



# How to Build Grassroots Support at the Local Level

## Strategy

School and library board races may be confronting national issues (divisive topics, book banning, etc.), but they are **ultimately WON locally**. Local groups who can get out the vote, keep the community informed, and who know the issues on the ground are invaluable to turning out the vote.

## Starting a local group

### Types of groups

The first step to making a difference in your community is deciding what kind of group you want to start. You should carefully consider the following questions.

1. What format will the group use to meet?
  - a. Online group - Zoom or Facebook or Instagram group centered around an issue serves to inform voters, give out voting information and to rally voters around a particular issue
  - b. In-person group - centered around a theme to help get the vote out and share voter information
2. What will the focus of your group be? Your group will be more effective and proactive if you have something to rally around. Examples of topics groups might center include:
  - a. Equity and diversity
  - b. Public school and library supporters
  - c. Supporting students or educators
  - d. Friends of the Library
  - e. Intellectual freedom and the right to read
  - f. Politically connected group
  - g. Book enthusiast group
3. Do you want it to be a voluntary informal group or a PAC?
  - a. A political action committee (PAC) is a formal, registered political group that helps fund the electoral campaigns of candidates or related to ballot proposals. In Michigan, if your group receives or spends over \$500 in a year, you will have to register as a PAC.
4. Do you want to actively get out the vote and call potential voters?
5. Do you want to support other education- and library-friendly races as well?

### Steps to starting a group

1. Find a few like-minded friends.
2. Decide on the issue your group will center around.
  - a. This is not just what you are *against* (you should already know that). What are you *for*? What is the future you see?
3. Decide on roles of member leaders at first two meetings.
4. Choose a locally meaningful name that's easy to distinguish.
5. Decide on method of communication, such as an email address, a Google listserv, a Facebook or Instagram account, or a website, so other local people can join in and get information.

6. Decide on privacy levels for group. Is it by invitation, can anyone join? Some groups create a public Facebook page as well as a private Facebook group for strategizing and planning or maintain a public Facebook page and keep their planning communications to email.
7. Design any logo or branding you might want to use to identify your group. Canva is a free resource that makes design much more accessible.
8. Decide on target audience for your group: everyone, supporters of public education, parents?
9. Decide on actions your group wants to undertake. Write them down.
10. Research and decide on messaging themes for best impact.
11. Identify future target dates for items like these; set a timeline.
  - a. Gathering more members via social media
  - b. Educating voters about role of school board or other local positions
  - c. Postcard writing
  - d. Get out the vote door knocking or phone banking
  - e. Hosting house parties for candidates
  - f. Hosting online forum for candidates
  - g. Written questions for candidates
  - h. Hosting online education events or webinar. You can promote accurate information about a variety of relevant topics. Ideas include: How do libraries select books? How do teachers use the curriculum? How do you register voters? How does a school board work? Bring in informed guest speakers for these events.
  - i. Voter registration or ballot education
12. Connect with others at the statewide and national level such as professional organizations for educators and librarians or organizations that offer advocacy training such as Red, Wine, and Blue.

## Gaining members

1. Start with your small initiating group and then ask each person to invite others.
2. Use social media to reach new people.
  - a. Share your new group on other sympathetic Facebook or Instagram pages.
  - b. Tag you school district and local library on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram posts to increase visibility.
3. Always keep your tone professional to avoid alienating like-minded community members.
4. Design a t-shirt or other clothing item that can be worn in public to attract attention.
5. Make your meetings and events interesting and accessible.
  - a. Have start up meetings at a local place or on Zoom to outline a few goals to guide the group and to make introductions.
  - b. Invite local guest speakers or candidates to meetings to gain more knowledge and attendance.
  - c. Hold “book celebrations” or “public school” celebration events in local location with guest speakers, activities for kids, and voter registration.

## Get Started!

Every little bit of advocacy helps bring attention to school and library board races! Consider coordinating with other local groups, too, or candidates to make sure the support you provide is what’s needed. Helping people become aware of and invested in voting school and library board races in your area is key.

Adapted with permission from @FReadomFighters