



PEOPLE'S
CAMPAIGN FOR THE
Constitution

ORGANIZER'S
TOOLKIT

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Introduction

This toolkit contains suggested steps and supporting materials that your local group can use to hold elected officials accountable for the oaths they take to protect and defend the Constitution. The new president, new Congress, and the 2009 expiration of PATRIOT Act provisions offer the best opportunity we've had in seven years to change the direction our nation is taking. The more we organize and build broad, local coalitions to take advantage of this historic moment, the more successful we will be.

We encourage you to adapt this framework to the needs of your local coalition. If you are working on a local campaign in your community, please tell us about your efforts by emailing us at info@constitutioncampaign.org. We invite you to download resources from our website, www.constitutioncampaign.org, and send us tools and links you want to share with other groups around the country.

The toolkit is presented in three steps:

1. Reach Out

Invite people you know to work with you on the local campaign and plan further outreach.

2. Build a Coalition

Build a coalition from across the political spectrum by promoting the campaign and creating dialogue about how threats to the Constitution affect your community. Agree on demands to make to representatives and candidates about unconstitutional policies.

3. Hold Representatives Accountable

Hold a public forum or attend a town hall meeting to demonstrate broad community support for your representative to defend the Constitution. Monitor your representative's votes and use public pressure to reinforce your coalition's demands.

Step 1: Reach Out

Objective: Invite people you know to work with you on the local campaign and plan further outreach.

1. Join the PCC and recruit new members

Join the PCC in your community. View the map on our website to see how many people from your community have joined and contact us (info@constitutioncampaign.org) to find out how to get in touch with other local PCC members.

Send e-mails to your friends and colleagues and use your blog or website to spread the word about the PCC. Distribute literature at meetings and events and post fliers on community bulletin boards. You can find the pledge and map, resources for spreading the word about the PCC, and printable fliers and brochures at our website, www.constitutioncampaign.org.

2. Hold an initial meeting

Once you've started spreading the word about the PCC and gotten a few local members, hold a meeting to plan your local strategy. This first meeting may be just a few interested friends and family members, but your focus should be on recruiting new members to help with the campaign. See our sample agenda (next page) for ideas on how to run your first local PCC meeting.

Brainstorm potential coalition members and decide which members will make initial contacts. If your members are involved with or have contacts within potential coalition partner organizations, see if you can make a presentation about the PCC at those groups' next meetings. If you're not sure whom to contact, here are some likely allies:

- Local chapters of national organizations
- Teachers, professors, students, and student groups
- Librarians
- Attorneys
- Political party chapters
- Civic groups and neighborhood associations
- Religious leaders
- Activist groups
- Local unions
- Groups that have been victims of "war on terror" laws and policies
- Organizations that work to address "war on terror" policies or human rights abuses

You'll also want to make sure that your local coalition represents a diverse cross-section of your community, politically and demographically. Having a diverse core group helps build a broad coalition and show candidates and representatives that there is broad support for your agenda.

Further Reading

Scher, Abby. "When Adversaries Become Allies: The Fight Against the Patriot Act and the Surveillance State." *The Public Eye Magazine* - Spring 2006. http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v20n1/scher_allies.html

Sample Agenda for First Meeting

1. Introduction

- Hand out materials (agenda, brochures, fliers). See www.constitutioncampaign.org for resources.
- Welcome and introductions
- Briefly describe the PCC and review the agenda

2. Goals and basic steps of the People’s Campaign for the Constitution

Discuss the congressional accountability strategy. Key resources in this toolkit:

- Honing the Message of the PCC and Challenging the “War on Terror” Rhetoric
- Frequently Asked Questions about the PCC Strategy
- Arriving at Your Demands
- Tactics for the Public Campaign

Discuss how the suggestions in this toolkit (and your group’s own suggestions) can be implemented in your community. Lay out possible activities for the coalition. Be sure to leave time for brainstorming and discussion.

3. Basic facts on your congressional representative and candidate(s)

Briefly describe the circumstances in your congressional district.

