

THE COMMONS

Social Change Library



How to Make a Difference

5 Steps to be an Effective Change Maker

Includes Resource Recommendations from the
Commons Social Change Library

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Congratulations on deciding to make a difference!

The journey to create social change can be a rich, rewarding, and challenging one. Many of the skills we develop in other parts of our life are transferable to this context but we can learn much more in order to be effective change-makers. Luckily, many others have gone before and have guidance to share.

The Commons Social Change Library gathers the collective wisdom of people engaged in social change and makes it available on one easy to use website:

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We have defined 5 steps on the social change journey that we have found to be important, whether for individuals starting out or for groups and campaigns getting oriented. They are:

1. Learn About How Change Happens
2. Choose Your Role and Play it Effectively
3. Plan Your Path
4. Work Well with Others
5. Tell Your Story

In each section, we've included four resource recommendations to help you dig deeper. Click on the title of each resource to open it on the website. These recommendations are only a small taste of the hundreds of helpful resources you'll find in the Commons Library - explore for more!



1. LEARN ABOUT HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

You've noticed problems in the world and you want things to be different - but how does that change come about?

There are many theories about social change that can help you find your way. Explore some options and take time to reflect on your own beliefs and instincts. You may find your ideas and assumptions change over time, the more you act and reflect on your action. See the [Theories of Change](#) topic on the Commons Library for more guidance.

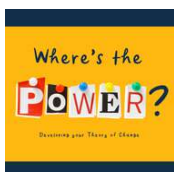
History is a great teacher - you can learn from what other people have tried and their successes and failures. The [History](#) topic on the Commons Library has many case studies of past campaigns and struggles.

Here's a taste of some of the resources that can help you learn about how change happens.



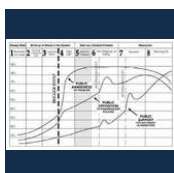
9 Videos from Key Thinkers on How to Change the World

Do you want to change the world? Learn from activists, philosophers, academics and entrepreneurs in nine videos about social change and creating a better future collated by The RSA.



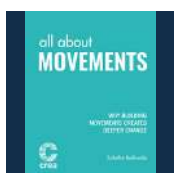
Where's the Power? Developing Your Theory of Change

A theory of change statement is a tool to understand your strategy and how (or if) it will work. Being able to articulate a clear theory of change statement is a prerequisite to an effective campaign. Use the template to develop yours.



Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan

Bill Moyer describes eight stages through which social movements normally progress over a period of years and decades. It provides organizers with a map of the long road of successful movements.



All About Movements

Why do movements matter? Why do we march on the streets or come together online? 'The best way to eradicate inequality and injustice is when oppressed people build strong movements that shift the structures of power'.

2. CHOOSE YOUR ROLE AND PLAY IT EFFECTIVELY

Diversity is a strength in social movements! Many different people working towards shared goals but using different paths and skills can add up to powerful impact.

However, sometimes these differences can lead to tensions and conflict. Deciding what role to take on can also present dilemmas. The resources shared here highlight the strengths of different roles so you can understand the contributions each make.

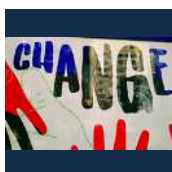
When deciding what role you will play in social change consider: What are your skills and talents? What are you passionate about? How do you believe change comes about? What contribution does your group make? Where do you see a gap that needs filling?

If you choose a role that relates to a skill-set (such as campaigner, organiser, lobbyist, digital campaigner, media spokesperson, etc) there are many guides to help you develop those skills: [Start Here](#).



The Four Roles of Social Activism

Four different roles activists and social movements need to play in order to successfully create social change: the citizen, rebel, change agent & reformer.



Exploring Roles in Social Change Movements

Social movements are made up of many individuals and organisations with varied strengths, perspectives and theories of change.



Movements and Leaders Have Seasons

Learning to attune to the cycles of our own leadership can help us know when to do the right thing at the right time. Choose your role according to what fits your current season.



Changemaker Chat with Hahrie Han: People Power Researcher

Hahrie Han talks about the difference between mobilising and organising. The whole conversation with Amanda Tattersall is rich but for definitions of different approaches to change listen from 16 minutes in.

3. PLAN YOUR PATH

You're getting clearer about your approach and role - but what's the path that will take you from the current problem to the desired solution? Change doesn't happen overnight!

Developing a plan with others makes it more likely your action will be strategic, purposeful and effective. Without a plan you can be stuck reacting which can end up feeling futile and disempowering, leading to burnout.

