DIGITAL TOOLS GUIDE

Websites, Social Media, Petitions & Crowdfunding: What tools are available?

Local Organizing 101

ONTARIO Yours to Protect

This guide was produced by Environmental Defence for the Yours to Protect Coalition with input from Stop Sprawl Hamilton and Community Climate Council. It is designed to help new community groups decide which digital tools are right for them.

Why Organize Online?

In the midst of a pandemic, digital organizing is more important than ever. Even in person outreach techniques like leaflets, posters and lawn signs work best if they direct the public to your online presence. If your supporters follow you on social media or sign up for email updates you can ask them to participate in future calls to action as new opportunities arise.

1: Making a Free (or almost free) Website

Many web hosts allow you to build a site for free from a '**template.**' The template sets the look and feel of your website, but you will be able to alter the text, images, layout and colors.

Website Platforms with Cheap or Free Options

- Wix.com
- Wordpress.com
- Squarespace.com

How to Get Your Website up in 4 Steps:

1. Visit these sites and browse the free templates.
2. Choose a template and start building your site using a free monthly plan. You can upgrade to a paid plan when you have a better understanding of what additional features might be useful for you.
3. Start by making a landing page which explains your mission and a contact page. You can add other pages and features like a newsletter sign-up as you need them. Only add a calendar or upcoming events page if you are confident you will keep it updated.
4. Decide if you need your own 'domain'.

REGISTERING A DOMAIN

If you build your website with a free plan, your URL will usually include the hosting company's name. E.g.: www.savecarrutherscreek.wordpress.com. Registering your own domain and redirecting it to your website will make your web address easier to remember and make your organization seem more legitimate. At Wordpress and Squarespace you can register a domain name for an annual fee of $20 or $30 – although some URLs may cost more.

Once you've chosen a hosting company, you can search to see which URLs are available and then register the domain and redirect it to your site by following the instructions they provide. You can register a domain directly, without going through your hosting company, but the process is more complicated.

Website Examples

https://climatepledgecollective.org/ was built using a free monthly **wordpress** plan, paying only for the annual domain registration.

https://www.ssho.ca/ was built using a $12 USD/month **Squarespace** plan.

https://www.eanap.org/ was built using **wix.com**.

2: Social Media

There are many good guides to social media use, so we will limit ourselves to comparing the major platforms so you can choose which tools are worth learning more about.

FACEBOOK:

Advantages	Disadvantages
● Almost everyone has an account. ● Useful for promoting events.	● Difficult to navigate ● Designed to only show your supporters paid content

Three Types of Facebook Presence: Private Group, Public Group and 'Page'.
A private group is useful for internal communication between members, but participants won't be able to share news and images to their own profiles – so private groups are not good for raising awareness. A public group works in a similar way, but participants will be able to share everything with their own friends. A 'page' is more official, but Facebook won't show your followers much of your content unless you pay to promote it. Having a 'page' can be useful for scheduling events and inviting attendees.

TWITTER:

Advantages	Disadvantages
● Good for connecting with journalists and academics ● Easier to go 'viral' organically	● Many people don't use twitter ● Progressive user-base means your preaching to the converted

Twitter is heavily used by academics and journalists, so if you have detailed facts or policy information that you want to raise awareness about, this is the place to be. It is also easier to go 'viral' organically on Twitter because of the way hashtags and retweets work on the site.

INSTAGRAM:

Advantages	Disadvantages
● Younger audience ● Less argumentative	● Difficult to share multiple links ● Need good images for each post

Instagram is organized around images. It's a great place to be if you want to share infographics or beautiful pictures. It's not an exclusively visual platform though. You can, for example, share an image of a stream or forest and write a few paragraphs explaining its value and a potential

