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# Create Your Activism Plan

## Self-Paced Course

Many activists have a great vision for the change they want to create, but are unsure about how to actually accomplish that change. Our “Create Your Activism Plan” course will help you understand what you need to do to accomplish your goals, and it will guide you in creating a specific plan to succeed. This course covers six “building blocks” of activism that must be understood and used in order to reach your goals: vision, goals and objectives, leadership, civic environment, message and audience, and outreach activities.

This text is from an online version of the course, and as such may contain references to links and other functions that are not accessible through this downloadable version.

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# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 1: Vision and Motivation

### 1.1: About the Course

Welcome to the Online Activism Institute's course on how to **Create Your Activism Plan**. This course is designed for people who want to change something in their community. There are different ways to push for change. Some people want to change laws and policies. Others want to change cultural attitudes, practices and assumptions. People who take the initiative to bring about change in their communities are activists.

This course uses real-life examples of activists who successfully achieved change in their communities to show you the key steps of a successful activism effort. As you explore the skills and lessons learned from these activists, you will apply these skills to translate your vision into a Personal Activism Plan that you can print out and take with you. Refer to the accompanying Activism Plan Builder document to create your activism plan, available online at the Activism Institute website.

In your Personal Activism Plan, you will:

- Define your vision
- Translate your vision into achievable goals and objectives
- Prepare yourself to recruit and lead other people
- Assess your civic environment to determine which civic channels you will use
- Develop effective messages that are targeted to your audience
- Identify people and organizations who will help you deliver your message

For most people, the path to achieving influence is a journey, not a sprint. Small, steady changes add up to success. Through this course, you will look inward to all the power, talents and passions you hold within. By drawing on your knowledge of who you are, and what motivates you, you will be better prepared to achieve success on the issues you care about for your community and your country.

This course will also point you to resources available on the Internet where you can learn by researching materials from around the world, and "meeting" people who can share their experiences with you. By the end of this course, we also hope you will have gained a better sense of how the Internet can be a resource for you in your personal goals.

Take the time to explore the online resources we've provided in the Online Activism Institute website's library.

## 1.2: Course Navigation

*Note – This section applies only to the interactive version of the course.*

This "course navigation" page seeks to help you, the user, move quickly and easily through the various elements of this self-paced course.

There are six sections of the course, as noted on the tabs at the top of the page. The six sections are:

- Vision and Motivation
- Goals and Objectives
- Leadership
- Civic Environment
- Message and Audience
- Outreach Activities


When you click on one of these section tabs, you will be taken to the first page of course materials for that section. Each section has two components, as highlighted on the left-side navigation screen. They are:

- **Lesson Materials:** where you learn about the topic of that section (for example, Goals and Objectives or Leadership)
- **Activism Plan Builder:** where you access the online form you can use to build your own activism plan

You can move through the lesson materials either sequentially, by hitting the "next" button at the end of each page, or by clicking on a specific topic in the left-hand navigation screen.

As you move through the lesson materials, you will notice that information is provided in a variety of ways.

- **Text:** Read the text and be sure to carefully consider the issues discussed. In particular, think carefully about the summary questions at the end of each section, which will be very useful for you when developing your activism plan.

- **Activist Interviews:** Throughout the course, you will be linked to the OAI's database of activists, which offers an opportunity to learn about how other activists in the Middle East are making a difference in their communities. To return to the course from these pages, simply close the window by clicking on the "X" in the upper left-hand corner.
- **Flash Presentations:** The course contains short animated presentations that are represented as a text link with an arrow that looks like this . Simply click on the link to play the animation, which will appear as a window in the middle of your screen. You will need to have speakers attached to your computer to hear the audio portion of the presentation. Once the presentation is done, simply click on the "x" at the top left of the window.

Once you have completed the lesson materials for a given section of the course, you should turn to the "activism plan builder" for that section of the course.

### Using the Activism Plan Builder

At the end of each lesson, you will be directed to complete a section of your Activism Plan, by filling out the questions in the "Activism Plan Builder" document that accompanies this course.

## 1.3: The Building Blocks of an Activism Plan

Building an activism plan is a multi-step process. You will start with clarifying your vision and defining your goals and objectives. Then you will create a plan for leading your effort as well as assessing your civic environment. Finally, you will determine how to develop and deliver effective messages that will resonate with your audience.

As you build your activism plan, first you will need to develop your internal resources and information. In this first stage, you must understand how to effectively plan for your activism effort. This stage includes:

- Clarifying your vision
- Defining your goals and objectives
- Preparing yourself to lead
- Assessing your civic environment

In the second stage, you must determine how best to deliver your message to the outside world. This stage includes:

- Developing your message

- Conducting outreach activities

#### 1.4: Who is an Activist?

As you prepare to develop your personal activism plan, you may want to take a moment to reflect on what makes a person an activist. Consider the questions below:

- When you think of activism, what words come to mind? What do activists do?
- Is there a specific individual activist or movement that inspires you as an activist?
- Why do you think these activism efforts were successful? Did laws change? Did customs change? Did people develop greater awareness of the issue and ways they could contribute to solutions?
- If you could change one thing about your community or the world around you, what would it be?
- Are you an activist, or do you want to become an activist?

#### Activist Interviews

Throughout this course you will review the real-life stories of activists and identify some key lessons that you can apply in your own efforts. Through our website, [www.activisminstitute.org](http://www.activisminstitute.org), you can view the Online Activism Institute's library of activist interviews, select the people whose activities interest you, read their profiles and view their interviews where they discuss what motivated them to become activists.

#### 1.5: Activist Interviews

In this section, you can use the online interface of our self-paced course to view the Online Activism Institute's library of activist interviews, select the people whose activities interest you, read their profiles and view their interviews where they discuss what motivated them to become activists.

