

Setting "Benchmarks" to Launch Your Campaign: A Campaign Approach to Ending the Practice of Prosecuting Youth as Adults

By Liz Ryan

We are asked regularly why we take a campaign approach to ending the practice of prosecuting youth in adult courts and thought we'd start a series of conversations in our newsletter to discuss all the various aspects of a "campaign."

A number of you have said that you'll be launching your campaign in early 2012 potentially as part of the new legislative session in your state. As part of your campaign strategy, you will need to set up "benchmarks" to help you get ready to launch your campaign. Here are a few key steps:

1) Start at the End

To figure out what your "benchmarks" are, skip forward to when you want to launch your campaign in 2012. Envision what you want to have happen on that date. Do you want an "event" where you announce your campaign name, legislative champions and policy agenda? Do you want to have a specific number of organizations and individuals in support of your campaign? Will you want media to cover the event? As you think about the launch date, you'll want to start making a list of all the pieces you want in place by then and factor those in to your plan. You will want to establish some goals for your launch date based on your vision for the day.

2) Create a Calendar

After you've set the launch date, you'll want to create a calendar working backwards from the launch date you've set. Post activities and deadlines on the calendar that will help you get to the launch date in an organized and manageable capacity. Be sure to include regular check ins with your "team." Give yourself some wiggle room on the calendar in case things don't go according to "plan" and you need more time. Ensure that you have factored in holidays and other non-campaign activities that you have going on. Ask others to look at the draft calendar so that all the steps are included. Consider printing a large calendar and having it posted in a place where everyone working with you can see it.

3) Divvy up Launch Day Responsibilities

As you've set your launch date, you will want to divvy up launch day responsibilities such as Organizing & Coalition Outreach, Media, Event Logistics, and Policy & Legislative Platform. You might even consider establishing small working groups or committees for each area and encouraging campaign volunteers and allies to join. Share the calendar with each working group, and invite them to add and edit the calendar. Put all working group meetings or conference calls on the calendar.

4) Set Benchmarks

Now that you have set a launch date, created a calendar, and engaged your team to work on various aspects of the effort, you are now ready to set some "benchmarks." A "benchmark" is "a standard of excellence, achievement, or reference, by which something can be measured." Again, you will want to start at the end of your calendar and work backwards. Look at each two-week period and ask yourselves, "What do we want to have accomplished by this date?" And then ask yourself, "How will we know when we have made that accomplishment?" The answers to these questions are your "benchmarks." Be sure to put them on the calendar. Engage your entire team in this process and consider planning a "campaign strategy session" six months (or more) before you want to launch your campaign.

5) Flexibility is Key!

As you work to launch your campaign, having a flexible approach is key! Setting benchmarks will help you ensure that you are making progress towards your campaign launch goals, but you must factor "the unexpected" into your plan. You will want to build in flexibility to change a benchmark, revise your end goals, or consider alternative activities if what you're doing is working according to plan. Build in a "check in" each month on your calendar to assess your progress on meeting your benchmarks and adjust your plans accordingly.

Please share your feedback, comments and ideas on this article! We'd also like to know what questions you have about campaigns and what topics you'd like to see in future articles.

For previous articles, visit the campaign resource center at:

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/advocacy-resource-center.html>.