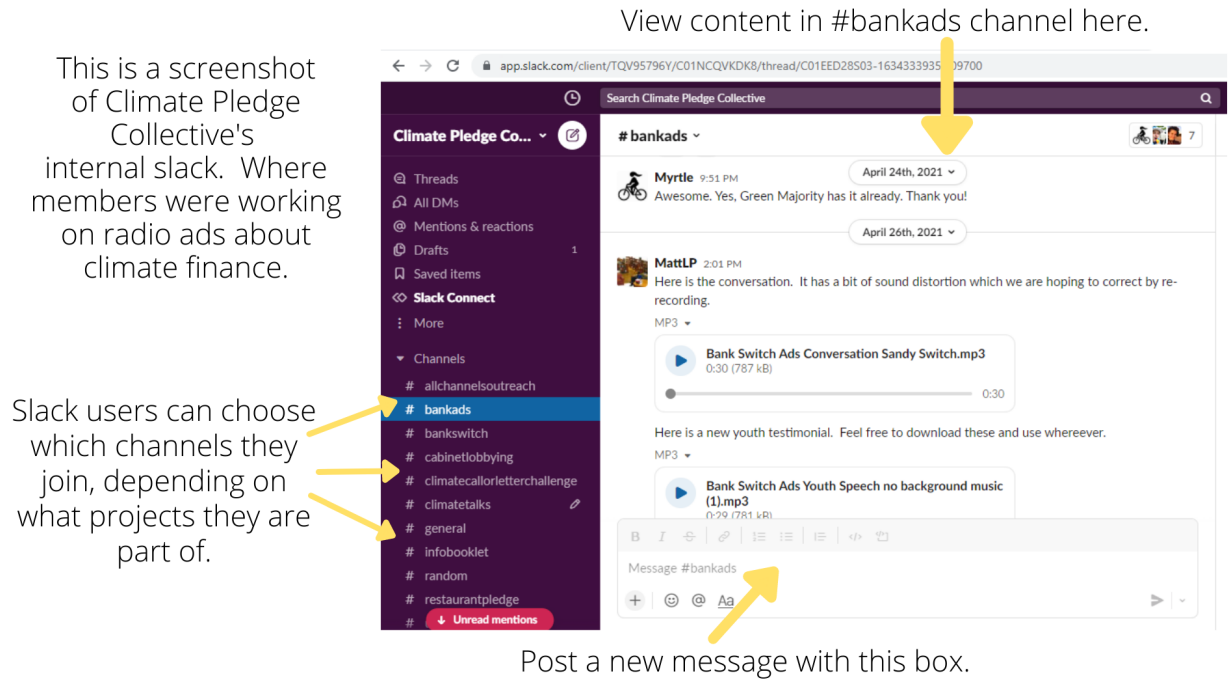
threat against it. You are unlikely to have success on Instagram unless you put the time and effort into producing appealing content.

3: Internal Communications

As your group grows, it can be difficult to ensure everyone is in the loop without overwhelming people with too many messages.

Google groups is a free tool which basically allows you to set up your own email listserv. Everyone subscribed to the group will get all the emails sent to the list by all members – but they can choose to only receive a daily digest if the volume of emails is too high.

Slack is a message board system which you can divide into 'channels' for messages about certain topics or projects. Slack has a free version which will delete older messages once your users have made over 10,000 posts. **Mighty Networks** is another option similar to Slack.



With both **Slack** and **Mighty Networks** the **biggest barrier is getting all your members to log in regularly.** If your members are averse to new technologies, you will want to stick with email or use **Google Groups**.

4: Banners, Logos,Graphics and Photos

Canva.com is an excellent, free and easy-to-use tool for making graphics of all types. It has a huge selection of fonts and clip art and a wide selection of templates for posters, business cards and all manner of social media posts. A simple Canva image can be a great way to draw attention to an announcement you make on social media.

SAMPLE IMAGES MADE ON CANVA BY CLIMATE PLEDGE COLLECTIVE:

Looking for free photos for your graphics? Here are some options:

Canva has some free photos, but the selection is limited.

Unsplash has a wider selection of free photos. The aesthetic of Unsplash leans towards the artistic.This can be an advantage as these photos don't look like stock photos, but can also be a disadvantage, as lighting and angles are at times more important than clearly showing what you want to see. If you use a photo from Unsplash do your best to credit the photographer

Pixabay also has a good selection of free photos that are overall a bit less artistic than Unsplash. Do your best to credit the photographer.