#### 1.6: Summary Questions

As you prepare to fill out your activism plan on this subject, consider the following questions:

- Why am I interested in activism?
- What specific topics or issues would I like to work on?

- What about my community would I like to see changed?
- What would I like my community / state / world to look like as a result of my activism work?

Then, apply these lessons to the "vision" portion of your activism plan by filling in the "Write Your Vision" section of the Activism Plan Builder.



# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 2: Goals and Objectives

### 2.1: Lesson Objectives

In this lesson, we'll look at turning your vision in to a more concrete set of goals and objectives, which is crucial to achieving change. At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Translate your vision into attainable results
- Create effective statements of goals and objectives

### 2.2: Activist Interviews

In this section, you can use the online interface of our self-paced course to watch one or more of the videos titled "Goals and Objectives" in which activists discuss their goals and objectives. As you view the videos, consider the following questions:

- What did the activist and her group want to achieve?
- How did the activist and her group propose to achieve their goals?
- What action did the activist and her group want the audience to take to achieve their goals?

### 2.3: Translate Your Vision into Results

Once you have determined your overall vision, you need to identify what goals and objectives will help you achieve it. In other words, you need to translate your vision into attainable results. It is important to set concrete goals and objectives. A goal identifies a problem or issue you want to address. Goals are more measurable and finite than your grand vision.

In order to achieve your grand vision, you must break down your goals into specific, achievable objectives. As important as your vision is, your purpose as an activist is to not just envision change, but actually achieve it. The goals and objectives you develop in this lesson will help inform the very specific plan of action you create to make your vision a reality.



A goal is a brief statement that identifies a problem or issue you want to address and what you hope to achieve with respect to this issue. It identifies a specific, achievable result or outcome relative to your vision. It states the outcome you are targeting with your efforts. It is more measurable and finite than your grand vision. It should be achievable and specific. A goal has a clear end point, a “deadline.”

Each general goal has more specific supporting objectives: short-term goals that will help you achieve your long-term goal. Like goals, supporting objectives are outcomes; in essence, they are the outcomes necessary to achieve the goals.

The most important thing to remember about this process is the movement from the very broad – your vision – to the very specific – your objectives and, eventually, your specific actions.

It does not matter if your vision is very large – such as achieving world peace – or very targeted – such as creating more green space in your neighborhood. Just think about the specific goals and objectives that apply to your particular situation. They will lead you to the actions you can take today to start making a difference.

In addition, do not be concerned if you have to set small goals at first. Your vision may be broad-ranging, but the reality of your situation may require smaller victories along the way. Remember that some of the world’s largest, most successful activism campaigns, such as those of Mandela and Gandhi, started with small, courageous acts that grew to global proportions.

## 2.4: Examples

Let's go over some examples of goal statements and supporting objectives (and how they relate to overall vision). Note that these examples apply to a very broad vision as well as a

more targeted vision. Remember that it does not matter how broad or narrow your vision is - what matters in the goal and objective setting process is establishing specific outcomes to achieve the goal.

### Broad Vision

**Vision:** To ensure that all women in my country have access to health care

**Goal Statement:** To provide women in my country with access to a new national health care program within the next two years

**Supporting Objectives:**

- Convince the legislature, through a petition campaign, to allocate tax revenues to pay for women's health care services.
- Raise sufficient funds from business leaders to finance our campaign within the next six months.
- Launch a website highlighting existing health care programs.
- Recruit 10 leading women to serve as spokespeople for a campaign to encourage more health care service providers to address the needs of women nationwide.
- Establish three community pilot programs for women's access to health services in the next year.

### Narrow Vision

**Vision:** To provide better health for women in my town.

**Goal Statement:** To open a women's health clinic in the next year.

**Supporting Objectives:**

- Contact women and get thousands of signatures for a petition for a clinic.
- Persuade the community town leaders to allocate funding to build the clinic.
- Recruit doctors from the hospital in the province capital to volunteer half a day a week each to serve in the clinic.

## 2.5: Criteria for Effective Goals & Objectives

In addition to moving from the very broad to the very specific, goals and objectives must meet a series of other criteria to be effective. Effective goals and objectives are:

- **Brief:** In *one sentence*, your statement should communicate to people exactly what you want to achieve.
- **Outcome-oriented:** Your statements should give a clear image of what the world will look like once the goal or objective is achieved. They do not cover the ins and outs of achieving these outcomes – only what the outcomes themselves are.
- **Attainable:** Remember, you want people to join you in your efforts. They need to know that what you're seeking is possible.
- **Measurable:** Anyone should be able to look at your objectives to see if they were achieved.
- **Aimed at clearly defined audiences:** Your statements should clarify who needs to be approached.
- **Clear about the desired actions:** Your statements should identify a specific plan of action.

## 2.6: Summary Questions

As you prepare to fill out your activism plan on this subject, consider the following questions:

- What is your overall vision? Is it a broad or narrow vision?
- Are there short-term steps, or goals and objectives, that could help you achieve that vision? How did other activists break their larger visions into smaller steps?
- How can you be very specific about your goals and objectives?

Then, apply these lessons to the by completing the "goals and objectives" portion of your activism plan in the accompanying Activism Plan Builder.

# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 3: Leadership

### 3.1: Lesson Objectives

#### Why You Need to Think of Yourself as a Leader

You are taking this course because you want to make your community better. It is very difficult to achieve change on your own. You will want to convince others to join you in addressing a problem. You may need to lead the way.

Even if you don't see yourself as a leader, and don't particularly want to be a leader, from the moment you try to persuade others to join you in your efforts, you are preparing yourself to be a leader.

In this lesson, you will learn how to:

- identify and polish your skills so you can become an effective leader in your community.
- identify skill sets in others so they can help you build a winning team.

