

Mobilizing for Elections

Our Tools for Community Social Planning series tries to provide practical tools for use in local community social planning initiatives. Please give your feedback and suggestions for areas you would like to see covered by emailing us at info@sparc.bc.ca. In this issue, **Nancy Henderson**, Executive Director of SPARC BC, offers some suggestions for mobilizing for elections.

ELECTIONS ARE NOT JUST ABOUT politics; they are also a time when real social issues are brought forward and discussed. They are an opportunity for all of us who are engaged in working for social change to contribute to the discussion -- because informed citizen participation can make a difference!

Here are some suggestions:

No partisan activity The suggested activities are to contribute to public education. Becoming involved in the politics will violate your charitable status if you have one, and is also probably not within your constitutional objects as a not-for-profit society. Be careful about these parameters and examine each activity you undertake to ensure it is clearly non-partisan and is not favouring any particular candidate or party.

Choose your issues there are far too many to effectively deal with all of them, and you will get more impact if you concentrate your resources. Also choose appropriate issues for the election -- it is a waste of effort to fight provincial issues in a federal election.

Define your desired results If you define how it is you want to see your issue addressed, you make a positive statement for change as opposed to being another voice of complaint. Your organization will be better equipped to ensure your result statements are clearly non-partisan. Most importantly, it will allow your audiences to make

their own assessments about how those results could be achieved, and who should get their vote to carry the issue forward.

Take your issues and results to the public There are a number of ways in which you can do this: make it into a statement that can be distributed as information at all-candidates meetings; or have your statement published in your local newspaper as an opinion/editorial article; or formulate questions based on your statement and pose them to each of the candidates, then distribute the answers; or use your website and email networks to distribute your message widely.

Follow-up on your activity When the election is over and you have a new elected representative, get in touch to again pursue your issue and desired results. Offer your organization as an ongoing resource on social issues within your community. Try also to follow-up with members of the public you've now touched with your message.

We are anticipating a federal election call in the spring of 2004, and need to take this opportunity to make our community voice heard. You may know the famous quote by Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." An election campaign can be one of these opportunities, if you make the commitment. ■