

Protect your people



Protect your community

Without **active people willing to take risks**, the social movement would never have grown and we would never have won cao's, weekends, free elections, bike lanes, or same-sex marriage. Standing up for your rights and changing the world **has never been without risk**. And it's reasonable to expect that those risks will **increase in the years ahead**. From getting online hate, to sanctions by employers or other authorities, up to legal risks. It's good to make people aware of these risks without needlessly frightening them.

As an organization you have a **responsibility** toward the people you ask to take action and therefore to take risks. The best protection for active members is a large, prepared, and active group around them that stands in solidarity.

 If an active member is attacked, that's an emergency! It is now top priority for you to show quickly and decisively that the attack is unacceptable; protect the active member, the watching bystanders, and demonstrate to your opponents that this won't be tolerated. Of course, you must do this while listening carefully to what this member needs and what they do or do not want.

As an organization you can take steps such as:

-  **Step 1:** Formal communication from the organization demanding that the attack stops, and announcing that failure to stop will have consequences.
-  **Step 2:** Organizing a solidarity meeting with the affected active member.
-  **Step 3:** A petition or other online action to make the support for that active member visible.
-  **Step 4:** (Threatening) seeking media attention and publicity.
-  **Step 5:** Solidarity actions at the opponent's door.
-  **Step 6:** (Threatening) legal action.

Counter-campaigns

We are seeing it more and more: **counter-campaigns**. Well-planned campaigns by opponents designed to undermine an organizing campaign. Sometimes these are carried out by the opponent themselves, but increasingly by PR firms that specialize in this type of campaign. It's important to be aware of this and to investigate whether a coordinated counter-campaign is taking place.



What can counter-campaigns look like?



Spreading division and doubt among your target audience

- Portraying your organization as external troublemakers working in their own interest rather than the interests of the target group: “They just want your membership fees.”
- Launching their own petitions or public actions by a small group of supporters.



Undermining your efforts

- Offering (small) collective improvements before an organization is strong enough to achieve major change, thereby emphasizing the opponent's goodwill and portraying the organization as unnecessary.



Intimidation

- Using intimidating communication.
- Pressuring outspoken members through employers, clients, or other power relations.
- Issuing formal warnings.



Bribery or co-optation

- Offering individual members benefits (e.g., compensation, addressing individual grievances, or personal assistance) to isolate them from the group.

If you expect a counter-campaign, or notice that one has started, your organization can respond by:

- Initially **working under the radar and remaining active anonymously**. Don't ask members to reveal themselves to people they don't trust, and avoid organizing public activities. The step of acting publicly should only be taken once your group has reached a sufficient critical mass and members are fully aware of the risks and willing to take them.
- **Safeguarding and coaching new active members** to ensure they don't inadvertently provoke repression through their own actions, thereby preventing opponents from having a means to pressure them.



We are Stroomversnellers

Stroomversnellers is a trainers' collective of experienced campaigners, organizers, facilitators, and trainers. We have all been active in environmental organizations, grassroots initiatives, labor unions, or anti-racism movements. Through trial and error, we've learned how to run effective campaigns, build organizations, and create social change.

We are constantly learning and love sharing our knowledge and experiences with others. The world doesn't move in the right direction on its own—far from it. Only with many well-prepared people can a different, more just society come closer. That's why we support a wide range of groups fighting for social and ecological justice, offering advice, strategy and brainstorming sessions, (action) trainings, and workshops. Together, we grow, strengthen our impact, and work toward a better world!

Toolbox for Movements

This guide is part of the "Toolbox for Movements." The toolbox includes a collection of short digital guides covering the basics of strategy, movement building, activism, and organizing. It provides a solid foundation for beginning activists, while also offering fresh insights for experienced changemakers. [Here](#) you will find links to all other guides published so far.

We love learning too

If you have ideas for improving this guide or adding your own experiences, we'd love to hear from you!

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