#### What is a Leader?

A leader is someone who:

- people follow
- influences others to do something
- rules others
- guides or inspires others
- provides direction and a plan

### 3.2: Activist Interviews

The fact that you care deeply about the problem you want to solve can give you strength as a leader and rally others to support you. Passion-driven leadership is when you inspire others to follow you based on what is deeply heartfelt. It allows you to make emotional connections with people to persuade them to follow you, based on shared concerns.

Pushing for change is not easy. Knowing – and remembering – what you are passionate about will help you to work through the challenges you will encounter as an activist.

In this section, go to the Online Activism Institute’s library of video interviews with activists, and play one or more of the videos titled “Leadership” in which activists describe what motivated them to become a leader, what they viewed as their leadership strengths and weaknesses, and how they built on their past experiences and found others to help them lead.

### 3.3: Leadership Experience

Your past experiences are an important source of leadership strength. Many future leaders, especially women, begin to exercise leadership through community work. You will want to remember your past accomplishments to guide you as you move forward. In addition, you will want to consider how your own leadership strengths contributed to that success.

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- What have you accomplished in your life (personal and professional)?
- Have you already had the opportunity to make a positive difference in your community?
- If you’ve achieved change, how did you do that?

You can record your leadership experience in your Personal Activism Plan by clicking on “Examine Your Experience” in the left-side menu of our online course, in the Plan Builder section. Or you can move onto the next section to learn about different leadership styles and the positive qualities of effective leaders.

### 3.4: Leadership Styles

There is no single model for a successful leader, and some leaders use different styles depending on the situation. The table below describes four different styles of leadership:

<b>Authoritarian or Autocratic</b>	The leader tells followers/team members what to do and how without seeking their input. The leader commands others.
<b>Participative or Democratic</b>	The leader engages followers in the decision-making process and asks for their views on what to do and how. The leader still maintains final decision-making authority.
<b>Delegative or Free Rein</b>	The leader sets a vision and priorities, but allows followers to make their own decisions about how to achieve that vision. The leader remains responsible for the decisions that are made.

**Inspirational**

The leader has no authority or responsibility for the actions of his or her followers. The leader inspires others to take certain actions, by communicating a vision, or setting an example through his or her own actions.

Consider the activists interviewed in the prior section and other leaders you know. These don't have to be famous world leaders; they can be people you have met in your life, such as women and men in your community.

- Did these leaders use any of the leadership styles described above?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each leadership style?
- What are the reasons that people follow leaders? Is it out of fear? Admiration? A shared vision?

### 3.5: Positive Leadership Qualities

Some leaders use force, power and threats to make others do what they want. Other leaders inspire and persuade people to willingly follow them. The positive qualities of leaders who persuade, rather than force, others to join them include being:

- Communicative
- Passion-driven
- Courageous
- Self-sacrificing
- Inclusive
- Purposeful
- Persuasive
- Collaborative
- Ethical
- Self-confident
- Charismatic
- Decisive
- Determined
- Honest

Consider which positive leadership qualities you have, and which ones you want to develop. You can record these qualities in your personal activism plan by clicking on “Explore Your Leadership Traits” in the Plan Builder section of the online course, or you can continue to the next section to learn how to build a team.

### 3.6: Building a Team

You may not have money to pay people to work for you, and you may not have the political power to force people to obey you. Instead, what you can offer them is the emotional satisfaction of being part of solving a problem they care about. If people share your values and concerns, and they trust you, and you exhibit trust and gratitude toward them, you will be amazed at how much they will do for you!

In order to build a team, you must do the following:

#### Create a circle of people with shared values

- **Relationships matter.** You have the opportunity to bring together diverse people in a group, by making emotional connections through shared values.
- **Women have a large social network** and contact with groups that are often different from the ones men have developed. Bringing together these people enhances creativity while providing fresh ideas and new resources.
- Identify all the groups or **people you have relationships with in your everyday life** – family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances.
- Finding **commonalities** – common ground – is critical to making an emotional connection with the people you meet. It creates the basis of positive politics.
- **Be perceptive.** Pick up on those values and beliefs that you share with the people you meet. You can work to make every potential contact a friend by listening and learning.
- What are **the questions you need to ask** so you can find a common denominator between you and the people you meet?

#### Cultivate trust with others

- **Personal trust** is the asset you have acquired in your everyday personal and business life. People know that they can count on you and that you are going to get things done.



- **Trust is a valuable commodity.** Once you lose trust with someone, it is difficult, if not impossible, to regain it. Learning how to use the personal trust you have built is an important step to effecting change in your community.
- **Treat everyone you meet with respect.** Personal relationships do matter. Open doors for people who have always had them slammed shut. Go above and beyond the call of duty by making people feel special.

### Understand others' passions

- **Be inquisitive.** Ask a lot of questions to identify the passions of the people you meet. What values do you share that might persuade these people to support you, or to help with your project?
- **You have to listen before you can lead.** You really have to find the roots of people's passion.
- **Collect personal stories and anecdotes.** Studies show people reason by listening to stories. You can provide a framework for a path to change. What are you going to do to harness your passion, and the passion of others, so they will follow you?

### Enlist the help of your potential supporters

People who share your values are likely to want to help you; they are your potential supporters and volunteers.

Part of your role as an advocate leader will be to identify the capabilities of people who want to support you, and assign them to appropriate tasks. Invest time to consider their talents and skills, so that you can enlist their help with specific tasks.

Whether it's to help manage the day-to-day work of the campaign or to serve as part of a larger network to help deliver messages, participate in rallies or talk to the media, volunteers are the life blood of any activism effort. In an activism network, volunteers perform a variety of tasks, from basic office management and assistance to delivering messages to opinion leaders and elected officials. Some make great public spokespeople for your cause, while others are better at behind-the-scenes work.

