



Potential Solutions

Problematic Practice

Organizers endure emotional stress due to working with people facing injustices in their current lives.

Attacks and threats by rightwing extremists, authorities or law enforcement can be traumatic for organizers.

Sustainable Practice

Encourage self-care and be clear how organizing staff can use benefits to meet their needs.

Put limits on how many locations, relationships or campaigns one organizer is responsible for.

Aspirational Practice

Offer sabbaticals for long-term organizers. While they require fundraising and budgeting in advance, they will have long-term benefits for movement-building.

Intense overwork near the end of the campaign. If organizers have to go right back to work, that's a key moment for burnout.

Plan to shut down after the campaign ends, e.g., week off for everyone after the election or final decision.

Plan thorough debriefs after the rest period, to ensure lessons learned are rolled into the next plan and not ignored or forgotten.

Hire more organizers so workload can be divided into manageable chunks.

One rule of thumb is that core job functions should take up 60% of work hours, leaving 40% for administrative work, planning, meetings and organizational and professional development; aspire to fund positions that can be so spacious.

Dedicate time to strategizing about truly feasible and sustainable campaigns far in advance.

Losing campaigns is so painful that despair and depression may ensue.

Sometimes organizers turn their anger against others in the organization, blowing up over small grievances.

Allow extra mental wellness days off in the month after a major defeat.

Create opportunities for everyone involved in a losing campaign to debrief, and to note achievements along the way, such as community awareness of the issue.

Acknowledge other ways that the organizers' work strengthens the organization and mission besides campaign success.

Besides mental health parity in health insurance plan, budget for additional therapy for organizer PTSD.

Continued on next page.



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Problematic Practice

Winning campaigns sometimes go unmarked.

Progressive activists have a tendency to focus on the negative, and to quickly switch focus to the next social problem, in the name of avoiding complacency. This can backfire by engendering hopelessness.

Sustainable Practice

Give appreciation to everyone who played a role in the success, e.g. victory parties, certificates of appreciation. Encourage mutual appreciation by all staff and other stakeholders.

Remember to name organizers when reporting on the victory to funders, the board, journalists and the constituency.

Aspirational Practice

Organizers feel isolated, like they are coping with the stress alone.

Sometimes there are issues they are uncomfortable bringing up within their own organization.

Staff can self-organize regular organizer-to-organizer gatherings, gripe sessions or support groups with organizers at other kindred organizations (e.g., in the same coalition, or working on same issue).

Include 'Organizer PTSD' and resources for healing from it in the onboarding packet for new organizers.