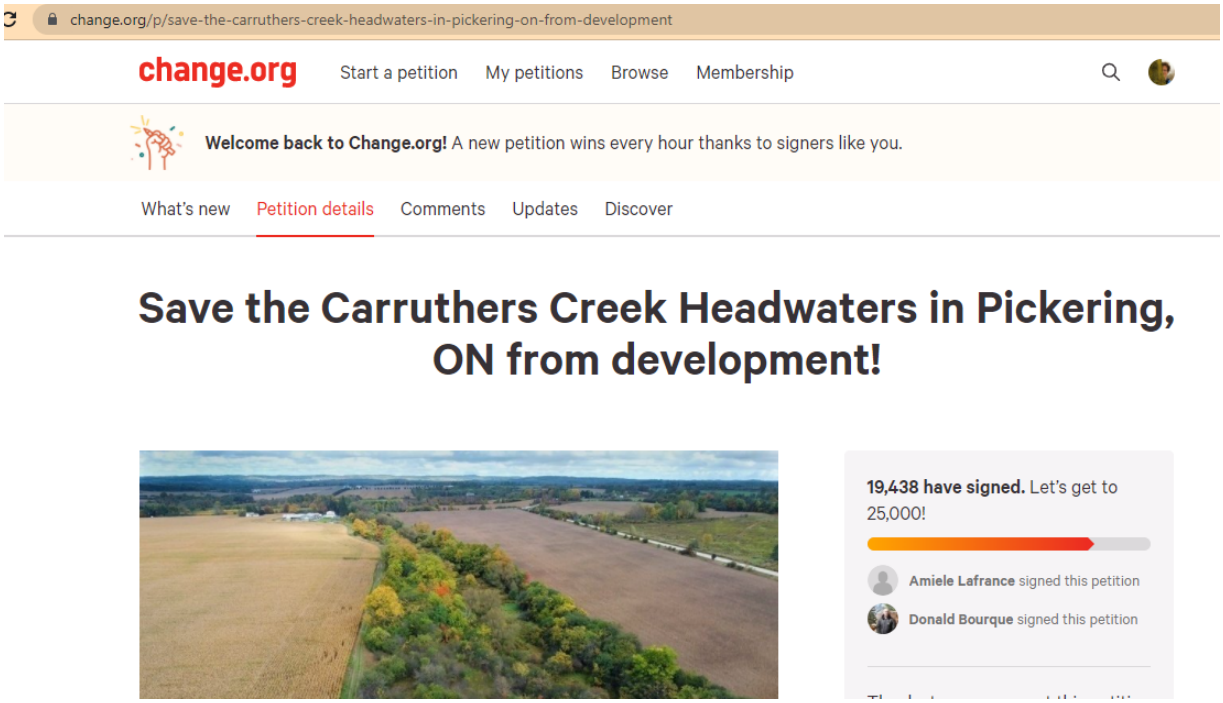
One note about free photos: if you are looking for something very specific, you may not find it. Try to think of something more general or about the mood you want to convey with the photo, and select the photo you use based on those criteria.

5: Petitions and Email Campaigns

Because many petition tools will automatically email their targets, petitions and email campaigns will overlap somewhat. If your primary goal is to flood email inboxes, you're organizing an email to target campaign. If your primary goal is to publicly deliver a large stack of signatures, you're organizing a petition. However, in many cases you can do both at once using the same tool.

