



**THE
WATER
FRONT
ACTIVIST
GUIDE**

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The Water Front: An Activist Guide for Coalition Building

Food & Water Watch has joined forces with director Liz Miller for a six-month Great Lakes tour of the award winning documentary, *The Water Front*. In the midst of the imminent global water crisis, this film brings the issue home through an American story that powerfully connects water, race, and poverty. *The Water Front* follows one woman's unwavering quest to keep her community from being shut off from water. Food & Water Watch is using *The Water Front* as a tool to raise awareness and support for clean, affordable, and public water. Our goal is to strengthen community-based organizing and to encourage the development of diverse coalitions that include labor, faith, civil rights, student, and environmental justice organizations.

In order to ensure that this powerful film moves local and national activism around water politics, we are providing you with this activist guide to help you develop and sustain local campaigns around water politics. The activist guide is meant to complement the corresponding resource guide, which will give you a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding water politics. For more information or support, contact Food & Water Watch by calling (202) 683-2500 or visiting www.foodandwaterwatch.org.

How to turn the energy from *The Water Front* into a fight for clean, affordable, public water?

After you and leaders of other local organizations have viewed *The Water Front*, you will be in a good place to build an effective campaign around water politics. The key is to build on the momentum of that screening. If you are not affiliated with an organization and there is no organization in your community that is working to keep water a public resource, a good option is to form a citizens' group. For more information on starting an organization, refer to the Midwest Academy's book, *Organizing for Social Change*, or contact Food & Water Watch for more information about starting a local organization or becoming a Food & Water Watch activist.

If you are already a member of a local organization, you will want to put together a leadership meeting to decide which water issue you want to tackle. If your organization has already decided on which water issues it is going to focus, you may be ready to have a meeting with leaders of the other potential coalition members.

In either case, make sure that you get contact information for all who attend the screening so that you can contact them for volunteer activities. You can use the screening to announce the next event that you want people to participate in and to make sure that everyone is given an action they can take. If you need ideas, the Food & Water Watch Website always lists current ways that people can take action.

There are many issues that can be tackled locally—for instance, putting water fountain repair on the priority list of your local mayor, asking local restaurants not to serve bottled water, demanding that your member of congress support the Water Trust Fund; fighting against an impending privatization or advocating for a re-municipalization. The list of possibilities is endless.

Building a Coalition

Before beginning to work with other organizations, you should have a leadership meeting to clarify your organization's goals and resources. The leadership meeting is an internal meeting within your group that is usually small, typically 7 to 12 people, and is by invitation only. This is done not to shut anyone out but so the meeting can remain focused. These are the movers and shakers of your organization, the people you can depend on to be strategic and can-do.

Whether your organization must confront a pressing issue in your community or you have the luxury of choosing from a range of issues, you should consider the interests of other potential organizations and why they might want to join you. When selecting an issue, be sure that it will bring real improvement in people's lives, be worthwhile, be winnable, be widely and deeply felt, be easy to understand, have a clear target and a clear timeframe.

Sometimes issues are very apparent (a private corporation comes into a community to privatize its public water system), but other times the organizers of a campaign can select from a number of issues facing a community based on which will bring the most people to the table.

Once your organization has chosen a specific issue or a narrow range of issues, you will be ready to approach other organizations. A coalition is group of organizations working together to build a base of power capable of winning on an issue of common concern. Coalitions come in different forms; most often they are temporary, but sometimes they are permanent. They can be formed based on geography or around a specific constituency. Coalitions can focus on one issue or a group of issues.

When forming a coalition, you want to select organizations that have the potential to bring a significant number of people into the campaign. A great benefit to working through organizations is that they already have a built-in constituency. They can bring out people for events and put pressure on the local politicians you wish to influence or hold accountable. These members of these organizations need to have a real self-interest in winning on the issue that you choose for the campaign.

In putting together a meeting for the leaders of several organizations, it is important that two or three people have discussed the issues and potential campaigns before the meeting, and perhaps come with a plan of action in mind so that people

could have something to react to immediately. Leadership meetings which start with something like, “Well, the city is planning on privatizing our water district and I think we should have a meeting in two weeks and invite Council Member Smith,” will get off the ground much quicker and focus in on the goals.

