

## How to Build a Citizen Mouvement for Basic Income

### **\*\*Introduction\*\***

Hello, my name is Jonathan Brun, I previously founded two citizen action groups that successfully lobbied for more government transparency - or what we call open data - in Montréal and in the province of Québec. I am the Québec spokesperson for the Canadian Basic Income Network and the cofounder of the Québec Basic Income citizen initiative. I am a web entrepreneur and obviously passionate about basic income.

This talk is aimed to help those who are looking to organize around basic income. It is of course not a comprehensive guide or contextualized to your environment. I hope it helps some organizers here in the United States and elsewhere structure your efforts, build them out and exert influence. I believe basic income is possible in our lifetimes, but it will require thousands of hours of hard work, dedication and discipline. The following steps are not comprehensive, but I believe they are essential to any citizen initiative.

**\*\*The five steps I wish to cover today in about 10 minutes are\*\*:**

1. Building an Identity
2. Getting Organized
3. Spreading the Message
4. Growing a Mouvement
5. Exerting Pressure

### **\*\*1. Building an Identity\*\***

The first step to any mouvement is to clearly lay out your own identity. Who is the Basic Income mouvement and why does it exist? When people hear about Basic Income they should immediately have a clear picture in their mind of the organization, its aims, goals and its way communicating. Ask yourselves this, if the Basic Income Mouvement were an animal, which animal would it be?

This need for an identity is essential to any successful organization - non-profit or for-profit. What do we think when we are asked what the World Wildlife Federation is, Greenpeace, the United Farm Workers, the Teamsters, The Tea Party, The Occupy Mouvement, etc. There is an image that comes to mind within a few seconds, that image will define the way people react the following things you say - so it is of the utmost importance.

Part of building an identity is branding. In a modern society, such as the United States or Canada, we have tough competition of people's attention - and donations (eventually). Our competition is not so much other non-profits or other mouvements, but rather the media landscape in general. People are bombarded with advertisements and content 24/7 - they see advertisements and information all day, every day, on their televisions, radios, computers and phones. If we want to gain even 5 minutes of the

average person's attention, the Basic Income movement must be presented in a catchy and professional manner.

This requires a professional logo, powerful copy on websites and printed material, a great catch phrase and even more. The recent social movements in Ukraine and Thailand and elsewhere had a number of common features - one of which was a colour. A colour or colour scheme is a powerful symbol - think of the national flags or the major corporations we know about, their colours are a pillar of their identity. This is not recent and includes everything from the thirteen colonies to the French revolutionaries, who used the red white and blue to symbolize their difference with the ruling classes. The Basic Income movement should consider adopting a colour that allows itself to be easily identified. This colour would then be used on t-shirts, communications and other items. In Canada, we are adopting purple to ensure we are not tied to a political party and it is a colour that is not commonly used - it also has a link to peace.

The fonts and layout used on the website and the printed materials must also be consistent. Building an identity requires a number of pieces, but it should not be taken lightly or disregarded as something for large organizations, well funded political movements or corporations. No movement can be successful without a strong and clear identity.

## **\*\*2. Getting Organized\*\***

It has been said that there are two challenges in building a sustainable movement - getting organized and staying organized. Basic Income, in North America at least, has yet to get organized. It may therefore be premature to discuss staying organized, but it is something we should keep in the back of our minds. Part of the reason that the civil rights movement fell apart after the death of Martin Luther King, was that its organizational structure was terribly poor. But I digress, let's discuss getting organized.

Start small, but use scalable models. In the business world, when someone is proposing a new venture, one of the first questions is, "Is it scalable". Which means, with more capital or resources, does your model grow in a cost effective manner. If your model cannot grow cost effectively and generate a profit, then you are not scalable, which is a death sentence. While the initial work done by any organization is typically arduous and labour intensive, it needs to lay a foundation on which the organization can sustainably build up its structure.

The beginnings should be simple. The United Farm Workers, led by Cesar Chavez, defended the rights of farm workers, but when they started they did so in a simple format not dissimilar to certain corporations such as Tupperware. They organized discussions at people's homes, around their kitchen tables, by doing this for five months, they were then able to call a general convention that brought together farmers and their families to define a common way forward.

Now, one challenge with comparing basic income to other social movements is this: "Who is most concerned with basic income?" In all likelihood it is the underprivileged

and the disenfranchised, though a good article by Geoff Simmons in New Zealand laid out 10 potential people who would benefit most: Students, The Working Poor, Volunteers, Entrepreneurs and a few more. However, should we base a Basic Income movement around this group of people - the poor and students, it is likely going to affect our identity - making basic income harder sell to the middle class and the political elites. To ensure a broad base of support for the movement, we must create coalition of groups that all have something substantial to gain from basic income. If they have too little to gain, they will not mobilize their resources to help.