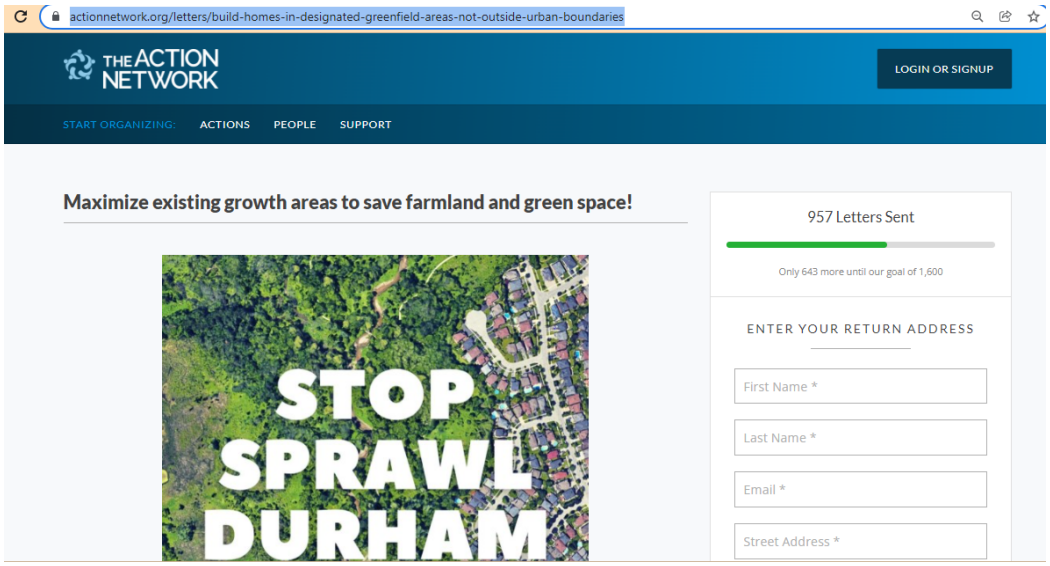
Change.org

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Familiar and easy to use. • Algorithmic recommendations to site users can increase signatures	• Although you can send updates to signatories, **Change.org doesn't share contact info of supporters.** • Only sends one email to petition targets for every fifty signatures, so it's hard to flood inboxes. • Doesn't integrate other features



Action Network

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Sends emails for every signature • Keep contact info for all signatories • Extensive set of features, including e-newsletters and supporter database	• Less familiar to potential signatories • More features means setting up your first petition is slightly more complex



Leadnow

While Leadnow runs many of its own campaigns, they also support partner petitions. Read the guide here: https://s3.amazonaws.com/leadnow/you.leadnow.ca+Guide.pdf

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Familiar to many Canadians • Keep contact info for some signatories • If it fits their current strategy, they may promote your petition and provide staff guidance and suggestions	• Need to apply for full partnership

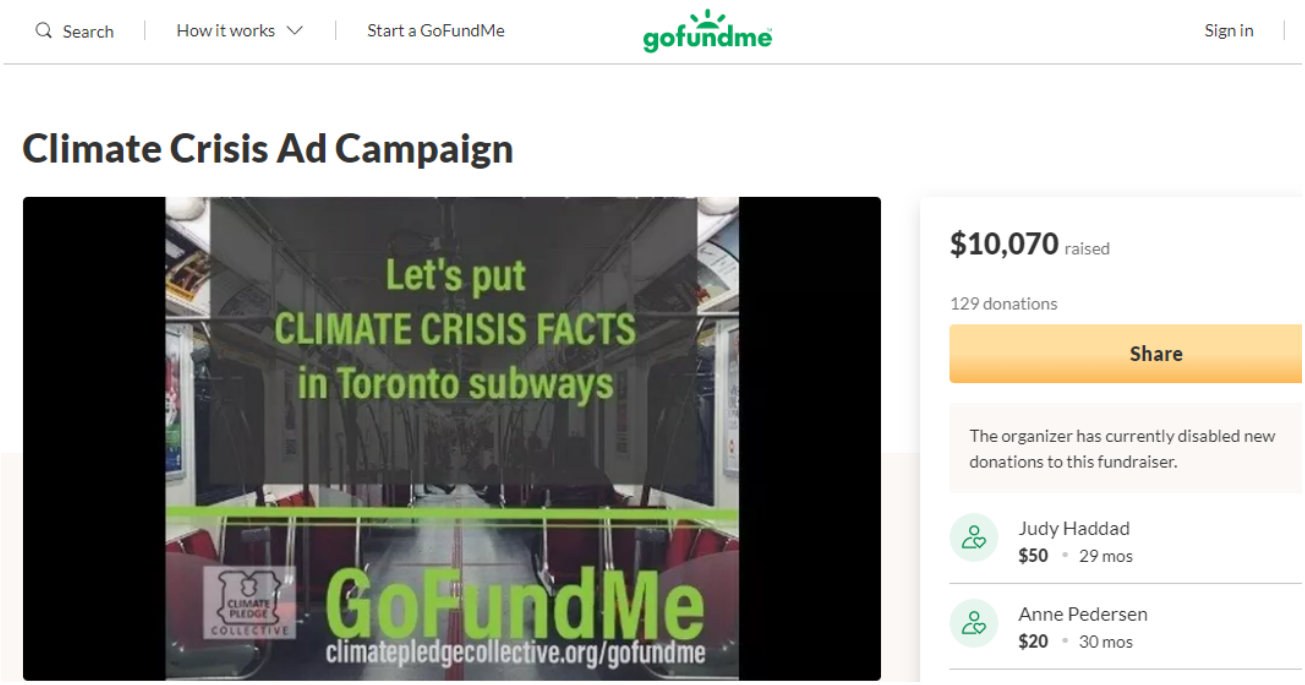
BOTTOM LINE: If you just want a simple petition that can garner a lot of signatures, use **Change.org**. If you're planning a long campaign and want to connect with supporters about future organizing, it's worth setting up an **Action Network** account. If your group would benefit from a partnership with **LeadNow**, send them an email. There are also more complex tools like **New/Mode** and **Engaging Networks**, but they are priced in the thousands of dollars per year.

