



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

How To Establish a Pro-Choice Group on Campus

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Executive Summary

Canadian campuses need pro-choice groups to get information out to people, so they know why having access to abortion services is an important right for women. Pro-choice groups are also needed to combat the misinformation and scare-mongering tactics from the anti-choice. This document is designed to help young men and women establish such clubs and keep them running smoothly.

Pro-choice action groups can be established under the direction of a university women's centre. These groups are then guaranteed funding, have access to paid staff and numerous resources, and can build upon an earlier support base. However, with ties to a centre, their independence is lost and they must put extra effort into working with a greater overseeing body.

Pro-choice clubs with a charter and support from their student government can also be formed. These clubs have greater independence and a more inclusive membership. However, they will have to hunt for funding and resources, and starting anew without institutional support and alliances is always challenging.

The greatest chore of any group is membership recruitment, a time-consuming and continuous task. It is especially difficult to find committed members and leaders who will help to organize events or programming. Tabling at clubs days, hosting a "cookies condoms and choice" event, postering, visiting classrooms, and asking friends for help are the best recruiting methods available.

Sustaining a group is challenging. A strong leadership and core volunteer base needs to be established. New members must be mentored so they are gradually prepared to take on new tasks, and are accurately informed on a variety of reproductive issues. New leaders need to be found and cultivated. Ideas and information on events, financing, and organizing meetings need to be documented and passed along to ensure the group's success. Funding is always an issue as time is spent hunting for money, or a door is opened to financing an anti-choice club.

Another difficulty faced by university groups is getting a high event turnout. For this reason, substantial and eye-catching advertisement is necessary. Luckily, the controversial nature of abortion makes this issue stand out, but events still need posters, banners, ads in newspapers, classified ads, and ads sent out via e-mail, Facebook, and the Internet. Remember to make events accessible to all.



Why Does My Campus Need A Pro-Choice Group?

There are a number of reasons why a pro-choice group may be necessary on your campus:

- There's probably already an active anti-choice club (aka "pro-life" group) that is putting out a ton of misinformation about abortions — information that needs to be countered by making pro-choice resources available.
- There is likely a need to warn women about anti-choice "crisis pregnancy centres," which try to guilt women into carrying their fetuses full-term.
- The Genocide Awareness Project, a poster display which equates abortion with genocide, may be coming to campus and you need to organize a counter campaign.
- Maybe there is a need to help the wider community by providing an escort service for women to abortion clinics where they fear harassment.
- There may be a need to make sure pharmacies sell plan-B (a morning after contraceptive).

The most important reason for establishing a pro-choice club is to get information out to people, so they know why having access to abortion services is an important right for women.

Remember that other feminist and women-oriented clubs and organizations on campus are so bogged down in other important issues (like getting women into office, safety problems on campus, supporting queer women and trans issues etc.) that they don't have the resources, people, or time needed to seriously address this crucial issue. This is an important issue that needs the time, care, and attention that an exclusively pro-choice group can give it.

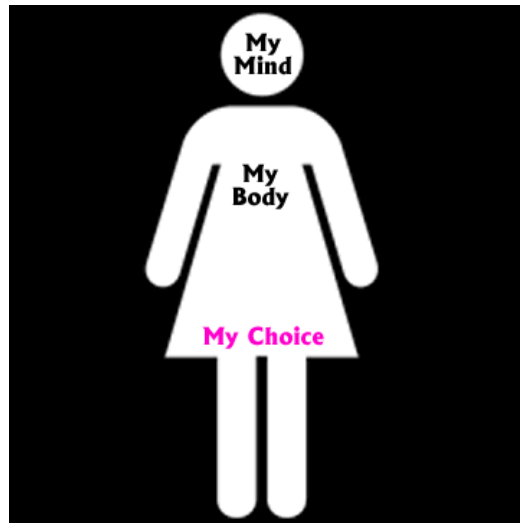


What Does “Choice” Mean?

Choice means slightly different things to different people. Generally, it means ensuring women are given access to the resources and services they need in order to decide if they want to bear children, and if so, when and how many. Choice is the belief that women have a constitutionally-based right to unrestricted, fully-funded abortion services, without legal, discriminatory, social, regional, or other barriers to access.

