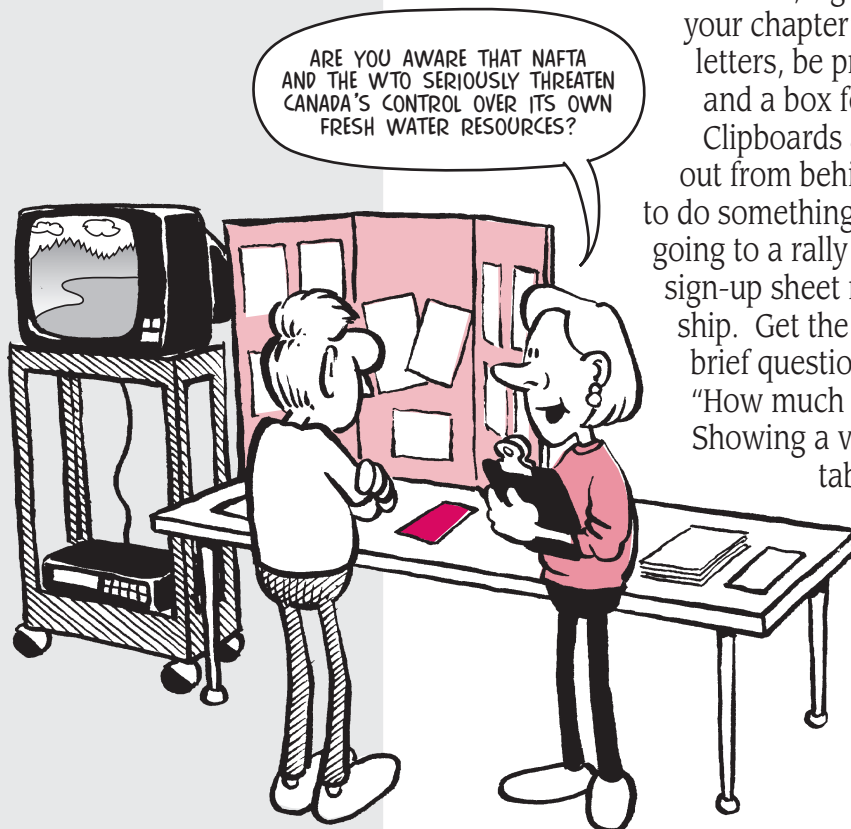
A rally takes a lot of planning to be successful. You will need a public venue, speakers, entertainment, visual aids like banners and placards, and a good crowd. In some locations, you may need to get a rally permit. Look into it and get one well in advance. Rallies work best if you can mix hard-hitting speeches with music and participatory exercises to loosen up the crowd ("What do we want?"... "Tuition Freeze!"... "When do we want it?"... "Now!"). To impress your target and the media, make sure you attract a lot of participants through networks and publicity.

Information tables

The best information tables are ones that encourage passers-by to participate in some activity. Get people to sign a petition, buy a ticket for a fund-raiser, sign a letter or sign up to work on one of

your chapter's campaigns. If you are collecting letters, be prepared with paper, pens, envelopes and a box for donations to help with mailing costs. Clipboards are great because they allow you to get out from behind the table and ask people to sign up to do something, whether it be making a phone call, going to a rally or joining a coalition. Always have a sign-up sheet ready to build your chapter's membership. Get the attention of passers-by by asking a brief question to involve them in a dialogue, such as "How much profit did your bank make last year?"

Showing a video of a related documentary at your table (at low volume!) is a good way to attract people. Giving away pins or stickers is a terrific way to build visibility and boost morale. It's best to have two or more people tabling together. Try to put less experienced people with veteran activists. Have one of them work the flow of people and draw people to other activists sitting at the table.



After it's over: evaluating your event

Evaluation is a step that is sometimes skipped because people are exhausted after an event, but it is an important step. Organizers should ask themselves: "What did we do right? What could we have done better?" Such self-criticism will help you to put on better public events in the future.

