

# Community Ordinances Toolkit

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This toolkit describes how community members can plan and implemented successful ordinance efforts and provides links to documents and tools others have used. We invite you to use these steps and documents and adapt them to your needs.

If you are working on promoting an ordinance in your community, please [inform us](#) about your efforts, and send us links that we can post on this website to update and assist others.

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## Initial Planning

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### Initial Meeting

Organize an initial meeting and invite people in your community (e.g., neighbors, friends, colleagues, or acquaintances) who you think might be interested in civil liberties issues. Share your concerns with the group and assess who is interested in supporting a collaborative effort. This can be a small or large group of people, formed as an informal affinity group, a new group, a subcommittee of a pre-existing organization, or a coalition of existing groups or organizations.

Discuss a strategy to accomplish your goals. Begin by assessing the local political landscape.

- Who among your coalition has time and interest to actively participate? Does anyone have a particular interest that you could harness?
- Consider forming subcommittees to take responsibility for specific areas. As a group, review a [list of possible subcommittees](#) with descriptions of their responsibilities and ask each participant to volunteer for one committee.
- Brainstorm ways to build public support. Examples:
  - hosting a forum or educational event
  - building a coalition of diverse groups and elected officials
  - circulating a petition
  - press outreach
  - lobbying local elected officials
- Before finishing your first meeting, be sure to schedule the next meeting and write down follow-up tasks and the participant(s) responsible for each.

### Networking and Outreach

Organize members of your group to call other local people and organizations that might be interested in supporting the local ordinance. Schedule the next coalition meeting and have group members invite people in other organizations. People and groups you might include in your outreach:

- Teachers, professors, students, and student groups
- Civic groups and neighborhood associations
- Religious leaders
- Activist groups
- Union locals
- Political party chapters
- Human rights commission of your local government body, if one exists
- Librarians
- Attorneys

Be sure to seek out people who have been most affected by laws and policies enacted as part of the so-called “war on terror.” Talk to groups that fight racial and religious profiling, immigrants’ rights groups, Latino advocacy groups, and those that advocate for Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans.

Ask existing local organizations who express interest in working with you if they would be willing to share their mailing list or email list, or to send an announcement about your coalition to their membership.

Use social networks for outreach as well. Create a group on Facebook and have members join and invite friends. Spread the word about your effort by encouraging your members to post about it in a Facebook status update or on Twitter. You can also use Facebook groups to manage your subcommittees and coordinate outreach.

Emphasize that our government’s constitutional violations affect us all. Refrain from involving members of only one partisan group. A coalition that represents the diversity within your community will be more effective and less vulnerable to the opposition than one that reflects the views of only a few community members.

*Tools:*

- [Suggestions for building bridges](#) with Arab, Muslim, and South Asian communities

## Community Education

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### Plan a Forum

To educate the community, hold a forum to discuss the ordinances. Set dates for the forum and your next meeting to plan it. Be creative. Some communities have held arts & culture events, such as benefit concerts and poetry readings, to help raise money and awareness.

The program committee can choose panelists to cover topics related to new laws and their impact on immigrants, students, and civil liberties in general. Don't overlook high school and college students as speakers.

Schedule a conference call with your speakers to review their respective emphases. Be sure to include the perspectives of diverse community members.

### Seek Endorsements

Send out an invitation to individuals, businesses, and nonprofits in your community. The invitation should ask recipients to endorse the forum and make a donation to cover expenses such as copying, postage, child care for participants, and facility rental. Endorsements will not only help recruit new members for your committee, but also expand your network for promoting the event and rallying support for your later efforts.

### Promote the Forum

To promote the forum, send a press release to media, put up posters, hold a news conference, and use your local activist network to spread the word. Send the release and poster to endorsers. You can also create a website. BORDC will also link to your group's site to help promote your efforts and to provide contact information for your group. [Email us to request a link.](#)

Be sure to leverage social networks when promoting the forum. Set up events on Facebook or MySpace and have everyone in your group invite their friends. Spread the word about the event by encouraging your members to post about it in a Facebook status update or on Twitter.

Also, contact people in surrounding towns about your effort, and invite them to the forum. They might be inspired to organize in their towns.

#### *Tools:*

- [How to Hold a News Conference](#)

### Educational Materials

At the forum, place fact sheets, informational literature, petitions, buttons for sale (see our [store](#)), and collection cans at tables.

## Record the Event

Consider videotaping your forum. Ask your community access station to air it, and post it (or clips from it) on YouTube. If you decide to videotape the event, be sure to inform participants in advance and note in the program that the event is being videotaped.