Women have a constitutionally based right to unrestricted, fully funded abortion services!

Choice also means ensuring that women can safely carry out a pregnancy. It is just as wrong for a woman to be coerced into an abortion as it is for her to be coerced into carrying the fetus full-term. Without control over their fertility, women will be unable to achieve equality as they will not have authority over their own lives.



How Do I Establish a Group?

So, knowing how important it is to have a pro-choice group on campus, you're probably going to want to start up a group yourself. But how exactly do you go about it?

There are two different types of groups you can establish: an action group or working group of your university's women's centre, or a separate club. Our campuses are diverse, but a few general guidelines can be offered about establishing clubs or action groups.



Establishing a Women's Centre Action Group

ADVANTAGES: Full funding through your centre, paid staff to advise and assist you, a guaranteed place to meet, easy access to good resources, people are more likely to attend an event if it is connected to the centre, and you can build upon earlier pro-choice events.

DISADVANTAGES: You may need to adhere to a particular model of government (collective structure), self-identified males may be excluded from membership, you will need someone to be involved with the women's centre board or collective as well as with your group (extra work), and the centre may have a structure that discourages membership.

If you are interested in starting up a pro-choice group, and you are already involved with the women's centre on campus (or are very interested in being involved) this is probably the route to go. Establishing an action group is usually fairly simple.

1st

Talk to the staff and the coordinator(s). Mention that you are interested in starting a pro-choice group through the women's centre; it's highly likely they will be interested in supporting your initiative. Discuss your vision for the group and the support you will need from the centre (i.e., what events and projects you want to take on, the role of the group on campus, money you will need, resources you will need, and the coordinator's involvement). Ask that they send your information out through the digest/newsletter to gauge interest.

2nd

Find two or three other people interested in helping you. Find out when they are available and plan to hold a meeting within the next two weeks.

3rd

Go to the next collective/board meeting and strike a subcommittee. At this meeting, ask for some preliminary funding – probably \$200 – to print off posters, pamphlets, and put on a small event. (You can always ask for more later). Ask again that your information and the time and date of the next meeting be sent out over the minutes and digest/newsletter.

4th

Hold your first meeting. Establish a mission statement and look at what forms of recruitment will work for your group (see the section on *Running a Meeting*, and *Recruiting Members*). Make sure meetings from now on are continuous. You will probably want a member of your group to start designing posters, another member to reserve a table for tabling, and another member to print off pro-choice pamphlets/information and review books at the women's centre that could be useful for tabling.

5th

Create a group e-mail account and listserv as a subsidiary of the women's centre. Create a Facebook or Myspace group and add as many members as possible to get the word out. If you or someone at the women's centre is tech-savvy, get a webpage set up on the women's centre website, or at the very least ensure that your group e-mail, Facebook/Myspace group, and mission statement are up.

6th

Recruit, recruit, recruit, poster, poster, poster, and get the word out. (See *Recruiting Members* section). Once you get a steady core membership of ten people, you are set and established. It's time to branch out into bigger and better things like your first event or programming (an ongoing project).

7th

Start preparing for your first event. Making it fun and with food is always a good idea. Most importantly, don't plan anything too big and have people burn out. Keep it simple and easy. It will probably focus on getting your name out, providing information, and legitimizing yourself as a group. Next year may be the time to take on larger events like a speaker series.

Similarly, you can establish an action group through a university PIRG. It follows a similar process of establishment, and has similar advantages and disadvantages, except that you will always be able to involve men in the group.



Establishing a Club

ADVANTAGES: Independence, you can set your own goals without having to refer to staff, inclusive membership, you are not obliged to liaison with the women's centre and their allies.

DISADVANTAGES: You will have to look for funding, fewer informational resources, a lack of institutional memory, a need to start anew without advice from experienced feminists, and it will be more difficult to build relationships with your women's centre and other allies.

If you like your independence, do not feel your women's centre is active enough, do not have a women's centre on campus, or are unable to work within the centre's framework (which is often based on a collective structure), then you are likely going to want to establish your own student club.

1st

Find 3-5 other people who would be interested in starting a club with you. Find out when they are available and plan to hold a meeting within the next week.

2nd

Check out your student union/society website. They will have a section on clubs, where you can find the form that needs to be completed, as well as information about any relevant bylaws, meetings you need to attend, and packages. Read through all this information.

