

PRINCIPLE

BUILD STRENGTH THROUGH REPETITION

An often overlooked aspect of campaigning is the patient work of building a skilled and committed base of support through the repetition of regular events.

CONTRIBUTED BY

Khalil Secker

Khalil Secker worked as the campaigns officer at the University of Manchester Students' Union from 2012/13 and co-founded the Save Our NHS campaign to defend local health services from government cuts. He was formerly one of the London representatives for the doctors' trade union the British Medical Association.

"THE REGULARITY OF THEIR VIGILS SIGNALLED AN UNWAVERING RESILIENCE."

"Happiness is the longing for repetition."
—Milan Kundera

A crucial skill for campaigners is the ability to react quickly to time-sensitive issues. For example, a government threatens to declare war, so peace campaigners respond by organizing an anti-war protest, or an oil and gas company announces a plan to build a pipeline, so activists organize to stop it from being built. However, an equally important, but often overlooked, aspect of campaigning is the patient work of building a skilled and committed base of support through the repetition of regular events. With each iteration of the event, it has the potential to become bigger and better, and grow into a reliable part of a social movement's infrastructure and culture.

This regularity can be both dramatic and prosaic.

On the more dramatic side, consider the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo — a group of Argentine human rights activists formed in response to the campaign of disappearances, torture, and murder carried out during the military junta's 1976–1983 "dirty war." At the same time of day, on the same day of the week, every week for years, the Mothers assembled in the Plaza de Mayo, facing the presidential palace, to protest the disappearance of their children. They wore headscarves with the names of their children and often carried photographs of the disappeared. The regularity of their vigils signalled an unwavering resilience in the face of the junta's repression that played a critical role in the junta's eventual collapse in 1983. And then the Mothers kept marching! They kept holding

POTENTIAL RISKS

If followed too religiously, this principle can lead your organization to become rigid, boring, and disconnected. While stability and repetition are useful for recruiting and building an activist base, it's also important to be able to recognize when it's time to do something different, and to organize one-off events in reaction to timely, pressing issues.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Birthright
- Unplugged/Replugged
- Boxing Gender Oppression
- Reclaim the Streets
- #ThisFlag
- Walk a mile in her shoes
- #YouStink

Tactics

- Artistic vigil

their regular weekly vigils — for 40 years now! — to shine a light on continuing injustices in Argentinian society.

On the more prosaic side, consider campaigners who put on a regular annual conference so that supporters can share insights and decide upon their priorities for the coming year. Or a local climate group that holds regular monthly film screenings. Given the vast number of documentaries on climate change, you could screen one a month for several years and still never run out. Every time you run the event, it becomes easier: You gradually build up a network of attendees and supporters who can help distribute posters and flyers to ensure a good turnout. Maybe after a few events, word of mouth points you towards a better or cheaper venue nearby. Other, similar organizations hear about your event and start coming in greater numbers, giving the added benefit of networking. It becomes a reliable part of the local movement infrastructure.

Or consider the monthly Critical Mass bike rides. All over the world, they happen on the same day and at the same time: the end of the work day on the last friday of the month. Not only can people can put it in their calendars far in advance, but this cyclical regularity helps give the event the feeling of a ritual celebration. Or the UK-based group Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP), which produces an annual newspaper called Palestine at Christmas, featuring accounts of life under the Occupation. JFJFP organizes a network of Palestinian human rights groups to hand these newspapers out at train stations across the country. Hundreds of thousands of copies are distributed, with circulation increasing each year as word spreads and more activist groups volunteer to help out.

In all these examples, the regularity and repetition of the event serves to strengthen the organization's connection to its members and the larger movement culture it's helping to build.

LEARN MORE

How to Plan an Event

The Complete Event Planning Guide

<https://www.wildapricot.com/articles/how-to-plan-an-event>

- Critical mass
- Distributed action
- Enforced appearance
- Eviction blockade
- Visibility action

Principles

- Brand or be branded
- Build people power, then negotiate
- Create many points of entry
- Don't fall in love with your tactics
- Know your community
- Make new folks welcome
- Praxis makes perfect
- Simple rules can have grand results
- Use organizing strategies that scale
- Use the power of ritual

Theories

- Cultural hegemony
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Participatory democracy

Methodologies

- Art of Hosting
- Ladder of engagement
- Pillars of power
- SWOT

TAGS

Action design, Campaign strategy, Community building, Movement building