Volunteers may undertake some of the following tasks:

- Fund-raising
- Work on your campaign website
- Assisting with operations
- Dealing with the media
- Making and taking phone calls

### Collect more people

- **Assess and nurture your current network.** You may wonder where you can go to collect more people. The good news is that potential supporters and volunteers are all around you. They look just like normal people. They differ only in the fact that they care strongly enough about the same issues you care about to get involved in one way or another.
- **Build long-term relationships.** Keep in touch with people if they move on to new endeavors in new directions. They can help you in the future. You have developed a personal, emotional, and business stake in these relationships.
- **Reach out to new potential supporters.** Expand your reach. Consider the various different venues in which you might find people who share your concerns and values, and are likely to become supporters. These might include friends, family, and neighbors; business leaders in the community; local schools, colleges, and universities; anyone who might benefit from the goals and objectives of your activism campaign; and individuals with specific, needed expertise, such as journalists or lawyers.

When you think about who you want to approach, some options to consider include:

- Host a table or booth at a community event, and ask for volunteers.
- Post flyers or a brochure in your community.
- Ask if you can make a presentation at a local business organization meeting.
- Consider classifieds or other advertisements in the local press.
- Post notices on local bulletin boards.
- Ask supportive organizations with large email databases to send out an appeal for volunteers on your behalf.

### 3.7: Summary Questions

As you complete the “Leadership” section of your personal activism plan, consider the following questions:

- What experiences have you had that prepare you to lead others?
- What skills do you have as a leader?
- What are some important leadership qualities of successful activists?
- What qualities do you possess?

- What qualities and skills will you need to find in other people?
- Who in your existing circle of people might be willing to be part of your team?  
Who else might you reach out to?
- How can you build trust with them?

Your answers to these questions will help you define your leadership plan.

# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 4: Civic Environment

### 4.1: Lesson Objectives

For an activist, civic environment is crucial. Each country offers different levels of freedom for civic organizing. Understanding your political environment and its openings for civic action will help you adapt your objectives to the realities of your situation. This step is essential to understanding what will be possible (and what may not be) given the nature of your political, cultural and social institutions.

In this lesson you will:

- Examine how activism strategies depend on civic freedom
- Evaluate your freedom of expression and association
- Identify the institutional channels through which to pursue your activism goals

### 4.2: Activist Interviews

Go to the website's library of video interviews with activists, and play one or more of the videos titled "Civic Environment" in which activists discuss the civic and political environment in which they operated, and how they utilized different institutions to achieve their goals. While reviewing the videos, consider the following questions:

- What channels did the activists use to communicate their cause and mobilize followers?
- What constraints on activism did the activists face?
- How did the activists overcome these restraints?

### 4.3: Institutional Channels for Activism

As an activist, you operate within the context of a set of laws and state institutions that determine how decisions that affect society are made, and what role citizens can play in influencing these decisions.

Below is an overview of the major institutional channels through which political and social decisions may be shaped in a country.

**Institutional channels of the state:**

- **Legislative** – Work with lawmakers to reform or pass new laws, or become a legislator yourself.
- **Executive** – Work with those who implement the law (governmental institutes).
- **Judiciary** – Seek to have existing laws enforced by the court, or pursue new interpretations of laws.

**Other institutional channels**

- **Public events** – Engage in events like public protests, such as sit-ins, marches and boycotts, civil disobedience (refusal to obey unjust laws), and the like.
- **Political parties** – Form your own political party, join an existing party, or convince a party to add your issue to their political agenda.
- **Civil society** – Form your own organization, or ally with existing organizations, such as professional, community, or non-governmental organizations, or groups oriented towards social services, students, activism, or labor.
- **Media** – Access this channel through articles in newspapers, press conferences, and interviews with journalists.

**4.4: Why the Civic Environment Matters**

Opportunities and constraints for activists are largely a function of which institutional channels exist through which citizens can express their views and influence the government. It is important for activists to understand how much freedom they have to operate within their country's laws, and how responsive their governments are to citizens' concerns and criticism. Activists must continually take the pulse of their country's politics, their government's willingness to respond to citizens' concerns and even criticism, and the dynamics of their civil society.

When a government is accountable to the people, it is highly motivated to serve their needs and demands for better livelihoods. In such a political context, activism campaigns can more readily influence government policy.

In countries where institutional mechanisms for people to air their grievances to the government are limited, activism is more challenging. Nevertheless, people in any political context can successfully advocate for positive change. Social change is not always dependent on government policy, and progressive social change is possible even in the most repressive political environments.

In these contexts, the strategies for civic mobilization, awareness raising, and legal reform will be different. Much thought needs to be given to protection mechanisms for leading advocates, and the cultivation of allies and support networks is significantly more important for activism in repressive countries.

In the Middle East and North Africa, political relationships are in flux. Although rulers in many countries use their power to limit and control the activities of ordinary citizens, activists are making inroads and fighting for increased civil and political liberties, better livelihoods, and economic opportunities. Young populations, more open press environments, and strengthened connections to other parts of the world, especially through the internet, are helping to aid the social, political, and economic transformation in which citizens are increasingly asking to have a voice and a role in the decisions that affect their lives.

### Methodology for Evaluating Your Civic Freedoms

To determine how much freedom you have to operate as an activist, and which institutional channels to use, you need to comprehend the building blocks of freedom. What are the freedoms and institutions that enable ordinary citizens to influence how their countries are run?

A number of international organizations have developed methodologies for evaluating the level of civic and political liberties in any country. One authoritative methodology comes from [Freedom House](#), an American nongovernmental organization that has authored a survey of freedom for every country in the world since 1972. They use a survey of questions to rank countries as free, partly-free and not-free. Click on the link below to view their survey questions, which you can use to assess your own country's civic environment.