- What is your representative’s public record (e.g., votes and statements) on preserving constitutional protections and rights?
- What is the contact information for the representative’s (and, if before an election, candidates’) offices?
- If an election is coming up:
 - ◊ Who is running for Congress? Who has won the last few elections, and by what margins?
 - ◊ What issues have emerged in the election campaign? Are constitutional violations among them?

4. Local Outreach Strategy Brainstorm

List local groups to contact to join your new coalition. Identify allies, potential allies, and potential funding sources in the community and develop a plan to reach out to them.

- How can new allies support the campaign? For example, they can become members, lend the support of their organization, or contribute funds or in-kind donations such as copies or meeting space.
- What potential allies do the participants know? What can they ask them to do?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining lists of local supporters for the group?

5. Committee Breakouts

Briefly outline the tasks of different subcommittees (research, outreach, publicity). Refer to the toolkit for ideas on each subcommittee. See *Forming Committees*, next page.

If there are enough people at your first meeting to split into smaller groups right away, divide into subcommittees. Distribute guides for each subcommittee. After meeting as subcommittees for about 15 minutes, return to the large group and have each subcommittee report what they will do before the next meeting.

Forming Committees

You may want to assign certain tasks to subcommittees. Here are some subcommittees to consider:

- **Research Committee:** Identifies the power bases (funders, voters, other supporters) of the representative (and if before an election, candidates running for office) in your district and explores ways to bring members of those power bases into your local coalition. Researches the voting records and positions of the representative (and challenger candidates). See *“Analyze the power bases of your coalition and your representative”* on page 6.
- **Outreach Committee:** Establishes relationships with potential allies; identifies people willing to host house parties or other events to support the campaign and helps carry out events; members make public presentations on behalf of the group. See *“Reach out to community members and local groups about the PCC”* below.
- **Publicity/Media Committee:** Produces posters for events, coordinates mailings, writes and sends out press releases and public service announcements to promote the public forum. Organizes press conferences, if desired.
- **Program Committee:** Contacts speakers, including representatives and candidates, and organizes public events.
- **Sponsorship Committee:** Invites businesses, individuals, civic organizations, and nonprofit organizations to endorse the local campaign and contribute financially to various expenses of projects the group takes on (such as organizing a public forum, running a sign-on ad in the local paper, printing campaign literature).
- **Refreshments Committee:** We all know that food entices people to come to meetings and makes those meetings more enjoyable. This committee coordinates how refreshments will be provided for each meeting or event by soliciting refreshment donations from local businesses and assigning members to bring refreshments.
- **Coordinating Committee:** Most useful after campaign gets off the ground; helps set meeting agendas to manage the work of multiple committees; coordinates and runs meetings.

3. Reach out to community members and local groups about the PCC

Implement the outreach plan you developed at your initial meeting. Prepare a presentation that explains the PCC and how it can work in your community, and present it at meetings of potential coalition partner groups. Ask members to join the PCC and enlist the organizations’ partnership in your local coalition.

If you have subcommittees, these outreach efforts and presentations can be assigned to the **Outreach Committee**.

Honing the Message of the PCC and Challenging the “War on Terror” Rhetoric

The PCC seeks to unite the public around the goal of defending the Constitution, rejecting the rhetoric that the so-called “war on terror” justifies sacrificing constitutional rights and limits on executive power. The proponents of the “war on terror” insist upon virtually unlimited powers to detain people and spy on Americans, but the Constitution requires the government to abide by limits that prevent abuse of power and guarantee fundamental rights. Appealing to the Constitution to justify our demands carries moral weight because most Americans still believe in these principles.

The PCC promotes an interpretation of the Constitution that drives our specific demands. We want to change the relationship between the people and the government in order to fully realize what the Constitution promises:

- Government serves at the pleasure of the people—not the president.
- People are guaranteed certain fundamental and inalienable rights and protections.
- Each branch of government keeps the others in check to prevent the corrosive abuse of power.
- All of us, including the president, must be accountable to the law.