3rd

Hold your first meeting where you will establish a mission statement, look at recruitment, and hold elections. Make sure meetings from now on are continuous. You will probably want a member of your group to start designing posters, while one works on filling out club information, and another prints off pro-choice pamphlets/information.

This meeting should happen in the first, second, or third week of classes as information usually has to be submitted by the third or fourth week. Such information must be resubmitted yearly/semesterly. If you have already missed the deadline for this semester/year, start up a club anyway and keep it unofficial. You won't get student government funding or space, but you will be helping to protect women's choice on campus. You will still want to hold elections though; having a chain of command is always a good idea.

4th

Begin drawing up your group's constitution. Constitutions detail the following:

- Aims, purpose, and objectives (your mission statement)
- Electoral procedures (quorum, advertising, length of office, duties and powers, impeachment, recall, and filling of vacant positions)
- Constitutional amendment procedures (notice for amendment, how voting is conducted, quorum, and procedures)
- How clubs can be dissolved (i.e., you have no members).

The constitution must also stipulate that anyone can become a member of your club. Most universities have a sample constitution you can adapt; you simply need to fill in your mission statement and name. You may want to alter the sample constitution, especially if you want to use a consensus decision-making format.

5th

Attend clubs days. This is when most people on campus will sign up for your group. Make sure your display is catchy (see *Recruiting Members*). However, you will probably need to do outreach beyond the clubs days by tabling, posterizing, or classroom runs.

6th

Make sure a core member of your group attends the new club meeting (held at many but not all universities) and obtains all of the necessary information. If there is no new club meeting, talk to your student government's general office personnel. They can go over your constitution to make sure it is functional, provide you with detailed information on how to get funding, and advise you on any relevant bylaws.

7th

Submit all of the necessary information to your student government (both online and hard copies). Make sure everyone involved with your group is signed up on your registration sheet; even peripheral members (try and make your group look as big as possible).

8th

Create a group e-mail account and listserv. Create a Facebook or Myspace group and add as many members as possible to get the word out. If someone is tech-savvy, set up a website.

9th

Assess the progress of your group. Do you need to do more recruitment or should you be focusing on events? If you want to focus on recruitment, ask yourself who your target audience is and how you are going to draw them in with your current volunteer base. Also, how many regular/core members do you need before you feel capable of taking on an event?

10th

If you feel ready to start planning an event, you need to begin considering what type, its purpose, who your target audience is, and what kinds of advertising should be used, etc. Again, as a new group do not take on anything too strenuous.





Recruiting Members

Now that you've got your group established either as a club or an action group, you need to get people to show up to your meetings. So how exactly do you go about getting people to join?

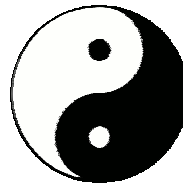
Recruiting members is something you will have to do continuously, every year and every semester, as members graduate and move on.

Unfortunately, recruiting members does require a lot of time, energy, and resources. Luckily, there are a number of effective recruiting methods.

Clubs Days

This is where all the clubs and organizations on campus set up booths to recruit new members. It usually happens in the second or third week of the semester. If you missed the one for this semester, go to the next one. Make sure your display is colourful and eye catching. Luckily, the controversial nature of abortion means that your group is hard to miss but visibility is still important. Candy always helps too.

If possible, know when your first meeting of the semester will be so you can advertise it to interested individuals. Also, have a flyer about your group ready and on display (with mission statement, possible activities, meeting times, etc). Have information available about abortion misconceptions and anti-choice activities, as this is one of the best places to get information out as well. Pro-choice pins are also popular items to hand out, but they cost money.



Club Day!

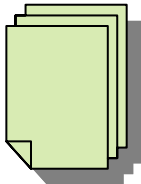


Cookies, Condoms and Choice

This is an event, as well as a method of recruitment, and it describes a style of tabling. Through your student society or student union, book a table in one of the busy areas of the university. On the table provide cookies (to draw people over), condoms (to help people make responsible reproductive choices), pro-choice literature, and flyers about your group. If you can't afford the cookies or the condoms, then just table with information.