So, getting organized requires that we very actively reach out to anti-poverty groups, right wing government reduction groups, student organizations, volunteer networks and single revenue homes while also explaining the tax benefits to the middle and ruling classes. This process will take a significant amount of time and lots of hard work.

### **\*\*3. Spreading the message\*\***

Once a base has been established, the next step is to spread the message. This can be done through a series of tactics. Publicity stunts, such as the coin deposit done by the swiss movement help in attracting press attention. Op-eds, and articles in the mainstream press would help as well. But, the key element is the need to leverage existing institutions to help scale the movement.

On a side note, we all know there is growing mainstream press coverage of basic income and people in high places murmuring things about it. Even Bill Clinton was seen carrying the book, *With Liberty and Dividends for all*, that covers the need for Basic Income. However, do not confuse this with spreading the message about a Basic Income Movement - we are talking here about spreading the message that a mass citizen movement is requesting basic income.

Many successful social movements in the United States leveraged powerful organizations that already had scale such as religious organizations. In New York, where religion is perhaps less prominent in people's lives, we often forget the importance of the Church, Mosque Synagogue or Temple in people's lives. Everything from the Civil Rights movement to the Farm Workers to anti-war movements were able to effectively leverage religious institutions to both spread their message and position themselves as a just and holy cause. This piggy back effort can also be applied to other groups such as unions, non-profit groups and celebrities. It can be an important tool to spreading the message farther and faster than what we can do alone.

### **\*\*4. Growing a Movement\*\***

Once you are organized, a major challenge is maintaining momentum. You must constantly keep your troops motivated, at attention and willing to take action. This can be done in a number of ways.

You can organize events, conferences and common meals. One key element is that the members of your movement must see progress and small victories, or else they get

frustrated and leave. For example during our effort for more government transparency, we hosted letter writing campaigns where we sent hand written letters to elected officials, many of them got a response, which led them to remain motivated. We also hosted Hackathons, which is an event that brings together technologists and other people to design technological solutions to problems. In Montreal, corruption had been making headlines for the last few years and so we leveraged or piggy-backed on this problem to organize an event called "Hacking Corruption". The event brought together bureaucrats, technologists, journalists and others to build technological solutions to help fight corruption. Due to its timing, catchy headline and our identity, we were able to get 300 people, 10 politicians and most of the local, provincial and national media to cover the event. The visibility brought us new members, but more importantly it reenergized the existing base of volunteers.

Another thing to mention when growing a movement is how to handle motivated highly volunteers. As you grow and attract new people to your movement, you inevitably come into contact with highly motivated volunteers who are willing to go above and beyond typical requirements. It is essential that you empower these individual to take action and demonstrate that they are valued by the organization. If you do not, you risk losing them and they may start rival organizations. However, some motivated volunteers, can have difficulty following orders or sticking to a party line, so you must find a way to frame them into something productive that they are satisfied with and that allows you to maintain control over the messaging. This is perhaps one of the more challenging parts of growing an organization and each volunteer who wants to go beyond the typical tasks needs to be treated according to their specificities.

In summary, to grow a movement you need to piggy back on existing movements, groups or actions. You need to empower individuals and you must achieve small periodic victories to keep the troops motivated.

#### **\*\*5. Exerting Pressure\*\***

When civil rights leader met with Franklin Delano Roosevelt and asked for help for African Americans, he replied "Make me". By this he meant that the social movements must form enough pressure so that the decision makers are obliged to act and have a public legitimacy to do so.

During our efforts to increase government transparency, we identified people within the city administration who were already advocating for our policy. We did this through LinkedIn - which is a powerful tool. We met with these people, off the record, to gain insights into how the city worked and why the policy had not already been done - who was opposing it, who was for it and what were the key roadblocks inside the administration. This is essential information, that is actually easy to obtain, and will pay huge dividends.

You can apply pressure from outside an organization, but your movement can also allow people within the organization to apply pressure. When we started the group, there were already people within the city administration who had been asking for such a

policy. However, because there was no external pressure on the city, the higher-ups could point out the lack of public support and dismiss the internal demands of the employees. Just as we are competing for the attention of the general public when trying to promote basic income, we are also competing for the attention and decision making time of the powers that be. Our outside group empowered our insider allies to go back to their superiors and apply pressure.

Ultimately, effecting massive change on government or society requires us to identify the current pillars of support for a policy or system and systematically move those pillars of support to our own goals. We do not want the pillars to crumble, as that leads to anarchy (see Libya), but we want to transfer their weight bearing capacities to our structure.

I hope this has been useful information and that you can use it to build a citizen movement for Basic Income in the United States.

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