Frequently Asked Questions about the PCC Strategy

Use the following questions and answers to help you prepare your presentation on the PCC and respond to people's and organizations' concerns and doubts about the effectiveness and usefulness of the campaign.

Concerns about the PCC	The PCC's Responses
Our group wants to maintain our issue focus (the war, impeachment, torture, privacy, etc.) and not be spread too thin.	A broader coalition with a common strategic focus is stronger. This campaign is about building political power by helping to unite people who see that the challenges we face share a common root: the erosion of constitutional limits on government power. Each group can continue involving and educating others, within and outside our PCC coalition, on its focal issues, but we'll all be stronger by supporting each other.
Our group has tried, but we have found our representative to be unresponsive.	Coalition-building is part of our strategy to compel our representative to act. Perhaps our representative ignores our group because s/he perceives it as weak or too small a minority. If we demonstrate broad public support for restoring constitutional rights and protections, our representative will be more compelled to respond to our demands, even if s/he doesn't attend one of our public events.
We need to reach out to new people and groups, not existing allies.	Agreed. Building a diverse coalition united around defending the Constitution is key to attracting many other members of our community who are upset and frustrated, but who don't know what they can do to restore their rights and our country's image.
The only way to hold our representative accountable is to vote him/her out.	Accountability is grounded in the Constitution. This PCC's long-term goal is to ensure that Congress works for the people. The Constitution is on our side, and government must adhere to it, no matter who is in office.
The electoral system doesn't work for us. The incumbent always wins because of earmarks and/or gerrymandering, so our efforts to press Congress are undermined.	<p>The point of this campaign is to change the people so that we can change Congress. So, even if we can't change our representative's mind, we can still explain these issues to the people who elect her or him so that our representative will have to take notice and re-evaluate her/his decisions.</p> <p>Since gerrymandering shapes congressional districts in ways that don't correspond with how our communities are actually connected, regional level coordination among ally groups spanning multiple districts will greatly aid our organizing. Regional groups can share resources, direct new participants to the closest group in their district, and coordinate meetings in multiple congressional districts.</p> <p>An excellent model for such a regional campaign is the Rural Organizing Project's Costs of War Campaign: http://www.rop.org/CostofWar.htm</p>
We don't want to duplicate efforts. How is the PCC coordinating with other national groups?	National organizations and grassroots groups share the goal of defending the Constitution, so for the PCC, we are reaching out to national organizations to support the formation and work of grassroots groups. Visit www.constitutioncampaign.org and click on "About the PCC" to see a list of the local, regional, and national organizations that are partners in the PCC. We'd like to add your group to the growing list.

4. Analyze the power bases of your coalition and your representative

Find out who funds and supports your representative as well as who supports the PCC in your congressional district.

Questions and Tools for Assessing Your Power

No matter how well a group states its demands, a representative has little reason to consider them unless numerous constituents demonstrate active support. As you begin the campaign, it is helpful to have a clearer picture of who makes up your representative's power base. Once you have a coalition, you'll analyze your own power base to prove to your representative and your members that you can affect the political support your representative enjoys.

If you have subcommittees, researching power bases can be assigned to the **Research Committee**.

Your Representative's Power Base

To get a picture of your representative's power, ask these questions:

Who funds your representative? Visit OpenSecrets.org for information on campaign contributions to federal elected officials. The money that funds your representative's campaign is an important aspect of his or her power base.

- If these funders might support your demands or are vulnerable to pressure, try to get them on your side. If you can get their political or financial support, you can draw from your representative's power base for your own purposes.

Who supports your representative politically? Who endorsed your representative in the last contested election? Are you in a position to make an alliance with any of the representative's supporters?

- Appeal to these people to publicly endorse your organizing effort.

How politically entrenched is your representative? When was the last time your representative faced a contentious election? How wide was the margin? If an election is coming up, is there a challenger? If so, is that challenger more or less aligned with your demands than the incumbent? The Cook Political Report provides information on how close various political races throughout the country are.