Again, promote the times your group will be meeting, and try and encourage people to come out, but don't be pushy – if people are interested, they will let you know. Make sure the table is always staffed by someone; try to have two people for safety reasons. If an anti-choice group is also tabling, do not confront them; just do your thing and let them do theirs. Make sure you have the campus security's number just in case.

Do an event like this at the same time the anti-choice group is tabling, to offer an alternative perspective. Also, people upset with their display will come talk to you and may be more likely to volunteer.



Postering

Putting up posters around campus is one of the most popular ways of getting information about groups and events out there. Though popular, postering is not always the most effective tactic as we tend not to notice all the posters that surround us on campus. Human contact is best.

Before postering, check the rules and regulations of the university, which will indicate where and on what surfaces you can poster, as well as what time the posters will come down. Try to poster in unusual areas by putting them up on departmental boards, in classrooms, and on the student society/student union boards. Make sure your posters detail the name of your group, the time, date, and place of the event or meeting. If advertising an event, provide the price (e.g., Free), put the name in big catchy letters, ensure the terminology is inclusive of race, age, gender etc. (remember lots of men are pro-choice too), and have the names of any sponsors displayed. Make sure posters are on brightly coloured paper. You can create your own or take a design from one of the groups listed in the resource section of this guide. Make sure to save a master copy for future use.

Look to your Friends



Your friends are the first ones you should turn to when looking for new members. It is likely that many of them have the same political opinions, and feelings as you, and they are probably willing to help you out. At the very least, they will show up occasionally to help you with your events, postering, tabling, protests, and rallies even if they are unable to commit to being a core member of the group.

Classroom Visits



First, look at your school's schedule and pick out classes that discuss women's issues. E-mail the professor or show up a few minutes before the class starts to make sure it is OK for you to take a few minutes of the class time to discuss the pro-choice group on campus. Have an overhead available with a catchy picture, and the time, date, and place of your meeting (if it is women-only, indicate that as well).

Talk to the class about what choice means, and the importance of having a pro-choice group on campus. Tell them what events you are planning, and invite them to the next meeting.

Remember to keep it brief. It can be a bit nerve-racking to talk in front of a crowd, but this is a good way of getting the word out about your group.





Running a Meeting

Make sure to set a meeting time for when the largest number of core members are available. Make the meetings regular, either weekly or biweekly. You may also want to schedule additional planning meetings closer to events. Make sure to advertise your regular meeting time at all your events and on your posters.

How a meeting is run depends on the group structure. In collectives, the focus is on discussion and getting everyone to reach consensus. In executives, the focus is on debate, Roberts' Rules of Order, and the majority.



Roles at the Meeting

Roles are also different between executive and collective structures with the former having elected executive positions (president, secretary, treasurer), and the other having fluctuating positions appointed at the meeting or at the prior meeting (facilitator, time keeper, minute taker, vibes keeper, task keeper).

However, some things are the same. The president/facilitator should set the agenda, which will help to guide the meeting. An agenda should outline the topics that need to be covered in the meeting, accompanied by the time needed to be spent on each item. Items usually take longer to review using a collective format, so more time should be set aside for each item if your group operates using consensus decision-making.

Sample Agenda March 19th

Rounds - *3min* (everyone introduces themselves this; helps people learn names)

Additions to the agenda - *2min*

Approval of last week's minutes - *2min*

Treasure's report/approval of spending - *7min*

Old Business - *20min* (how is event planning going, evaluations, advertising, etc.)

New Business - *10min* (what new events do we want to do, membership recruitment, who should we request funding from etc.)

Additions and Announcements - *10min*

Tasks - *6min* (go over the tasks set during the meeting)

Any decisions made at a meeting must be recorded in the minutes and must indicate:

- What exactly is the decision
- Who is going to carry it out
- What information, money, and materials is needed
- When it will be done
- How the group will know it is done
- Purpose of any event or action (i.e., recruit members, gather info, disseminate info, have fun)



The First Meeting

The first meeting of every year will likely be run quite differently than the rest. In addition to establishing the goals of your group, it is also when some clubs elect new officers.

The first meeting is critically important for establishing the goals of your group and to give new members a taste of what your organization is like.

Start your meeting by establishing a mission statement or vision for your group that reflects your purpose. It should explain why you are together, what you hope to achieve, and who you hope to reach.

