



Event Planning Guide

For Grassroots Environmental Groups

Local Organizing 101

ONTARIO
Yours to Protect

This guide was produced by Environmental Defence for the [Yours to Protect movement](#). It has tips on planning and running a small to medium environmental event or rally. Not every step is necessary for all events, so feel free to skip anything that feels excessive.

PLANNING YOUR EVENT

1. Choose a Location

Your location should relate to your issue, but you should also consider visibility and accessibility.

- Busy plazas and intersections make good locations – as do symbolic locations like an MPP's office or city hall.
- A march, hike or cycling event might travel, but you will need to choose a starting point with a specific street address and plan to spend at least 30 minutes at that location so people can gather and get organized.

2. Choose a Date and Time

It's important to lock down your date and time early on as everything from designing graphics to lining up speakers will depend on having a firm date and time.

- Typically, it's easier to get a lot of people out on a weekend during the day – but you might find it's easier to get media to attend on a weekday.
- Holding an event a week or two before a corporate or government decision point will give people who have just learned about your issue time to take action.

3. Start Filling Your Roles

If you're simply planning to invite a few people to stand outside an MPP's office with signs, you can probably plan and run the event by yourself - just show up early and introduce yourself to anyone who arrives. But for larger actions, you will need to divide the work.

Depending on the size of your event, it is possible for a few people to take on several roles and some roles may not be necessary.

Marshalls Marshalls should be familiar with your plan and clearly marked with a hi-viz vest or colorful ribbon tied around their arm. They can instruct people where to gather, answer questions about your schedule and guide people towards or away from certain locations.

Photographer While everyone can and should take photos, it can be useful to assign this as a job to ensure that you get some good shots of your event. If you can afford a pro – that's even better!

Outreach Your main organizers will likely be too busy to talk to everyone, so it's good to assign someone the task of greeting people, answering questions and asking people to take an action such as signing a petition.

Social Media If you want to live-tweet or livestream your event, you will need to assign a specific person to that role. Other organizers will probably find themselves too busy to handle this extra task. Alternatively, you can just post to social media after you get home.

Media Liaison This person coordinates interviews with representatives of the media. If you issue a press release, include the media liaison's name and cell phone number. The media liaison doesn't need to make public statements, they connect the journalist with the people they want to speak to, whether that is a spokesperson, participants or a friendly expert.

Spokespeople Identify one or more people who can speak to the media about your event and make sure your media liaison knows how to reach them during the event and in the days before and after the event. It can also be smart to find an expert like an academic whose work you agree with who might not be willing to attend or endorse your event, but would be willing to talk to journalists to provide context.

Tech If you are planning to use microphones, megaphones or props, assign one or more people to ensure they arrive on site and get deployed and taken care of.

Police Liaison (if necessary) Most events won't need a police liaison, but if you are planning a large and loud event or planning to march in the road, you may encounter a police presence. Designating a specific person to communicate with police will make the event safer for everyone. When police arrive, the police liaison should identify themselves to police. It's okay if the police liaison is not able to answer questions from police immediately – they can bring things back to the group if you need more information or a group decision. You have a right to gather in public spaces and the police have a right to maintain public order.

More information on your rights is available here:

<https://ccla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Protest-Rights-Guide.pdf>

4. Choose a Name

The name of your event is important for both attracting participants and spreading your message.

A GOOD EVENT NAME IS:

- Short and unique so it's easy to search for on the internet. "Fridays for Future" was easy to search for because no one used that phrase before the FFF movement launched.
- Appealing and energetic. Climate Pledge Collective's "[Climate Picnic](#)" events aimed to attract a broad audience who might not typically attend a protest by associating activism with a common and well-liked activity: picnics.
- Clearly related to your message. Many people may only hear about your event in a news headline or when they quickly scan a poster – you want to use this opportunity to communicate. People reading about the "March for Jobs, Justice and the Climate" knew what the event was about just from reading the name.