Who surrounds your representative personally? What kind of associations has your representative made? In what town did she or he grow up? Who are your representative's former teachers and business colleagues?

- If you can get your representative's current or former colleagues to publicly (or even privately) state support for your effort, you can use your representative's personal ties to make your arguments, which can be very effective.

Who advises your representative? Who makes up your representative's key staff and advisors? Which of them relate most specifically to your demands?

- Establishing a relationship with your representative's staff is part of what it takes to move your representative because s/he relies on them when making decisions.

Who is your representative already serving? What is your representative's voting record, and how does it match up with your demands? How far does s/he have to go to meet your demands in the next Congress?

Your Coalition's Power Base

To get a picture of your own coalition's power and broaden your base:

- *Map out your congressional district.* Then, start mapping out potential ally groups active within it. In what parts of the district are you strong and able to mobilize people?
- *Contact members of the other potential ally groups you've identified.* Ask if you can make a presentation on the organizing effort so that they can get involved. Reach out to local groups and individuals about the PCC strategy.

Step 2: Build a Coalition

Objective: Build a coalition from across the political spectrum by promoting the campaign and creating dialogue about how threats to the Constitution affect your community. Agree on demands to make to representatives and candidates about unconstitutional policies.

1. Raise the campaign's local profile

Generate publicity and connect the PCC with the local community

Write letters to the editor and opinion editorials, distribute brochures, press releases, and fliers, and hold public events to emphasize the impact of “war on terror” policies on your community. Use our Human Rights Abuse Database to research stories of abuses that have occurred in your city, town, or state and use them to explain how national policies are already directly affecting community members. Find resources to help with these efforts, including fliers and the Human Rights Abuse Database, on our website (www.constitutioncampaign.org).

Hold a public forum on the Constitution

Use the forum to build interest in your campaign, recruit new members, educate your community, and encourage local debate. Consider asking a prominent community leader to moderate the panel. When choosing panelists, try to involve people in your community who are knowledgeable on constitutional violations.

Make sure the poster and/or program for the event include the following:

- Title and brief description (e.g., “Our Constitution in Crisis: A public forum on [topic]”)
- Date, start time, end time, location
- Names and relevant information (e.g., titles, organizations) of moderator and panelists
- Name of the group or coalition that organized the forum and contact information
- Campaign endorsers and event sponsors (individuals and groups)
- Is the venue wheelchair accessible? Will sign language interpretation be provided?

Coordinate with BORDC to spread word of your local successes

When you let BORDC know about your local campaign, we will spread news of your effort to other local campaigns and relay these stories to the national media to help build the campaign.

2. Agree to demands to put to representatives and candidates

Candidates and representatives want the public to view them positively. When people make demands effectively, representatives have to work harder to gain positive public recognition. When enough people work together to make specific demands to a representative, they can transform the political debate in a community.

The best demands are specific actions for a public official to take. Unless your demands are specific, politicians can spin them to suggest that nothing additional is required of them. Even if your representative already agrees with much of what your coalition calls for and supports bills to protect civil liberties, you can still make demands. Ask your representative to strengthen his or her position or to take on more leadership.

Research your representative's past voting record. During election season, you can use candidate questionnaires to put both incumbents and challengers on record about civil liberties and constitutional issues. You can find a list of questions for candidates at our website, www.constitutioncampaign.org, by choosing Resources under the Toolkit tab.

Suggested Demands to Put to Representatives

Restore habeas corpus for all persons detained under the jurisdiction or control of the U.S. government.

Eliminate torture and rendition to torture by all U.S. employees, agents, and contractors. Imprisonment must be humane, respectful of the human dignity of the detained. Restore the rule of law, providing that all persons are innocent until proven guilty and human rights are respected.

Provide speedy and fair trials for all accused. Prohibit secret evidence or “hear-say” evidence originally received through torture.

Restore Fourth Amendment protections of privacy from government data-mining, spying, and warrantless wiretapping. Eliminate secret searches of homes, mail, and communications.