#### [Freedom House Methodology for Evaluating Freedom](#)

In the [Resources section](#) of the course you will find links to the Freedom House Country Reports, as well as to methodologies developed by other organizations.

### 4.5: Activism in Different Environments

Please download these case studies from the Online Activism Institute's resource library to read examples of activism movements in not-free, partly-free and free countries.

#### Movements in Not-Free Countries

- [Aung San Suu Kyi and Human Rights in Burma](#)
- [Ladies in White, the Cuban Human Rights Movement](#)

### Movements in Partly-Free Countries

- [Mahatma Ghandi and India's Independence](#)
- [Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement](#)
- [Wangari Maathai, Africa's "Tree Woman"](#)

### Movements in Free Countries

- [Jody Williams and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#)
- [Rebecca Hoskings on Plastic Bags](#)

As you read these examples, ask yourself the following questions:

- How do the goals and strategies of advocates in different states of freedom differ?
- What institutional channels did the activists use to pursue change?
- How did they decide which mechanisms to use?
- How did activists from not-free countries protect themselves against state violence?
- How did advocates in free countries benefit from the rule of law and democratic institutions?
- What lessons can you draw from these movements?

## 4.6: Freedom of Expression and Association

A country's level of freedom of expression and freedom of association may be the most critical freedoms that determine how easy it is for civil society activists to build movements and mobilize the citizenry. [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, is the fullest expression of the equality and dignity of all human beings.

The UDHR provides the following statements of the freedom of expression and freedom of association to which all human beings are entitled:

### Freedom of Expression – Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

### Freedom of Association – Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Although most countries in the world are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in reality they do not all protect these freedoms. As you consider how to proceed as an activist, you may find it useful to start by examining whether you will face any limits to your freedom of expression and of association. Consider the following questions:

### Freedom of Expression

- Are journalists free to write on any subject in any way they choose?
- Do you feel people in your society self-censor when discussing certain political issues, personalities, or history?
- Is it a crime to criticize the political leadership of your country and/or the religious establishment?
- Can artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, and artists do as they like, and are people free to listen to any type of music, watch any sort of film, or read any sort of book or magazine?
- Can people access the Internet fully and openly, and do they feel they can contribute their ideas via the Internet without fear of surveillance or censorship?

### Freedom of Association

- Can people in your society organize peaceful protests around any issue?
- Can people gather in their homes, offices, or public places to discuss any issue without fear of surveillance, intimidation, or arrest?
- Can they organize themselves into a group or nongovernmental organization fighting openly for a cause?

### 4.7: Deciding Which Channels to Use

By analyzing your country's institutional channels for activism, you can determine which channel offers you the greatest likelihood of success and which ones are not worth pursuing. You can use the general questions below to help you, or if you have time, use a more detailed methodology such as the [Freedom House Survey](#) or other surveys in the [Resources section](#) of the course.



<b>Legislative</b>	Are lawmakers elected by citizens or appointed by governing rulers? Can you influence legislation by speaking to political parties and its leaders and elected officials? Do they care what citizens think?
<b>Executive</b>	Are government officials who decide how to spend the country's resources publicly elected? Do government officials change every few years in response to citizen voters? Can citizens peacefully remove government officials from power and replace them with new ones?
<b>Judiciary</b>	Can judges make rulings on the law even if government officials don't like them? Are judges independent from the government officials?
<b>Media</b>	Can the activist raise awareness through the media and public debate? Does the government have the ability to control what the media says?
<b>Public Events</b>	Can an activist hold a public demonstration to express his or her views?
<b>Political Parties</b>	How easy is it to create a new political party, or join an existing one? Can a political party express criticism and opposition to the existing government?
<b>Civil Society</b>	How easy is it to create an association or group of citizens to work on an issue? Are the laws for creating an organization clear? How easy is it for the government to shut down an organization if officials don't like its positions?

When you have completed your analysis, record your decisions in the plan builder, where you will identify which institutional channels you will use, and which ones you won't. You may also need to modify your goals and objectives to take into account what is politically feasible.

#### 4.8: Summary Questions

As you fill out and complete the Civic Environment section of your personal activism plan, consider the following questions:

- What is the civic environment in my country and how will it impact my ability to achieve my vision?
- What institutional channels in my country are best suited to my specific activism efforts?
- Will I need to adjust my short-term goals and objectives based on political realities?

# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 5: Message and Audience

### 5.1: Lesson Objectives

#### Your Success Depends on Developing an Effective Message

You have defined your vision and identified your goals and objectives. You have analyzed your leadership strengths and your civic environment. Now you need to communicate to others: your potential followers, decision-makers, the media, and even your opponents. An effective message is one that resonates with multiple target audiences and gains their support.

#### What is a Message?

Before you begin, take a moment to ask yourself: What is a message, and why is it important? Think of examples of messages that you have heard activists, politicians or advertisers use: What do you think makes a good message?

A message is a concise and persuasive statement about your goal. It communicates what you want to achieve, why, and how. It includes a specific “ask”: an action or position you want your audience to take.

The purpose of a message is to mobilize other people to support you in your goal; your message must clearly communicate what you expect or want from your audience.

Your effort will likely involve two kinds of messages – specifically, a comprehensive or overall message that expresses the main vision and goals of the effort, and targeted messages that relate to specific audiences and objectives.

By the end of this lesson, you will have the skills needed to:

- **Develop an effective main message**
  - In developing your main message, you will learn that an effective message should be:
    - Memorable and repeatable
    - Clear
    - Short and concise

- Persuasive and relevant
- Credible
- Action-oriented
- **Identify your target audiences**
  - You may be reaching out to two kinds of audiences.
    - Which people have the power to act directly on the issue you are trying to address? This is your *primary audience*.
    - Which people can influence the key actors or shape public opinion to increase your support? This is your *secondary audience*.

