How to Be A Citizen Activist

Cliff’s Notes from *Becoming a Citizen Activist* by Nick Lacata
The magic recipe to overcoming government inertia is opposing parties agreeing to a common course of action.
6 TIPS

1) Vote and help increase voter turnout
2) Get informed
3) Win A Politician To Champion Your Cause
4) Media Attention
5) Create a Citizen Commission
6) Petition
#1

Vote and help increase voter turnout
4 ways to increase voter turnout:
ONE
Same-day registration
TWO
Mail-in Ballots
THREE
Public Funding of Campaigns
FOUR

Public Spending on the Ballot.
TIP
#2
Get informed
A, B&C of getting good information
Seek reports, data and other information from organizations in other areas that have been successful in your cause.
B. for good information

National or International Organizations

Find out if there is a national or international organization that supports the cause.

Seek information and data from the organization.

Ask staff at the organization for advice for gathering data and information.
C. for good information

Gather data for your area.

Search online.

Get public records from government agencies.

Go to the library to get help in gathering data and information.
TIP

#3

Win A Politician To Champion Your Cause
The A-F of gaining a political champion
Have a clear message & plan. Broadcast it.
Go to public hearings and speak about your issue.
Volunteer & donate to their campaign.

C. winning a champion
Organize with other activists.

D. winning a champion
Ask other politicians to join your champion in support, especially when they are running for office.
Once you gain your champion offer them a leadership role and Give them credit when credit is due.
5 Trouble shooting tips for gaining a politician champion

1. Always get a specific commitment each time you meet.
2. Bring the draft legislation with you (in addition to providing in advance of your meeting).
3. If they need time to review, review the legislation with them or ask to another appointment to review together.
4. Do not settle for a statement of support. Ask them to sponsor, second, or co-sponsor.
5. If they refuse to meet with you or to negotiate, picket or protest them to get their attention.
TIP

#4

Media Attention
7 aspects for media attention
ASPECT 1

Develop a short but broad mission statement that clearly identifies what needs to be done.
ASPECT 2

Have a great slogan
ASPECT 3

Have a clear plan of what should be done ready to go, including draft legislation.
ASPECT 4

Use social media widely: website with a blog, youtube, twitter, newsletters, facebook, Instagram etc.
ASPECT 5

Get published widely: journal articles, newspaper opinion pieces, radio, TV, newspaper & magazine interviews, publish a book.
ASPECT 6

Speak: create speaking events – invite a keynote speaker, ask to speak at events, go to public hearings, get invited to speak at events.
ASPECT 7

Spread the word, ensure the media is about your cause, not personality or ego. Make is easy for allies to advocate for the cause. Never lecture! Listen carefully for other’s interests. Frame the cause to their interests.
3 Trouble shooting tips for dealing with bad press

1. Fully understand opponent’s position, interests & values.

2. Reply or write letter to the editor (or similar body) framing your cause.

3. Ask allies to respond as well.
TIP
#5
Create a Citizen Commission
8 steps
to creating a citizen commission
STEP 1

Have a clear plan of what should be done, including draft legislation, ready to go.
STEP 2

Learn from similar efforts. Get and share the reports, data and other information from other areas that have accomplished the goal of your cause.
STEP 3

Join with the other individual advocates (like you) who are advocating for the cause.
STEP 4

Create a group and give your group a name like Ad-hoc Commission on________________.
STEP 5

Invite organizations that are natural allies to join.
STEP 6

Issue advisory statements to legislators and the media.
STEP 7

Hold public forums.
STEP 8

Ask a politician to recognize the citizen commission and officially ask the commission for recommendations on programs, policies, appointments etc.
2 Trouble shooting tips for creating a commission

1. If a citizen commission or task force will not listen or is off-course, point to its shortcomings through the media or use the threat of public criticism to get their attention regarding your recommendations.

2. If a citizen commission or task force will not listen or is off-course, point to its shortcomings through the media or use the threat of public criticism to get their attention regarding your recommendations.
Caveat on a citizen commission

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TIP
#6

Petition
10 points
for petitions & initiatives
Point #1

Specific Language – Have Model Legislation
Point #2

If you goal is to get on the ballot, have the correct forms and follow the correct procedure for signatures.
Point #3

Hold regular (weekly) organizing meetings open to all
Point #4

Continually gather community-based support from businesses, nonprofits and other community organizations, authors, artists, faith-based organizations and schools.
Point #5

Hold a rally. Invite politicians and other great speakers. Ask all who attend to:

1. Sign the petition
2. Come to the next rally
3. Engage their friends
4. Come to a community organizing meeting
Once you have media attention, invite people to specific places to sign the petition (online or on the ground).
Point #7

March, sit in & demonstrate, and find other creative ways to exercise 1st amendment rights to assembly.
Point #8

Have fun at the protests & rallies: marathon games, dancing, singing, poetry slams, contests with prizes from supporting businesses.
Point #9

Hold a public hearing. The citizen’s commission can request the cause’s champion politician to spearhead the hearing. Ensure the purpose, venue, time, process are clear and that there is an experienced facilitator.
Point #10

Introduce legislation to body of law or get it on the ballot, and then continue to raise awareness and gain support.

Once your legislation is adopted. Advocate for an office or cabinet with full time paid employees and a budget.

Advocate for advisory role in appointing officials and determining program, policies and projects.
Celebrate successes
little ones and big ones