Abolish government secrecy by restoring full, meaningful citizen access to information through the Freedom of Information Act.

Restore First Amendment freedoms to speak and dissent, practice one’s religion, and seek redress of grievances.

Revoke unconstitutional executive powers usurped since 2001, including:

- naming “enemy combatants” for indefinite detention without legal process;
- impeding fair trials by forbidding evidence claimed to be “state secrets”;
- imprisoning anyone, including US citizens, without counsel, charges, witnesses, or trial;
- issuing National Security Letters or using other techniques to gather massive amounts of private information;
- spying on U.S. residents without warrants; and
- deterring or punishing whistleblowers;
- and restore the roles of the courts and of the Congress in overseeing the executive branch

Eliminate the use of executive signing statements that announce presidential intent to ignore legislation properly enacted by Congress and signed into law.

Guarantee Fourteenth Amendment equal protection of the law by halting roundup and special registration of groups based on race, country of origin, or other general characteristic; rely instead on due process procedures based on facts, individualized suspicion, probable cause, and court order for arrest of particular persons.

Restore respect for the rule of law, including international treaties that the U.S. has signed. Changes in U.S. policy would include obeying the requirement for humane treatment of detainees. Restore the constitutional mandate that treaties are “the supreme law of the land.”

Adopt and acknowledge procedures that allow victims of human rights and civil liberties violations such as torture, warrantless surveillance, and other crimes to seek justice in U.S. courts.

This list is available on our website at http://www.constitutioncampaign.org/toolkit/suggested_demands.php.

3. Broaden and strengthen your coalition

In order to move your representative to action, you need to build your coalition’s power. Continue and increase your outreach efforts and seek new methods of gaining community support for your demands and community participation in your campaign.

In doing so, it is important to avoid taking shortcuts, such as having a coalition member who knows the representative convince him or her to meet with you or attend an event. It should be the power and influence of your community coalition that compels your representative to meet with you, not the encouragement of a friend or colleague, who may then act as the representative’s protector. Avoiding shortcuts requires gaining support for your demands and your strategy with coalition partners and being able to effectively demonstrate that support to your representative.

Step 3: Hold Representatives Accountable

Objective: Hold a public forum or attend a town hall meeting to demonstrate broad community support for your representative to defend the Constitution. Monitor the representative's votes and use public pressure to reinforce your coalition's demands.

1. Learn common tricks politicians use to dodge questions

Politicians are well versed in strategies to respond to difficult questions. They can spin their voting records to make it sound like they're on the right side of an issue, and they answer questions they want to be asked rather than questions they are actually asked. It's important to repeat your questions when politicians don't answer them, to point out inconsistencies between their voting records and the public images they're trying to portray, and to stand firm when they try to change the subject. You can find role play exercises and tips to help you handle politicians' common tricks in the Resources section of our website, www.constitutioncampaign.org.

2. Choose a tactical approach for holding representatives accountable

Tactics for the Public Campaign

Use the tactics below to help your coalition hold representatives and candidates publicly accountable. Which tactics you choose depends on your specific situation: your demands, the strength of your power base, whether an election is coming up, and whether there is a contested race in your district.

Public Accountability Forums

Accountability forums can be moderated by local community leaders or an expert on the Constitution (for example, a constitutional law professor). Representatives of the local coalition should present the representative or candidate with your demands for restoring constitutional protections. Following this presentation, the public can ask questions about the representative's adherence to the Constitution.

Setting up this kind of public forum involves negotiating a schedule with the representative. A good way to start is to send a letter signed by your coalition's member groups to the representative or candidate requesting a meeting. You can ask the representative or candidate to name a date that would work for her or him within a certain time period, such as a congressional break (also known as a district work period). You can find dates of district work periods in the "Calendar" section of our website, www.constitutioncampaign.org under the "Toolkit" tab.

