

Key features of successful campaigns to reduce the prosecution of youth in adult court

What are some of the key features of successful campaigns to reduce the prosecution of youth in adult court? In our experience working with state and local campaigns around the country over the past five years, there are a number of key "features" in successful campaigns to change state policies on the prosecution of youth in adult court. Here are our "top ten":

- 1) Goal: There is a specific "goal" of the campaign such as reducing the prosecution of youth in adult court. Campaigns often use the "SMART" goal test: Is your goal specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and targeted? It is crucial to know what you consider a "win" to be up front in attempting to reach your goal and to establish an overall goal, short term and long term goals.
- 2) Timeframe: The campaign has a set "timeframe" in which it is trying to achieve its goal within a reasonable amount of time such as 1-2 years for a short term goal and 3-5 years for a long term goal.
- 3) Youth, parents and families most directly affected by transfer policies as well as allied individuals, organizations and networks are at the heart of the campaign.
- 4) The "campaign" is an independent vehicle, solely focused on the goals of the campaign with a physical presence such as an office, website, dedicated staff and volunteers and an "identity" of its own such as a name and logo so that it has "ownership" by all the participants in the campaign.
- 5) Governance Structure: There is a clear, fair, timely, and transparent way that decisions are made by the campaign. Decisions are shared by participants and are made by consensus in order to ensure accountability and transparency.
- 6) Dedicated Resources: The campaign has its own dedicated resources to manage the effort. Resources cover the office, web, staff, day to day operations, and activities including food (a key ingredient to any successful campaign!)
- 7) Core Functions: The campaign's core functions include a Campaign Manager to manage, coordinate, and assess progress; an organizing & base building function with on-the-ground organizers; A coalition building function to engage allies and partners; A direct action function to conduct events & activities; An external communications & outreach function to develop & manage contact lists, a database, social media, media contacts, action alerts, and outreach calls; A policy & research function; and a legislative and/or executive branch advocacy function. Each of these "components" can be covered by various individuals or organizations and some functions can be combined. It is critical though that there is at least one person whose job it is to manage the campaign's operations.
- 8) Strategy: The campaign has an articulated "strategy" (that is, on paper that campaign participants have developed) on how it is going to accomplish its goal. The strategy includes goals and objectives, timeline, identification of key policymaker targets, assessing allies & opponents, and a process for developing strategy.

9) Evaluation & Documentation: The campaign constantly evaluates its progress towards achieving its goal and evaluates its strategies and tactics. Also, the campaign ensures that from start to finish that the campaigns activities are documented. This can be done on the web or at the campaign's office. It is a way to remember what actions were taken and why.

10) Celebration: For a campaign to be successful, celebrating the small victories as well as the big "win" is really important. Recognition of key leaders and individuals as well as organizations is important. Food is always a great way to celebrate!