Both are equally important.

- **Target your message to each audience type**
  - To craft persuasive messages, you need to know what moves your different audiences.
    - What are their interests and values?
    - What is likely to persuade them?
    - Are they likely to be supporters or opponents?

You can then frame your message in a way that resonates with their concerns.

## 5.2: Activist Interviews

Go to the website's library of video interviews with activists, and play one or more of the videos titled "Develop your message" to explore how activists have created winning messages.

While reviewing the videos, consider the following questions.

- What was the activist's main message?
- Why was it effective (or not?)
- What audiences did the activist seek to reach?
- Did the activist change her message to appeal to specific audiences?

### 5.3: Requirements for an Effective Message

An effective message communicates a lot of information in a few sentences. It should explain:

- What you want to achieve
- Why you want to achieve it
- How you propose to achieve it
- What action you want the audience to take

An effective message must be:

- **Memorable and repeatable** – Create a message that can be delivered to an audience through a variety of channels over an extended period of time.
- **Clear** – Make sure the audience can clearly identify the issue you are addressing and the solution you propose.
- **Short and concise** – Offer a limited number of points.
- **Persuasive and relevant** – Create a message that the audience will understand and can relate to.
- **Credible** – Make sure that your message is being delivered by a source the audience finds credible.
- **Action-oriented** – Make sure the audience knows what to do to help further your cause.

If you want to start drafting your main message, you can complete the section called "Draft Your Message" in the Create Your Activism Plan Builder. Or move on to the next section to learn how to identify your different types of audiences.

### 5.4: Primary and Secondary Audiences

When you are seeking to make change, it is helpful to consider two types of audiences:

- **Primary audiences** are the key actors who have the power to act directly on the issue you are trying to address
- **Secondary audiences** are those with the power to influence the key actors, or the means to shape public opinion.

There are two important elements to consider when developing a message: *what* you want to say, and *who* you want to say it to. You will find that *what* you say will change as you

consider *who* you are talking to and *why*. That is why it is important to spend some time identifying your different target audiences.

When you are seeking to make change, your target audience should include the people or groups who have the power to act directly on the issue you are trying to address. These decision-makers are your **primary audiences**. They typically include people in a position to spend funds or pass laws, such as:

- Key policy makers
- Government
- Community leaders
- Business people
- Organization executives

Messages to your primary audience need to clearly reflect what action(s) you want them to take and why it is in their interest to take such action(s).

There are also people and groups who can influence your primary audience, because the primary audience cares about their views and actions. This is your **secondary audience**. They typically include people who support or shape the public view towards the primary audiences:

- Journalists
- Associations
- Public figures
- Voters

Messages to your secondary audience need to clearly identify the problem and the solution; messages must also be persuasive enough to convince your secondary audience to express support for what you are trying to do in a way that influences your primary audience.

### Example

As an example, assume that your activism effort is fighting illiteracy among women. A **campaign slogan** could be:

*Increase literacy rates among women: support the new literacy law.*

Your **goal** is the passage of a new law that funds literacy programs for women. Your **primary audience** would include members of Parliament who have the power to pass the law. Your message to them might state:

*Increasing literacy rates among women is the key to economic development. Pass the literacy law. Voters will re-elect officials who care about our country.*

Your **secondary audience** would include voters who support the lawmakers' need to be re-elected. Your message to them might state:

*Increasing literacy rates among women is a good investment for our community. Women who read get better jobs, and their children are more successful at school. Vote for members of Parliament who support the literacy law.*

Do not assume that the primary audience is more important than the secondary audience. The term "primary" does not imply that this is your most important audience. "Primary" just means "the audience that has the ultimate power to change your issue." It is often easier and more useful to target the secondary audience first.

### 5.5: Target Your Message

The key to crafting persuasive messages is to appeal to what your target audience cares about. Your message will only resonate with your audience if it connects to their values and concerns. You need to understand what motivates them, and your message should consider why it is in their interest to support your efforts.

How do you adapt your message to your different audiences based on their specific concerns?

Once you have identified whom you need to reach, you need to understand what moves them, in order to frame your message more persuasively. You need to know important information about your audience members, such as:

- What are their interests and values?
- What is likely to persuade them?

You will want to understand the values and factors that influence each of these target audiences, so that you can address their concerns and frame your message accordingly.

- Are they likely to be supporters or opponents?

Among your primary and secondary audiences, you have to keep in mind that while there will be supporters of your issue, there will also be opponents and neutral groups who can be persuaded to become supporters through a good message and strategy.

You can then frame your main message to address more specifically each audience's concerns.

#### Example

Consider the example of the women's literacy campaign with the following message:

*Increasing literacy rates among women is good for the country: Support the literacy law today!*

The target audiences might include **business people**, who need more skilled workers to grow their business. The message to them might be:

*Increasing literacy rates among women is good for our economy: They will have access to higher-paying jobs.*

Another audience might be **parents**, who care about their children's future. A message that might appeal more to them could be:

*Increasing literacy rates among women is good for our children: children of literate mothers do better in school.*

As for your goal for each group, you need to:

- Mobilize supporters to act.
- Persuade neutral audiences to become passive supporters. They may not take action, but they will view your own actions positively, and will be less likely to be mobilized by your opponents.
- Neutralize potential opponents.

**In summary:** A good activism campaign will have multiple messages for multiple audiences. It will have a main message that states your general campaign goal, and several targeted messages designed to resonate with different audiences.

You should have different messages for your primary audience – those who have the power to directly affect your goals – and your secondary audience – those who influence your primary audience.

And your messages should address the specific concerns and values of the people whom you are trying to influence.