Empty Chair Forums

Even if the representative or candidate(s) do not agree to attend, you can still hold a public meeting. This type of meeting, called an empty chair forum, has several goals:

- Educate the public on the representative's (or candidate's) role in unconstitutional policies. Speakers can respond to the representative's (or candidate's) public statements pertaining to constitutional issues.
- Publicize the local effort to gain broader and deeper public support for the coalition's demands.
- Strategize on other ways to present the demands to the representative or candidate.

Candidate Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a way to put the candidates' positions on your issues before voters. Find resources for developing your questionnaire, including sample questions and a tool to see how your representative has voted on civil liberties, in the Resources section of our website, www.constitutioncampaign.org.

Town Hall Meetings

Some representatives hold town hall meetings during periods when they're back in their own district. Check your representative's website or call the district offices for a schedule of town hall meetings or other public events.

The Rural Organizing Project (www.rop.org) organizes people to turn out for town hall meetings and take over the meeting. The purpose of this tactic is to put legislators on record about their positions and to demonstrate public support for the coalition's demands. You can use this tactic without going through all the effort of independently organizing a forum, but at a town hall meeting, your coalition's leadership will have far less say over the agenda. The key is to organize people ahead of time so that group members are prepared with pointed questions relating to your demands. You can also take the opportunity to present a resolution to your representative stating the coalition's demands.

Candidate Debates

When candidate debates happen in your district, you can organize your members to attend and try to have the moderator ask questions relating to your demands. You can also run your public accountability forum as a debate among candidates.

Local Resolutions

Eight states and more than 400 municipalities have passed stating that they refuse to carry out laws and policies that violate their residents' constitutional rights (see a full list at www.bordc.org). If your local government has not already passed a resolution, this strategy may be useful to demonstrate community support for your demands. If your local government has already passed such a resolution, use it to support your coalition's demands. You can also encourage your local government to further protect civil liberties by enacting ordinances instructing local police not to cooperate with federal spying and immigration enforcement and to challenge illegal national security letters.

What to do if your representative is non-responsive

If you have tried the above approaches and your representative or candidate still refuses to meet with your coalition or respond to your demands, your coalition should consider other strategies to communicate your demands and compel the representative to respond. Remember, we often have more rights than we realize.

Here are some strategies your coalition might use:

- If your representative won't attend your forum, invite an aide to attend in the representative's place. If the aide sees a large audience in support of your demands and is forced to field pointed questions about constitutional issues from frustrated constituents, the representative will hear about it and will feel pressure from inside her or his office as well as from the public to respond personally in the future.
- Use the media. Call your local newspapers and TV stations and tell them that your representative has been unresponsive to your growing local coalition. Ask them to write an article about your group or interview group members at your next meeting. Write letters to the editor and participate in radio call-in shows. The more negative media attention the representative gets, the more s/he will feel the need to respond to your group in order to protect his or her public image.
- Hold a peaceful march or protest. Gather your group outside the representative's district office or march through your local downtown area. Make signs communicating your group's demands and protesting the representative's lack of response. Hand out fliers to passersby and invite the local media.

3. Reiterate demands and highlight whether your representative lives up to them

There are a number of strategies for holding your representative publicly accountable to following through on your coalition's demands:

- Meet with the representative regularly to reiterate your demands and the community support for those demands.
- Use the media to highlight promises your representative made to your coalition.
- Before votes on important constitutional issues, hold call-in days and in-district meetings, write letters to the editor, conduct TV and radio interviews, and join radio call-in programs.
- Have supporters clip editorials, opinion editorials, and letters to the editor that reflect the coalition's demands and mail them to the representative's district office.¹
- In every communication, reiterate the coalition's demands and expectations to the legislator.
- Give the representative positive reinforcement for good votes by publicly thanking and praising the representative through news articles, letters to the editor, TV and radio interviews, and phone calls.
- Do periodic (annual or semi-annual) scorecards showing how your representative(s) voted on key civil liberties and constitutional issues.
- Keep the coalition active through an email list and meetings. Continue to generate proposals for local action.

¹ Mail sent to representatives' Washington offices gets irradiated and often becomes illegible as a result.