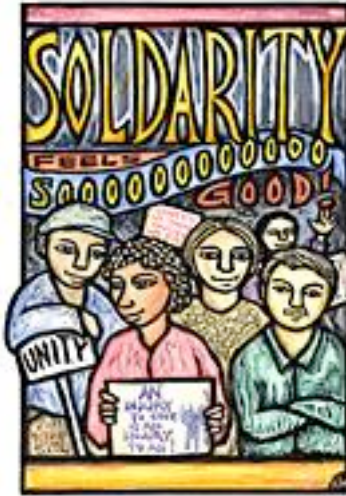


# The Solidarity Organizing Toolkit



## Using Student Power to Work for Climate Justice

A project of the Divestment Student Network  
Frontline Solidarity Working Group

### What is “Solidarity Organizing?”

#### Organizing

What is this term “organizing?” It obviously doesn’t mean putting things into well-labeled files. When we talk about “organizing” in the context of social and economic justice, it refers to the act of getting people together to 1) win real improvements in their lives, 2) get a sense of their own power, and 3) alter the relations of power permanently<sup>1</sup>, so that communities have more of a say in controlling their own lives. We, as participants in a fossil fuel divestment campaign, are organizing the community of our universities to achieve these goals, using the tactic of divestment.

#### Solidarity

Solidarity organizing means aligning our work with frontline communities. “The process of of ‘alignment’ is the painstaking work of organizing—taking into account strategy, power, privilege, access, impact, difference, similarity, trust—but it produces a movement in which we’re not acting on behalf of one another; *we can take meaningful action in an interlocking way.*”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bobo, Kim, Jackie Kendall, & Steve Max. *Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists.*

<sup>2</sup> Hillary Moore & Joshua Kahn Russell. “Organizing Cools the Planet.”

### Frontline

While we are all impacted by climate change, we are *not* all impacted by climate change and fossil fuel extraction equally. Frontline communities are directly impacted communities who have *recognized the ways they are disproportionately impacted* and are *organizing to resist those injustices together*.

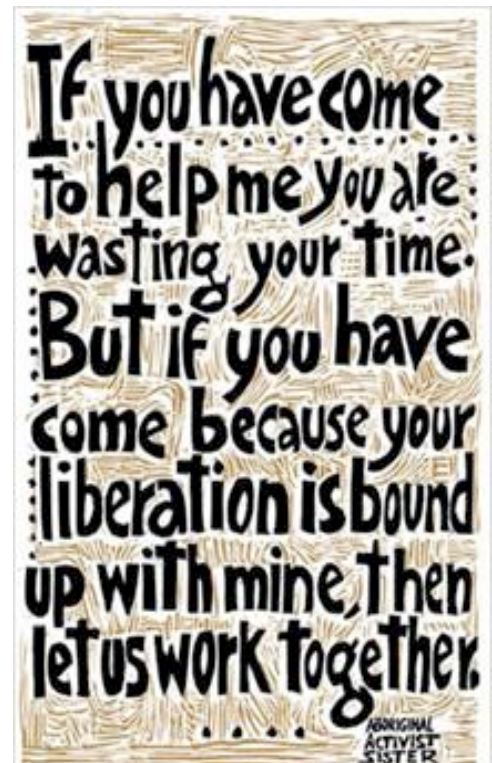
“Impact’ is how racism and poverty determine which communities choke on exhaust from incinerators, refineries, or which communities have their land razed and resources taken to power U.S. cities. Those of us who have the luxury of turning on our lights and not thinking about where that power came from have a lot of privilege at the expense of others. That privilege determines which communities *don’t* suffer from skyrocketing rates of asthma or leukemia, rare cancers, and other manifestations of toxic dumping, spewing, and pumping.”<sup>3</sup>

### Allyship

An ally is a member of the “dominant” or “majority” group working against oppression by supporting and advocating with or for an oppressed population. Being an ally requires that we educate ourselves about the oppression ongoing in impacted communities, that we show our support through actions rather than words, that we do not expect gratitude from impacted communities for any work we do. Above all, we accept that we will make mistakes, but strive to always respond to a frontline community or person’s needs. <sup>4</sup>

### Coalition

In order to work in solidarity with groups on the frontlines, we must work in coalition. A coalition is a collective of groups working together around a central goal. Together, they build enough power to accomplish change that no group by itself could have achieved. “A coalition can be a vehicle for addressing systemic oppression, building solidarity relationships between people from different communities, and modeling/embodying your highest vision for a just society.” <sup>5</sup>



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<sup>3</sup> Hillary Moore & Joshua Kahn Russell. “Organizing Cools the Planet.”

<sup>4</sup> “Allyship Pamphlet.” Multicultural Resource Center, Oberlin College

<sup>5</sup> Responsible Endowments Coalition. “Tips for Working in Coalitions.”