A good message clearly communicates what you want to achieve, how your audience can help you, and why it is in their interest to do so.

## 5.6: Summary Questions

As you fill out and complete the Message and Audience section of your personal activism plan, consider the following questions:

- What is my main message? How can I make it memorable?
- Who are my primary audiences? Who influences my primary audiences?
- What are the concerns of my primary and secondary audiences?

- How can I convince them that helping achieve my goal is in their best interest?
- How can I express this information in targeted messages that will inspire action?



# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 6: Outreach Activities

### 6.1: Lesson Objectives

Once you have crafted effective messages that are targeted to your audiences, the next step is to consider the different methods and strategies to deliver your message.

In this lesson, you will learn:

- How coalitions might be useful in helping you deliver your message
- How to build a coalition
- Various methods of communicating a message to different audiences

By the end of this lesson, you will create a specific plan to deliver your message to your target audiences through coalitions and a variety of outreach activities.

### 6.2: Activist Interviews

Go to the library of video interviews with activists on our website, and play the videos titled "Outreach Activities" in which activists talk about how they delivered their message to their target audiences and worked with other groups in coalitions.

As you view the videos, consider the following questions:

- What methods did the activist use to deliver the message?
- Were her methods effective?
- What groups of people or organizations did she work with?

### 6.3: How Coalitions Can Help

Activists often succeed by building alliances with key individuals or organizations who provide support to their activism project in a variety of ways.

As you prepare to develop your coalition strategy, consider the following questions:

- What is a coalition?

- Why are coalitions important?
- Have you worked with any coalitions in the past?
- What have been the advantages?
- What have been the disadvantages?

Continue reading to learn more about how collaborations, whether through informal networks or more organized coalitions, can strengthen activism campaigns.

Allies in a coalition can:

- **Add credibility** to your issue. The credibility of each group may be enhanced through its association with the other members of the coalition, and you may be able to reach a more politically diverse set of policy makers.

*For example:* Religious groups supporting women's rights issues may be able to successfully reach out to a different set of policy makers than women's groups alone.

- **Serve as surrogates** to place additional public pressure on those who are the final decision-makers. A large group of organizations and companies may be able to take a stronger stand on a controversial issues together than each could alone.

*For example:* A coalition of companies from different industries (manufacturing, banks, telecommunications, and so on) can work together to support the same policy from different angles.

- **Provide a network of supporters** and help you recruit volunteers. Various members of a group can share complex projects (based on experience, expertise, and resources). Expenses can be divided among coalition members, allowing smaller organizations to participate in activities that would otherwise be beyond their capacity.

#### 6.4: Coalition Advantages and Disadvantages

When you bring different groups together, it is worth keeping in mind the disadvantages as well as the advantages of building a coalition.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlarge base of support</li> <li>• Achieve policy goals together</li> <li>• Broaden contacts and relationships with policy makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can take too much time away from regular organizational tasks</li> <li>• May require compromising positions on issues or tactics</li> </ul>

- Provide protection for members who may not be able to take action alone
- Magnify existing resources by pooling them together and by delegating work to others in the coalition
- Increase resources for an activism campaign
- Enhance the credibility and influence of an activism campaign
- Help develop new leadership
- Assist in individual and organizational networking
- May require members to give in to more powerful organizations
- Power is not always distributed equally among coalition members; larger or richer organizations can have more say in decisions
- Organizations may not always get credit for the work
- Sometimes the coalition as a whole gets recognition rather than individual members
- If the coalition process breaks down, it can harm all the members

## 6.5: How to Build a Coalition

### Identify Potential Coalition Members

Deciding which groups to work with will vary depending on the specific objective. Potential coalition partners can include other civil society organizations, religious leaders, community leaders, and government officials.

When identifying individuals or organizations that can become members of your coalition, you should not limit yourself to those who traditionally support you. Coalitions can be based on gender, ethnicity, or interests, but you should also think of those groups that have something to gain by helping your activism goal or that may have developed an interest in your activism project owing to some nontraditional reason.

You may even find yourself working with people or organizations with whom you rarely agree.

After creating an initial comprehensive list of potential coalition partners, you will need to narrow and target your approach to specific groups. Answering certain questions will assist in the process of determining which groups to reach out to:

- **Mission Alignment**
  - How closely are the policy interests of the group in question aligned with your organization?

- Will the groups agree on key messages and arguments?
- Is there the potential for those policy interests to become competitive?
- **Strategic Alignment**
  - Will everyone agree on a general strategy?
- **Group Strengths**
  - Who brings what to the table?
  - Do any of these organizations have a strong volunteer base? Fundraising prowess? Expertise on a specific issue? A unique and complementary policy position or perspective?
- **Group Weaknesses**
  - Are there any negatives to having a particular group join the coalition? For example, does the group have a negative reputation? Or is the group at odds with another group that might be more important to your effort?
- **Group Capacity**
  - Does the group have the internal capacity to effectively manage its participation in the coalition?
- **Future Conflicts**
  - Is it possible that your organization will clash with this group in the future? Note that this is not necessarily a reason to not approach them. In fact, coalitions comprised of groups with different views often look very credible. However, it is important to consider these potential future conflicts at the outset.
- **“Getability”**
  - Are there groups that will be easy to get? These entities might be good to ask first, to create momentum and credibility.

## Recruit Coalition Partners

Once you have identified potential coalition partners and how they can help, your next step is to approach them and persuade them to join your coalition, through the following process:

1. Create a comprehensive coalition list with contact information.
2. Coordinate a meeting with the appropriate leaders of the organization for individuals.

3. Start incorporating groups with which you have an established relationship or affiliation into your activism coalition.
4. Make sure you provide all the information they need and ask for. Be responsive, and keep them informed.
5. Try to persuade them to support your activism project.
6. Incorporate them into your team.