### *Tools*

- Example of a [taped public rally in Lincoln, NE \(MW\)](#)

## After the Forum

The forum is only the beginning. After the forum, continue generating support:

- Table (with literature).
- Write op-eds to your local newspaper.
- Put petitions in stores and offices (including those of your endorsers).
- Give committee members and forum attendees petitions to circulate.
- Put the petition online, either on your own website or on the BORDC site.

The process is useful not only for gaining support for your ordinance effort, but also for educating people who are not aware of threats to civil liberties.

Consider showing a film or documentary about threats to civil liberties or holding a book signing by authors who support your cause.

### *Tools:*

- Example op-ed: [Jeffrey Milchen of Bozeman, MT](#)
- [BORDC's Recommended Resources](#) (includes books and documentaries)

## Lobbying

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### Meet Local Government Contacts

Someone from your group should contact each city councilor about the ordinances. One-on-one dialogues with decision makers can be extremely helpful.

Contact and meet with sympathetic elected officials about your group's concerns. Arrive at each meeting with fact-based, nonpartisan information for the officials, and make sure to address their concerns as well as your own. In addition to your civil liberties and privacy concerns, also explain your concerns about ensuring the ability of law enforcement agencies to focus on their core public safety mission.

Your goal is for city councilors to agree to sponsor the ordinance(s). Supportive officeholders and the local police chief could also be effective panelists in your forum.

#### *Tools:*

- Flier, "[Police Opposition to Local Law Enforcement of Immigration Laws \(As Allowed by the USAPA\)](#)"

### Customize the Ordinances

Meet with city councilor(s) who agreed to sponsor the ordinances. Share BORDC's model ordinances with the councilor(s) and go over the provisions of the model ordinances. You can customize the ordinances to your community by adding, removing, or modifying provisions to generate maximum support. Include the mayor, police chief, and other city councilors in the process of customizing the ordinance.

#### *Tools:*

- [Model ordinance on law enforcement, surveillance, and immigration](#)
- [Model ordinance on torture accountability](#)

### Leverage Public Support

Send postcards, emails, and press releases asking community members to call their councilors and attend and speak at the city council meeting(s) when the ordinances will be on the agenda.

Be prepared for possible opposition from your U.S. attorney's office. The most effective way to counter the opposition is to know your facts and to feel confident in your position. Focus on and familiarize yourself with the ways that counterterrorism policies have had the greatest impact on your community. Stories from local individuals who've been harmed by these policies are especially effective.

Also, be sure to remember your audience when debating with the opposition. Depending on the audience, it can be helpful to have "credible" figures, such as lawyers, professors, and politicians, defending your position.

## **Circulate a Community Petition**

A petition signed by community members is an excellent way to demonstrate support for the ordinances. Write a petition and circulate it at the forum and other community events. You might also consider asking shoppers entering a local grocery store to sign your petition.

Gather all the completed petitions and deliver them at the city council meeting. Keep in mind that this is only effective if you have a significant number of signatures. If you haven't been able to generate enough signatures to demonstrate broad community support, be sure to find a diverse (in age, economic background, race, religion, political affiliation, profession, etc.) group of people to speak on behalf of the ordinances at the city council meeting.

## **Initiate a Postcard Campaign**

As part of your lobbying effort, consider a postcard campaign. At your forum, have a table with preprinted postcards to legislators for attendees to fill out with their home address and signature. If you can, provide the stamps.

## **Public Relations**

After the ordinances have passed, send out a press release to local and national media outlets to inform your community and other communities of your success. Name your group as a resource for those trying to pass ordinances.

Consider documenting the process of passing your ordinance(s) in a book, and giving copies to local libraries and schools as a public record.

### ***Tools:***

- [SPEAKING OUT To Protect Civil Rights and to Reduce Discrimination and Harassment in the Era of the U.S.A. PATRIOT ACT](#) (PDF, 58 pages), the story of the Multnomah County (OR) Bill of Rights resolution

## Ongoing Outreach

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### Follow up

Make sure the final ordinance document is sent to all parties specified within it and that all the provisions of your petition are implemented, including reporting components, which require a mechanism to receive and disseminate the reported information. You can form a statewide coalition by networking with elected leaders and community members of other cities and towns in the state that have passed ordinances. As a coalition, visit all members of state's congressional delegation, and lobby them for what you want.

### Continue organizing efforts

Beyond any specific campaign, it's important to continue reaching out and supporting movements that appeal to your interests.

- Stay active within your community.
- Assist surrounding communities in their ordinance efforts.
- Continue to update BORDC about your work promoting civil liberties or the rule of law.

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*Help us make this web site a clearinghouse of information on Bill of Rights defense efforts nationwide. [Contact us](#) about efforts you are working on, others that you know about, or resources you'd like to share on our website.*

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