Some examples of mission statements would be:

- “Students for Choice is committed to ensuring that women’s reproductive rights and choices are respected across campus by counselors, professors, administration, undergraduates, and graduates.”
- “Anti-GAP is committed to opposing the sexist, anti-Semitic, and racist representation of abortion and genocide put out by the Centre for Bioethical Reform in their Genocide Awareness Project.”
- “Voices for Choice is opposed to the misinformation circulating around campus on the abortion issue. We are committed to ensuring women on our campus are accurately informed about all of their reproductive choices, including abortion.”

You will also want to brainstorm some projects for the semester. What events and long-term projects will you take on? When and how are you going to recruit members? Your group’s activities should relate to your mission statement (if you are committed to ending misinformation, then focus on education around abortion, not celebrating choice or on contraception). It is likely that your first semester or year will be spent recruiting new members, so you’re probably going to want all your events to focus on outreach.

Having snacks at the first meeting can be a good way of encouraging new members to come and stay with the group, but it is not always financially feasible. Also, to ensure your meeting isn’t too boring, keep it short and avoid long arduous topics to which new members will feel unable to contribute (like an evaluation of last year).

If your club is run by an executive, you will need to hold elections. The elected positions for clubs are president, secretary, and treasurer, although you can create other positions as necessary. Make sure your elections are recorded, typed up, and sent to the student society as soon as possible (if someone has a laptop, you should record the minutes as you go to save having to type them up later). If possible, try to get a new member onto the board as secretary to ensure new members remain involved and have a voice.

For clubs, elections are probably the most important thing you will do because you cannot officially exist until your elections are held.

Club finances and space also likely depend on getting people to sign up (even if they don't become core members). A lot of your focus at the beginning of the year should be spent ensuring you have enough people to get the financing and space you need.



Sustaining Your Group

Once your group is firmly established, you need to start looking to the future of your group. Hopefully, you have laid the foundations for a strong organization, but it is important to put effort into ensuring the continued viability of your organization. You will likely face many challenges that cannot be predicted, or with which this guide will be unable to help you. However, there are some situations you can begin to prepare yourself for.

Mentoring and Leadership



Groups and clubs need leaders. That is, people who can plan events, boss others around, talk in front of an audience, coerce others into volunteering their time, and give up a great deal of their own time to support group events. New leaders are needed to replace old ones as they graduate, and they need to be cultivated or else they will burn out.

Identify leaders by their dedication to the group, their willingness to take on new projects, their assertive nature, and their volunteer and work history.

Some ways to mentor new leaders include:

- Encourage them to take further outside training that may be useful, especially if it is free.
- Give them small easy projects to work on like making and distributing posters for an event or a group potluck.
- Introduce them to your allies and advisers, and the people that have helped you in the past. Make sure they have a strong support network.
- Take them to pro-choice events that are being put on by other groups (for example a Morgentaler celebration, or a pro-choice clothesline).
- If you are run by an executive, have them run for secretary or treasurer so they can gain experience but are not overburdened by work.

- If you are run by collective, have them facilitate a few meetings a year.
- Become their friend.

Most importantly, do not assign any one person more tasks and responsibilities than they can bear; it will only drive them away. Even if they volunteer for it, try to ensure no-one is taking on too much work.

Equally important to developing a strong leadership is the development of a strong core volunteer base. These are volunteers who regularly attend meetings, and help out with events. It is important to recognize that not everyone who volunteers is a leader, some people are shy, passive, or do not have the time to plan events.

To ensure a strong volunteer base, make sure everyone in the group is well-informed about women's reproductive issues. Though abortion is important, if they are tabling with condoms and information on contraceptives, it is important that they are also aware of the broader issue of women's reproductive freedom. Explaining the history of the pro-choice position in Canada and the changing legal status of abortion to new members is also important. Imbue them with a sense of why choice is important for women and how there is threat of this right being slowly stripped away. Try to show that you appreciate the effort and time volunteers put into events by recognizing their work and thanking them. Try to become friends with all of the people in your group, or at least be friendly to everyone. Also, follow the guidelines laid out above for mentoring new leaders.

Information Sharing



One of the greatest challenges facing you is ensuring that ideas, information, contacts, and values get passed along as new members join and old members leave.