In the process of developing a coalition, the group must have a clear understanding of the structure of the group and the allocation of decision-making authority: how decisions will be made, how information will be shared, how coalition activities will be paid for, whether is goals and objectives are consistent with those of your activism campaign, and whether the coalition can meet obligations of time and resources.

## 6.6: Outreach Activities

Once you have developed your network, the next step is to develop an outreach plan to communicate your message in multiple venues. Your network will be instrumental in delivering the message far and wide.

Most methods of delivering your message are divided into four main categories:

### **1. Direct contact with your primary audience**

- Meetings with government officials
- Community meetings
- Meetings with key leaders – that is, heads of non-government organizations (NGOs), women leaders, religious leaders, and so on
- Speeches to NGOs

### **2. Earned and paid media**

- Earned media refers to when the media discusses you or your cause for free. These may include an article about your press conferences, one-on-one interviews, opinion pieces in newspapers, or letters to the editor.
- Paid media refers to newspaper space, internet banner ads, or radio/TV time that you pay for.

### **3. Promotional activities**

- Promotional materials such as brochures, leaflets, and flyers.
- Public events to draw attention, such as protests, petitions, or sit-ins.

#### 4. Coalition activities

- Surrogates speaking on behalf of your issue
- Public endorsements by public figures or organizations

Determining which of these methods to prioritize will depend on who your audience is, and how to reach them most effectively.

It is important to be aware of social and political factors in your country that may influence the effectiveness of certain methods of communicating. For example, if the local television station does not allow for paid advertisement, then that should not be considered as part of your communications plan. Your analysis of your civic environment for activism will help you decide the best method for delivering your message.

**In summary:** Your message should be communicated through multiple methods.

You need to understand your audience and what venue best reaches them.

You need to analyze the realities in your country – which communication venues are easily accessible and which are not.

# Create Your Activism Plan

## Lesson 7: From Plan to Action

### 7.1: Review Your Plan

**Congratulations!** You've made it through the self-paced version of the Online Activism Institute's "Create Your Activism Plan" course. Now it's time to think about finalizing your plan and taking the first steps to achieve your vision. The materials below will assist you in that process.

### 7.2: Set Deadlines

To truly make a difference in your community, your country, or your world, you'll want to focus on completing your activism plan as soon as possible. Once your plan is finished, you'll have a very specific, step-by-step idea of how to move forward. Consider the following schedule for finalizing your work on your plan:

- *One week after completing course:* Finalize your first draft of the plan as best you can
- *One to two weeks after completing course:* Ask trusted friends and advisors for feedback on the plan. Do they understand your goals and objectives? Do they have additional ideas on message development and delivery? Do they know of others who may be able to help? Update your plan based on useful feedback you receive from others
- *Two weeks after completing course:* Develop a schedule for implementing activities associated with the plan. For example, if your goal is to educate women on technology issues and your objective is to hold a workshop for women on how to use computers, develop a schedule for finding a venue, developing content, finding teachers, etc. You can use the "Creating a Timeline" link in the activism plan builder to develop this schedule.

Remember that your plan is a living document. You may find as you move forward that you'll need to adjust goals, change coalitions and alter strategies. That is perfectly fine and, in fact, expected. You can always log-on to change your plan, and you can create a new one and save multiple plans on the website.

### 7.3: Share Your Plan

Once your plan is complete, you may want to save your own copy, print it and share it with others. You have many options for doing that.

### Download Your Plan as a PDF

If you take the online version of the course, you can save your plan as a printable PDF document. Once it is saved, you will have a nice document that you can print and read offline, or email to your friends and colleagues as an attachment.

### Share Your Plan with the Institute Community

You also have the option of sharing your plan with other registered users of the Institute. By clicking on the “Share Plan” icon at the bottom of the screen, you will add your activism plan to your personal profile. If other users find you based on your shared interests, they can view your plan and send you a personal message with their comments. You can also search for users of the institute who live in the same country, or who are working on similar issues, and contact them yourself. To do this, you will need to create your plan using the online version of the course.

Remember, if ever you revise your plan, you will need to share an updated version, using the icons at the bottom of the screen. And you always have the option of “un-sharing” a plan at any time, either by logging into the course, or by editing your online profile.

## 7.4: Work with a Mentor

Once you've completed your plan to the best of your ability on your own, the Online Activism Institute can connect you with one of our activism experts to help you refine and polish your plan - and put you on the path to implementation.

### How it works

A small number of participants are chosen each month to receive free personalized guidance from one of our activism experts on your plan. Go to the Online Activism Institute’s website to learn more about our mentoring process and to view the biographies of our experts.

Your assigned mentor will review your personal activism plan, and schedule an online session to discuss your plan with you in person, using our web-conferencing tools. Your mentor will give suggestions on how to improve your plan and get started, and answer any questions you have.

### How we select applicants



Applicants who wish to receive mentor feedback do not need to have activism experience. What we are looking for is passion, dedication and a commitment to values of human rights, tolerance and citizen participation in social issues.

Once we have received your application, we may contact you by phone or email to learn more about you. For example, we want to know:

- What parts of your plan do you especially need help with?
- What other issues, not covered in the plan, do you want guidance with? (for example, fundraising)
- By what date do you want to begin implementing your plan?
- Why do you think you are a good candidate for a mentoring session?
- If there any other information you'd like to give us that you think would help your application?

If you are chosen for a mentoring session, we will ask you to commit to promptly reply to any emails from your mentor, and to punctually attend your mentoring session.

If you are selected for a mentoring session, we will send you an email to let you know and to confirm your availability. Regardless of whether or not you are selected, we wish you luck as you begin implementing your activism plan!

## How to Apply

[Click here](#) to go to apply by filling out the application form.