## Why organize in solidarity and allyship with frontline communities?

1. **We must build power together in order to win this fight.** Climate injustice, at its root, is caused by a fundamentally flawed economic system that demands economic "growth" over people's basic needs. It operates on the assumption that there must be sacrificial people on sacrificial lands. Such a system functions in concert with racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and imperialism to shut out and oppress the Global South, people of color, women, and the working class. This system thrives on pitting these groups against one another. We will only see climate justice once all of these populations come together. Our commitment to a system change must be bound with a commitment to each other.
2. **We need to remember why we do this work.** Organizing in partnership with communities who are the most impacted reminds us just how urgent our work is, what has already been lost, and what is being lost every day.
3. **We have much to learn from these communities.** Many organizers and activists in frontline communities have been in struggle against the fossil fuel industry for years and years. These activists have developed incredible organizing skills, understand policy around resource extraction, and are very familiar with how the fossil fuel industry operates. They have a knowledge base that has been built on decades of work, and the young divestment movement has a lot to learn from honoring this knowledge.
4. **We must learn models to organize effectively across difference.** Often the forms of organizing used within frontline communities look very different from mainstream climate organizing. For instance, the type of on-the-ground community organizing (door-knocking, potlucks, deep relationship-building) that is often crucial in impacted communities is not a form of organizing that the climate movement has historically used. However, it is imperative to learn this type of organizing if we want to build a movement across differences.
5. **We cannot win unless we work with a broad base.** Our movement has historically catered to those who are supported by the political and economic status quo (mostly white middle and upper-middle class people). These populations have less incentive to withdraw from the system that has given them power, material security, and cultural and political dominance. There is much more transformative potential to be found outside of the current dominant climate movement demographic.
6. **Impacted communities see what is just, and what is not.** Working in coalition with directly impacted communities informs our understanding of what real solutions look like. More specifically, it helps to differentiate between initiatives that move us toward climate justice, and initiatives that continue to treat certain communities as sacrificial.

# Best Practices

Students have many resources to offer grassroots justice organizations:

## 1) Money

One of the best ways for students to ally with communities on the frontlines of fossil fuel extraction is to marshal resources for frontline organizations. Bring an organizer to speak on your campus and give them a generous honorarium! Host a fundraiser (house party, bake sale, alumni events), apply for funding from an academic department, etc.

## 2) Access to Power

You may have access to certain “pillars of power”-- Important locations, individuals, or other resources. This might mean proximity to banks, corporate headquarters, government bodies, or other centralized urban locations. Additionally, consider influential people such as board members with industry ties, board members with political ties, endowments, corporate research funds, etc. These are all “pillars” that you and your fellow students can put pressure on (through birdogging, civil disobedience, office occupations, and other tactics).

## 3) Bodies

When called on, come out to actions and help demonstrate mass support! While there, volunteer your time to helping in whatever ways necessary. This may mean making signs, doing dishes, cooking, hauling gear, greeting newcomers, etc.

## 4) Particular Skill-sets

If you have web skills, water-testing knowledge, legal expertise, or art skills offer them to frontline organizations. You never know what kind of skills are needed or useful at any given time so try to be flexible in the ways that you offer your support.

## 5) Social media attention

Use Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms to share information about frontline organizations, their campaigns, their struggles, and their victories. Use social media to draw people to actions and other major events.

## 6) Messaging on your campus

Use media opportunities to center both campus-based work and frontline struggles. While campaigning for divestment, don't forget to talk about those who are impacted first and worst by the extraction of fossil fuels, and by the effects of climate change.

# Finding Funding for Frontline Speakers

## **Student Event Committees:**

Most schools have at least one student committee or administrative body devoted to funding student events. Look online in the “Student Life” section of your school’s website, or ask the student budgeting or activities office how to apply for this funding. This type of funding application is usually not time-intensive, but can take at least 2-3 weeks to finalize, so start early!

## **Student Government:**

Your student government may have its own financing; ask your SGA representative of the Student Activities Office about the process of requesting funds.

## **Your Student Group’s Budget:**

If your group gets funding through a student activities office for supplies, fees, etc., it can be simple to allocate funds devoted to “events,” “education and awareness” or even “food and snacks” to frontline speaker honoraria. And next year when applying for funding, be sure to include speaker honoraria as a line item in your budget!

## **Student Organizations:**

If you know other student organizations with budgets who generally host or fund social justice, environmental, or related events, ask if they would like to co-sponsor the event with you! This is a great opportunity for coalition-building, if done respectfully.

## **Academic Departments:**

Ask departments such as Environmental Studies, Peace Studies, Sociology and Anthropology, and even Political Science to co-sponsor your event. Make sure to relate the event to the field of study, and be creative! Many departments have discretionary funds for events throughout the year. Ask professors you know and departments that groups members have connections to.

## **Host a Fundraiser:**

If your school will not offer funding for a frontline speaker, don’t despair! Host a fundraiser taking advantage of skills present in your group. Some ideas include bake sales, brunches, cards, simple jewelry, or a raffle. Even taking small donations, from a large number of people, adds up fast.