Because the university experience is so short (2-6 years) and busy people only have a small amount of time to give to student organizing, membership and levels of activism are always in flux. Students who are involved in the club must constantly re-write and re-do the same events from year to year even as advice, contacts, evaluations, and organizers are lost. Time and effort is wasted on logistics and planning that is unnecessary and the same mistakes continue to be repeated. So how do we avoid this situation?

The truth is that it is impossible to fully circumvent this loss of information. Things will inevitably be forgotten. The best tool to prevent information loss is institutional memory. If you are working through a women's centre, the coordinator is often able to remember these things. However, you should not rely entirely on the memory of an individual.

The best tools for preventing information loss are institutional memory, keeping an events binder, and staying organized.

Eventually they will leave and then all of that information will be lost, or you may not always be working closely (or at all) with a coordinator.

Maintain a well-organized events binder that has event evaluations, event posters, pamphlets, and event logistics (i.e., contacts, costs, and a step-by-step guide). Keep minutes in your events binder, and review the minutes once a year. Talk to new members about events that you have done in the past and events you hope to do in the future, and try to pair them up on events with more experienced members who can advise them on what works while ensuring they still play a critical role in planning. End of the year evaluations (discussed later) are a good place to briefly reflect on the year's events and group dynamics and can ensure that information is passed along.

Burnout



When volunteer work gets to be too much, and when peoples' lives become too stressed, they can experience burnout. They stop working on projects, they retire from the group, volunteers are lost, and group morale declines. Many groups fall prey to burnout in their desire to right all wrongs by taking on goals that are too broad and planning too many events. Burnout can also happen when one person takes on too much work. This guide has often suggested that you limit your activism for this very reason, and while some of the following suggestions are repetitive, it is important to recognize the dangers of burnout.

Some suggestions for avoiding burnout:

- Only plan one major event a year. Although there may be many events you want to host, it is important to limit yourself.
- Make sure responsibilities and tasks are evenly distributed amongst the group, no-one (not even you) should take on everything. Delegate tasks to others.

- Appreciate your volunteers, have potluck picnics, and hang out from time to time. Being friends with them makes them want to volunteer more and can limit burnout. Also, make sure to recognize volunteers' contributions.
- Make sure volunteers have the direction, support, and information they need to plan an event.
- Remember to take breaks (as an individual and a group). Relax after an event is over, and don't operate the group during the summer.



Funding Issues



If you are a club, much of your time will be spent looking for funding. Some universities provide clubs with some initial funding based on membership numbers, and you can always ask for dues from members (keep the amount small). However, this funding may only cover printing expenses or a fun group event. You will have to look to outside funding for events. Unfortunately, this makes planning events more difficult as you will have to consider funding sources at every step, as well as apply for funding a few weeks or a month in advance. It also means significantly more work for your treasurer, who will have to keep track of incoming and outgoing expenses.

Look to various funding sources, including members, your PIRG or Women's Centre, the student government, and pro-choice groups.

There are a number of places to go for funding. Look to your PIRG or Women's Centre; they can likely lend you \$50 to \$300 depending on the size and scope of your event. PIRGS are an especially good source of funding as they are set up to fund outside groups and have a committee that regularly meets to consider grants. At the very least, the women's centre will lend you resources and cover printing costs.

All student governments will accept grant applications for further money for events that benefit the entire school population. You simply need to fill out a form (on their website); you may also wish to attend

the grants committee meeting to motivate them (they will likely meet once a week or every two weeks). Student governments are usually very supportive of choice and would likely be willing to support your event for \$ 200 to \$400.

However, there is some concern that this would open the door to anti-choice demands for funding. Anti-choicers could make the argument that if the student government supports your event, then it should support anti-choice events as well; otherwise their right to equal treatment is being unjustly infringed. Some student governments will deny them regardless, but others in the name of “fairness” will likely give them money.

You can also look to groups outside the university setting such as Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, Canadians for Choice, or the Canadian Federation for Sexual Health. The UBC Students for Choice were able to successfully mobilize outside funding in opposition to GAP. They asked the support of a number of organizations for \$10 to buy banners to hide the display. However, these groups are themselves struggling for funding as the government does not support lobby groups and it is unlikely that they could significantly contribute much money. It would be better to ask them to supply speakers and resources.