By the end of this meeting, you should have a good idea about which organizations are interested in working together and what issue will be tackled. It is critical that this becomes a specific issue and not a generality, and that everyone leaves the meeting knowing what the goal will be.

You’ve accomplished next to nothing if you leave the meeting having decided to “work together to support clean, affordable, public water.” You’ve had a successful leadership meeting if you leave having decided to “work together to get Council Member Smith to drop the plan to privatize the water district.” This latter goal is specific, solution-oriented, and has a clear target – which are the elements for a successful organizing campaign!

Developing a strategy to win

Strategy, and the tactics derived from it, is a critical aspect of organizing. The issue can be sharp, leaders angry and ready to go to battle – but, if the tactics are wrong and the strategy is unclear, the entire fight can be lost. Therefore, in organizing it is important that everyone in the coalition be clear on the

strategy. And, in order for a strategy to be effective, it is essential that the coalition have thought thoroughly around the questions of who has the power to give us what we want, how do they have that power, what type and how much power does the coalition have, and can we win. Strategy development and power analysis are the backbone of successful campaigns.

There are a number of different methods for developing strategy and analyzing power, some complex and some simple. You can talk with Food & Water Watch to help you develop a full power analysis and strategy, but there are 10 simple steps to think about before you begin:

1. Clarifying goals. What are the main problems and conditions that you want to address through actions, campaigns and organizing? What are the causes of the problems? What are the solutions you want to push for?

2. Identifying issues that are linked to your goals. If the goal is cleaner water, what issue or issues can you organize around that will help build toward this goal? To start, the issue might be a modest demand. You need to assess whether you can start with a bigger demand or a more modest one, depending on current political opportunities and conditions.

3. Clarifying who must be involved in the struggle to achieve these goals. Who is the main constituency? Does it include those who are directly affected by the problems you are trying to address? If not, why not? Who are your allies and what role

will they play? Are there “friendly” people among the powerful who could be involved at some level?

4. Assessing your members’ and constituents’ political consciousness. How do they currently understand the issues, the causes, and possible solutions? Is this issue one that resonates with them? What might hold them back from getting involved? What kinds of education and analysis do you need to do with members, constituents and allies?

5. Framing and frame analysis. What are the terms of the debate around these issues and how will you impact the debate? What are your members and constituents currently thinking and how will you develop their capacity to understand the issues differently?

6. Doing an analysis of power. Who has the power to block you, or to help you achieve changes, how do they exercise their power and along which dimensions, what kinds of power do you have and how will you use it, etc?

7. Assessment of opportunities and constraints. What resources do you have? How best can you use those resources? What is missing and necessary in order to advance your goals? What problems exist within your organization that you need to address in order to do this work more effectively?

8. Identifying arenas of struggle. What institutions are involved in the issues you are working on? Where do you need

to focus your attention? The city council? The courts? The property management company? The school board? Who are the main targets within these arenas? Council president, mayor, superintendent of the water district?

9. Making choices about the tactics you will use. Strategic analysis should help us make choices about which tactics are appropriate to use at any given moment, depending on the levels of goals we have, the arenas of struggle, and our timeframe. A good practice is to develop criteria for choosing and evaluating tactics. Some questions to ask about a tactic include:

- Does it unify your constituency and involve them in taking action?
- Is it flexible and creative?
- Does it make sense to your members? Will they support the action?
- Are you clear about the target(s) of the action?
- Does it build on your strengths while exposing your opponents' weaknesses?
- How does it build your power as an organization? How does it confront the power of your opponents?
- Does it build the political consciousness of your constituents and challenge the dominant frame, or terms of the debate?
- Does it involve trade-offs that you may regret later?
- Is it consistent with your goals?

10. Evaluating and re-evaluating, as you go along. As part of ongoing analysis, education and evaluation for members and

leaders, involve as many people as you can in the process of evaluating actions and readjusting strategy.

ACTION!

Now that you have a broad-based coalition with strong leadership and a diverse constituency, and you've done a power analysis and have clear strategy with effective tactics, the time has come for action! This is the most important part of the campaign. If your goals are ambitious, such as beating a privatization, or could take a long time, such as a re-municipalization, it is important to set up intermediate victories so that your base feel like progress is being made. It's important that, no matter what form your action takes, it is fun for your entire coalition so they stay involved!

