WHAT DOES IT TAKE? Key Components of a Community-Driven Campaign For Transforming Anchor Institutions

Transforming Anchor Institutions: A Toolkit for Community Organizers

Much of what it takes to organize a successful anchor institution campaign is similar to the key strategies for any campaign, but there are some unique aspects too. Some of the overarching differences between anchor campaigns and other policy campaigns are:

1. **Multi-issue**: the potential benefits of winning an anchor institution campaign often touch on job access, housing affordability and displacement, educational and youth programs, local business and wealth building, and other areas of concern. This means that there is an opportunity and a need to engage constituencies and allied organizations involved in each of these issue areas.

2. **Multi-faceted policy demands**: because the community often has a vision for achieving progress across multiple types of benefits, the community must develop and advocate for multiple policy demands. This adds work to the research and development of the policy demands, and communicating them in a clear and coherent set of messages.

3. **Visible impact on the ground will take time**: the concrete improvements to people's lives from transforming an anchor institution will likely take a few years, since winning the policy changes takes an intensive campaign, and then anchors can be slow to implement policy because of their bureaucracy.

4. **Large bureaucracy within the anchor must be navigated**: anchors, especially universities, can have vast and decentralized bureaucracy, which means finding allies, decision-makers, and opposition within the institution can be just as important as finding them outside the institution.

> What it takes is big community participation, a strong coalition that can start advocating for the things that we want, and research and analysis for the community because knowledge is power.
> Claudia Jimenez, Community Organizer

Here are the key strategies that are often a part of any community organizing campaign, and what is unique about them in an anchor institution campaign:

1. **Grassroots leadership development and base-building**: an anchor campaign can be long, multi-issue, and involve technical issues, so community members will need ongoing capacity-building trainings to feel comfortable and meaningfully engaged.

2. **Coalition building**: because anchors affect so many issue areas, there are diverse organizations that have a stake in what happens with them. This creates the need and the opportunity for going beyond usual allies, like engaging local small business organizations, unions with members at the anchor, and organizations representing the clients of the anchor (eg students at a university or patients at a hospital).

3. **Technical assistance and research**: broader policy expertise is needed because a set of policy demands for an anchor campaign deals with multiple areas, from housing to living wage jobs to funding for community programs. Developing these policy demands so that they fit the community's vision, and doing it in a way that does not overshadow community voices, takes technical assistance that is closely coordinated by community organizers.

4. **Strategic communications**: anchors often rely on public funding, and value a positive public reputation in their region, so communications about how well they are serving the public can be a powerful strategy. Because they are large bureaucracies, communicating with the different parts and people within the institution can be critical.

5. **Negotiation and planning**: negotiations with anchors can be challenging because there are multiple players on the anchor's side, and a coalition with multiple players on the community's side. Working out a detailed and clear set of policy proposals within the coalition, and reaching agreement on it, is critical to having a unified voice. Negotiating legally binding agreements with the anchor requires legal assistance from experts that know how to take the community's lead. If the anchor institution creates their own formal community engagement process, this has risks and benefits, it can create new venues for the community to be heard, but it can also bog down the process and steer it toward one where the community does not have power in the decision making.

KEY ACTIONS AND REACTIONS DURING THE RICHMOND CAMPAIGN	
COMMUNITY ACTION	**ANCHOR REACTION**
• Community forum with 50 residents • Coalition formed with just three organizations • Two meetings with university representatives	'There is no need for an agreement'
• Hundreds of door to door visits to engage residents • Community forum at a church with local electeds and 100 residents • Mobilized residents to speak at university governing board meeting	1st letter of commitment from chancellor committing in principle to about half of the demands, and creating a formal community engagement process
• Monthly workshops for residents to build capacity • Coalition broadened to include unions, students, and more community groups • City council resolution passed supporting the coalition's goals	2nd letter of commitment from chancellor committing to more specific demands
• March through the city with hundreds of residents • Participation in the university's formal community engagement "Working Group"	Community proposals adopted by the campus/community Working Group
• Ballot initiative drafted to withhold city funding for the project if there is no Community Benefits Agreement	Final agreement signed?