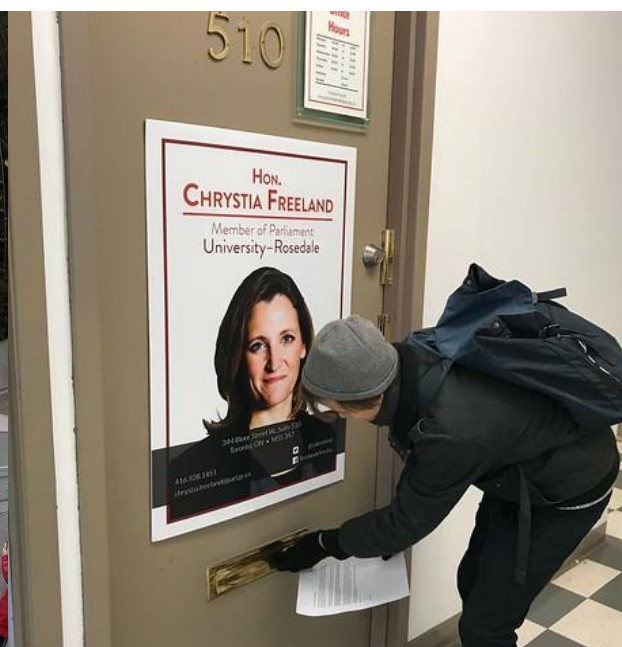
5. Choose a Visual

Creating striking photos for social media and the news is an important part of getting your message across. You can ask participants to dress in the same colour or have everyone bring a common household item which connects with your message. Consider puppets, costumes, street murals or other visuals. If you make signs or banners, consider whether they will be visible, not just to people at the event, but in photographs of the event. Your location should also be chosen with photographs in mind.



LEFT: In order to highlight flood risks, **Environmental Action Now - Ajax Pickering** asked participants to arrive at their rally to save the Carruthers Creek headwaters dressed in rain gear.

RIGHT: A 'picture frame' can encourage people to post about your event on social media.



LEFT: Murals make great photo ops for journalists and participants.

RIGHT: Using the signage of corporations or politicians as part of the visuals for your event is a great idea. It creates a nice contrast between the ordinary people participating in your event and the powerful individuals or institutions you are targeting. **350 Canada** got volunteers to deliver the IPCC SR15 report to their MP and take a photo - the resulting [collection of photos](#) was awesome.

7. Create an RSVP page (optional)

Creating an event page on Facebook or Eventbrite can help you get a sense of how many people might attend. It can also be a useful place to post updates or additional information.

Eventbrite is accessible to a wider audience, as not everyone uses Facebook. However, Facebook sometimes notifies people if a friend is attending an event in your area and those recommendations can help raise awareness of your event.

8. Get Permits (if necessary)

It is important to look into permits and policies around public events in your municipality.

While you always have a right to gather in public with or without a permit, what you are allowed to do may vary. For example, at Queen's Park you can always gather with signs, but will need to get a permit if you plan to set up sound equipment, tents, tables etc. In public parks in Toronto, you need a permit if you will be serving food.

In Toronto, you can file a 'notice of demonstration' with police. This isn't exactly a permit because your right to protest means your notice cannot be denied, but it notifies the police that you will be holding an event and what your route will be if you are marching.

9. Think about Music

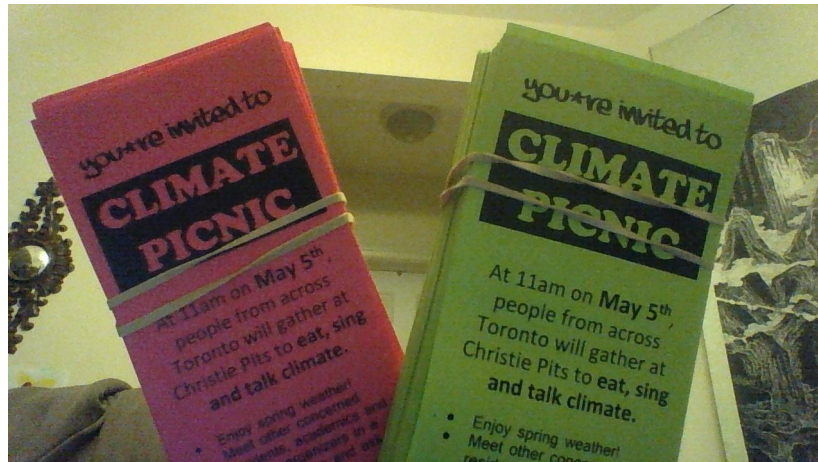
An event always feels more lively and upbeat if there's music in the air. Live music is best, but renting a battery-powered speaker and amp or megaphone with a digital input is a good alternative.