WHAT TO DO

1. LISTEN to rumblings about potential privatizations. Attend a city council meeting and follow the actions of the mayor and city council. Sometimes privatization processes are begun without public debate. Make sure there is no talk of outsourcing or contracting out operations of water or wastewater systems. Urge your elected official to sign a pledge to keep local water in public control. If your water is already privatized, insist on accountability and monitor contract performance.

2. SUPPORT your local water utility. Make sure they are providing clean and safe water and meet the staff.

The EPA requires water providers to publish annual reports on water quality, so make sure to follow this and to read the reports. Make it known to local decision-makers that you believe in investing in local water.

3. ENCOURAGE locally controlled alternatives to privatization. Local utilities can often find savings by improving efficiency or partnering with another utility. Evaluate the feasibility of using non-water revenues such as budget allocations to help finance your water infrastructure improvements or upgrades. Most importantly, make sure that the local decision makers, the community, and the media are aware of positive alternatives to privatization.

4. INFORM local officials and the community about the risks of privatization. Hosting a screening is a great way to get people talking; show *The Water Front* at a community center or have a house party and discussion group. Door knocking, town hall meetings, social and educational events are all also great ways to initiate a conversation. Once everyone is talking, bring the conversation to your local decision-makers to ensure that they know the community's position on water privatization.

5. ASK local restaurants to sign the Food & Water Watch pledge to stop serving bottled water. Many restaurants are promoting local produce and meat. Local water is a nice companion and a way that a restaurant can brand itself as green.

6. WORK to have community water fountains repaired and

installed, as well as establishing filling stations for reusable water bottles. The mayor is a good target for this campaign and it's a good way to bring in traditional environmental groups and other organizations that will benefit from fountains and water bottle filling stations.

7. CREATE a resolution to ban water privatization. Resolutions can be passed at the city or municipal level, or even by a community organization. This is a great way to show support for clean, affordable, public water as a human right. Talk with Food & Water Watch to hear about other groups who have initiated resolutions and to get sample resolution language.

8. OPPOSE privatization language in Federal and State Legislation. Keep an eye open for possible laws that promote privatization or that create unnecessary burdens on communities hoping to maintain a public utility. Stay in communication with your legislators and ensure that they know your position on water privatization. The best way to stay aware of what's happening around water politics is to get on the mailing list of organizations such as Food & Water Watch.

9. WRITE a letter to the editor of your local paper. Letters to the editor, or LTEs, are a great way to get your position out into the public. This is an easy action that both new and experienced activists can do. When writing an LTE, remember to keep it to 250 words or fewer and to refer to a recent article published in the paper. Don't forget to sign the letter and print your contact info - and always follow the instructions on the

editorial page.

10. SEND a letter to government officials expressing support for clean, affordable, public water. Letter writing campaigns have always been a staple of local activism. As with LTEs, this is a relatively simple and effective way to make an impact. When writing letters to government officials, always research the person to whom you are writing and write an individual, personalized letter as opposed to a form letter. State your purpose in the first paragraph, stick to the point, and keep the letter at one typewritten page. State how the issue will impact you and your community, and always suggest an alternative. A great way to engage a person in a dialogue is to formulate meaningful questions and ask him or her to respond in writing.

11. ADVOCATE for local referendum legislation. Local laws or ordinances can require a public referendum on water privatization contract or deal; basically this means that there will need to be a public debate and election before water can be privatized. This is a great way to be proactive around the issue and to ensure local democracy.

12. CONSERVE! While the agriculture industry consumes more than 80% of all freshwater in the U.S, landscaping accounts for 20-50% of all residential water use. Remember that conservation starts at home. Below are some tips on ways that you can follow to make an impact in your own home:

Faucets: Attaching a faucet aerator reduces water flow by 50

percent. Though the flow is reduced, it will seem stronger because air is mixed with the water as it leaves the tap.

Dishwashers: Run your dishwasher only when you have a full load.

Lawns: If you must water your lawn, water in the early morning or late afternoon to reduce evaporation. Consider landscaping with plants that don't require much water. You can do some research to learn which plants are native to your area.

(Conservation Tips provided by WaterWiser [the Water Efficiency Clearinghouse])

For more information on what you can do locally, see www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water
www.citizen.org/cmep/Water/activist/
www.waterfrontmovie.com



PASS ME AROUND.

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