6: Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding campaigns can raise hundreds or even thousands of dollars surprisingly quickly and it's a great way for supporters who are too busy to volunteer to show their support. The more details you can provide about how the money will be spent, the more comfortable people will feel about donating. Are you raising money for advertising? Specifically for legal costs? Be transparent. If you aren't sure how much you will raise, you can list potential expenses in tiers – if we raise $500 we will print postcards, at $5000 we will buy radio ads etc.

Gofundme.com

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Familiar to most donors • Easy to use • If your campaign does well, you can be featured on their homepage	• Slightly higher fees (2.9% + 30 cents) • Fees deducted from donation amount



Gofundme also provides a list of fundraising tips – many of which are applicable to other platforms as well.

[Chuffed.org]

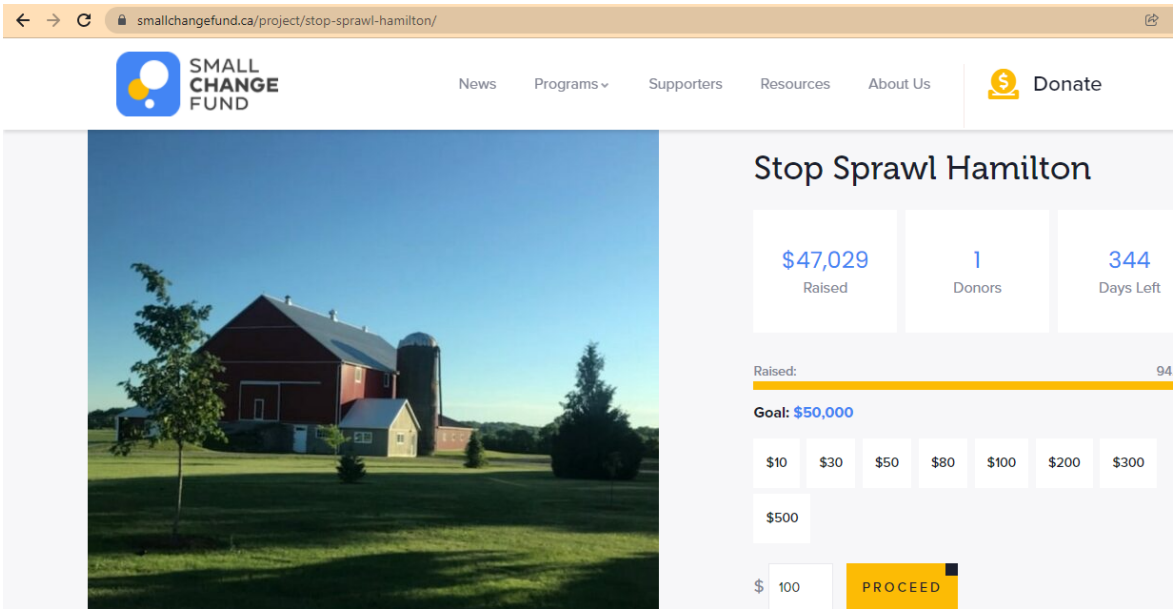
Advantages	Disadvantages
• Easy-to-use • Lower fees (2% + 30 cents) • Fees added to supporter's donation cost	• Less familiar • Less likely to gain donations from recommendations to other chuffed supporters

BankSwitch Radio and Podcast Ads

Like **Gofundme**, **Chuffed** also provides a variety of guides and training tools including case studies on their site.

[Smallchangefund.ca]

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Can issue charitable receipts • Tax receipts can result in larger donations • Handles tax-related accounting for your donations • Canadian organization	• Less familiar to donors • All spending invoices must go through SCF, they prefer to pay for expenses themselves rather than reimbursing • Significantly higher fees due to additional services



CROWDFUNDING BEST PRACTICE FOR LARGER CAMPAIGNS: Because **Small Change Fund** needs to approve even small disbursements, activists from **Stop Sprawl Hamilton** advise running two crowdfunding campaigns: one campaign with **gofundme** or **chuffed** which gathers small donations and is used for small out of pocket expenses and a separate campaign with **Small Change Fund** which gathers larger donations from donors who require a tax receipt and is used to cover your organization's larger, more formalized expenses.