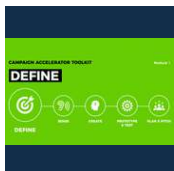
Take time to learn about the problem you want to tackle. Develop vision and values. Set goals and objectives. Then choose the tactics that will help move you along your path, shifting power in favour of your goals.

The [Campaign Strategy](#) topic on the Commons Library has many tools for developing your plan. Here's a small taste.



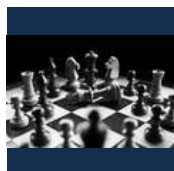
The Campaign Canvas

From vision and strategy to storytelling and metrics, this template ensures you've touched on all the essentials of an effective campaign.



7 tools for defining your campaign problem

Where will your campaign go? Which problems will you focus on solving? 7 tools for defining your campaign problem from the Campaign Accelerator Toolkit by MobLab.



Campaign Strategy Planning Template

This campaign strategy planning template prompts you to apply a number of different campaign strategy, community organising, and civil resistance concepts and tools.



The Tactic Star

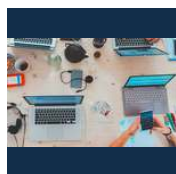
This tool names some key factors that change agents should consider when determining their tactics. The same tool can be used to evaluate actions after they have been carried out.

4. WORK WELL WITH OTHERS

Effective and lasting change tends to be the result of people working together in groups and networks towards a shared goal. Social change can't be won by isolated individuals, it requires us to do the rewarding but sometimes messy work of collaborating with others.

Powerful groups tend to have a shared purpose, defined roles and structure, clear communication, accountability, and a sense that their work adds up to impact. The skills to navigate conflict, build safety, welcome diversity and promote justice are also key. Group work skills, including feedback and facilitation, can be developed. Team work and morale can be fostered and built.

Explore the [Working in Groups](#) topic for many relevant guides. In this era many groups operate online so don't miss the [Online Meeting Guides](#) for facilitation tips, tools, icebreakers and more.



Working in Groups: Start Here

A comprehensive list of resources to help groups work together better: including group dynamics, better meetings and facilitation, coordinating teams, navigating conflict, teamwork and building morale.



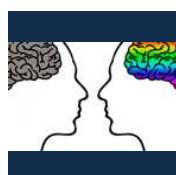
Diversity & Inclusion: Start Here

A comprehensive list of resources to welcome diversity and promote justice, including key concepts, capacity building guides, and advice for acts of inclusion, solidarity and resistance.



How to Build a Team: Online Course

Do you want to know about building leadership teams and organising? Here is an online course about setting up a team taught by Marshall Ganz.



The SCARF Model for Psychological Safety in Groups

Learn about the SCARF Model for Psychological Safety in Groups by David Rock. It's a tool for diagnosing and supporting good group health.

5. TELL YOUR STORY

Now you've got a plan and a team it's time to get the word out!

Tap into the power of stories to communicate your values and persuade others to lend their support. Whether it's telling your personal story (or public narrative), crafting the story of your campaign, or developing content with potential to go viral, there are tried and true tools you can use.

Narrative and messaging development is a science and an art but you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Explore the pre-existing research for guidance on the words that work.

The [Communications & Media](#) and [Digital Campaigning](#) topics on the Commons Library have many more tips for spreading the word, from media releases to engaging videos to effective emails to creative tactics and much more.



Why Stories Matter: The Art and Craft of Social Change

Marshall Ganz discusses narrative strategy, story of self & the importance of communicating values through stories in developing social movements.



The Story Canvas Template

The Story Canvas is a template from the Digital Storytellers which guides you to fill in the right ingredients to make a powerful story.



Re:Imagining Change: Story-Based Strategy

Tools, pragmatic lessons and case studies on harnessing the power of narrative, culture, and imagination to help our movements win.



How to Frame Issues for Social Change Impact

Want to know what words work on your issue? Here is a collection of reports, articles, videos and podcasts outlining narrative and messaging on a variety of issues including climate, crime, equality, nature, poverty and health.

GO FORTH!

We hope you find this guide helpful on your social change journey. Remember that you're not on your own - the Commons Social Change Library is right there with you!

Which means you have the collected wisdom of past and current activists on your side, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Follow the Commons Library on social media for regular guidance and inspiration. Look out for the newsletter landing in your inbox (or Promotions folder) every month.

If you get stuck reach out to the Commons librarians: Holly Hammond, Antje Dun, Iain McIntyre and the team of Commons volunteers.

If you figure things out along the way that others can learn from remember to make those lessons available via the Commons. We are smarter and stronger together!

If you value this guide, and the hundreds of other free resources in the Commons Library, please donate so we can keep supporting social change.

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