Call and response songs [like this one](#) are a great way to get the audience involved even if they don't know the lyrics.

9. Promote Your Event!

It's important to have some kind of plan for promoting your event. It could be social media, email, a telephone tree, posters at stores, churches and other community gathering places or all of the above.

It can also be effective to drop leaflets in the mailboxes of homes within walking distance of your event. Add general info and a link to a website so that even if people don't attend your event they will learn about your issue.



Bookmark size flyers in bright colours can be left under the lid of a mailbox so they catch the resident's eye. Put info about your event on one side and info about your issue on the other.

10. Issue a Press Release/Media Advisory

A media advisory is a type of press release used when inviting journalists to attend or cover an event. **You should issue a media advisory to local journalists a week before your event.**

Scan your local papers and regional websites for articles and posts on local events, environmental issues, or coverage of provincial politics and send your release to journalists who might be interested. You should also contact local radio and tv news desks. Include quotes from local residents about why this event or issue is important to them and indicate which participants are available for interviews.

This is a good guide to preparing a press release which includes a template:

<https://cpj.ca/writing-a-press-release/>

It's also okay to send a brief reminder the day before your event.

11. Props and Equipment (if necessary)

You should make a list of equipment you might need early on. Some possibilities include signs or banners, supplies for others to make signs or banners, identification (like a hi-viz vest or strip of bright cloth) for marshalls. For larger events, you may want to have water and a first aid kit on hand. You may want a megaphone or sound system.

In Toronto, you can [rent battery powered amplifiers from Long & McQuade](#) and musical instrument suppliers in your town may offer the same.

12. Plan Next Steps for Participants

The people who are willing to come out to an event will be some of your most committed supporters – so make sure you think about next steps. Is there a petition you want them to sign? Would you like them to subscribe to your newsletter? Do you want them to call a CEO or elected official? **Make a plan to communicate one or more calls to action during your event – but don't overwhelm people with too many options.**



An info board is a great way to engage both participants and passersby.

Rather than printing hundreds of flyers, have a few posters with **QR codes** on hand that bring people to a web page with a petition, newsletter sign up or more info.

[This website will generate a QR code](#) for any URL and then people can go straight to a specific website by using their QR reader.

13. Make Contingency Plans

Last but not least, take some time to think about what might go wrong and how you will adapt. By planning for different possibilities, you can ensure that your event has a valuable outcome no matter what happens.

- Will your event go ahead if it rains or be postponed?
- If your MPP or target isn't at their office, make a plan to take pictures and highlight the fact that you were there but they weren't.
- What will you do if only two people turn up? What if you get a thousand?

DURING YOUR EVENT

1. Start with a briefing

At the start of your event, welcome participants, do a [land acknowledgement](#) and let them know what your schedule is.

This is also a good time to introduce organizers and participants with formal roles. Ask your marshalls to raise their hands and say 'hello.' If you have a police liaison or a media liaison, point them out and let people know that they should send journalists or police to the liaisons rather than engaging with them independently.

You should also share info about accessibility, nearby washrooms or restaurants and other housekeeping info. Remember, you've been planning your event for weeks, but many of the people in attendance will have no idea what is going on. Participants will be much more comfortable at your event if they know what to expect.

2. Sign people up for future actions

Work the crowd! Your event is a perfect opportunity to recruit volunteers, sign people up for newsletters, or gather signatures for a petition. If you have a petition, make sure you gather email addresses so you can contact your supporters if you get a win or need their help again.

3. Take photos and post to social media

Social media will bring a second round of eyeballs to your event and issue – and this publicity can often be greater than what you achieve in person. Post your photos across all social media on your group and personal accounts and encourage others to do the same.

4. Have fun!

Connecting with others and taking action is fulfilling and invigorating. Take a moment to enjoy the moment.