Even if you are working through a Women’s Centre, you may want to explore other avenues of support for your events, rather than burdening the centre with all your expenses.



Activities

The most important thing to remember with events, activities, and projects is that they often cost money and time. Pick out a few projects that interest you and do them well.

There is a lot of work and education to undertake on the issue of choice, and it is likely that your group will never have the resources to do everything. Quality should trump quantity. For example, try taking on a **maximum** of one poster and information campaign, one event, and one long-term project a year.

Make events accessible to people of all genders, races, religions, and abilities.

Celebrating Choice



January 28th 1988 is the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in Canada. It did so by rendering null the existing therapeutic abortion legislation because it violated a women's right to bodily security.

The anniversary is a good excuse for a party, which can also double as a volunteer appreciation party, and a way to educate around the history of choice in Canada. Make sure to rent a room and serve cake and beverages. To serve alcohol, you need a permit and someone with a bartender's license. Have a poster display on topics like: Morgentaler, the Supreme Court decision, the Abortion Caravan, rallies, the therapeutic abortion committees or the establishment of a local clinic. If possible, invite one or two speakers to talk about the history of choice (if you live in Ontario, contact Canadians for Choice; otherwise contact ARCC). You could also screen a film (see next heading).

Unfortunately, January 28th falls early in the semester which means planning for it in the fall and over the Christmas break. Advertising should start in the first week back.



Film Screening

Film or video screenings are easy events to put on, but are not usually well-attended. You will need to rent a lecture hall or room. Usually you can do this through the university administration via e-mail or phone. Many universities have specific offices that handle room rentals; otherwise go through the general office. For smaller audiences, you can rent rooms from your student society/union.

Pick a time that most people in your club or group can attend. The afternoon from 3-5pm is usually best, as most people are finished class by then and rooms become available. Make sure to rent the equipment you need from the AV people. Usually, lecture halls come equipped with a projector and a DVD/VHS player, but you will likely need someone to set up the movie for you. Have them come at ten minutes before the event starts.

Free food is a good way to draw people to your event so buy up some snacks and drinks. If you are preparing food, you may need to get a food permit. Inviting a professor to speak about the film and lead a discussion is also a good idea (keep in mind that not all feminist professors are located in Women's Studies departments).

Coat Hanger Display



A coat hanger display can raise awareness about choice around the world, because it reminds people of the dangers of self-induced abortions that result from a failure to provide women with safe and legal abortion services. However, the image of the coat hanger may be losing its meaning as a symbol for young women because they don't remember the history.

Take a number of metal coat hangers, and from them hang a number of facts about abortion worldwide, or locally. For example, talk about the Gag Rule, the number of deaths per year from self-induced abortion, the risk of pregnancy vs the risk of abortion, the difficulty of accessing birth control in developing countries, the connection between fertility and women's empowerment, and so on (see the *Resources* section for places to go fact-finding).

The display should end up looking like a mobile. Hang it up in a display case that can be rented, and where it cannot be torn down. Such a display could be used from year to year.

Pro-Choice Clothesline



This display allows women to share their stories and experiences with abortion and pregnancy through art and written word. While tabling for your club, lay out pieces of cloth, and some fabric paints or markers. Ask women to record their personal pro-choice comments, feelings, drawings, and stories about abortion, pregnancy, or birth on the pieces of cloth. Make sure you have people in your club do some too, as it will encourage other women to follow their lead.

Behind you, string a rope between two pillars, or two rolling display boards. Attach the pieces of cloth to the rope using pegs. At the end of the day, find a place where the display will not be torn down (in a display case or up high) and leave it there for a week. This is not meant to be a dialogue between pro-choice and anti-choice, but as a testament to women's reproductive rights, and a way for pro-choice people to express themselves. Make sure people who are painting and writing know this, and police the remarks to ensure they are all respectful of a pro-choice opinion.

Crisis Pregnancy Centres



This can be a long-term research project that seeks to evaluate the anti-choice "crisis pregnancy centres" that are advertised around town. Have some confident and thick-skinned members of your group call in and drop by the emergency pregnancy services that are available. They should pretend to be pregnant and considering their options, including abortion. They can then rate the counselors on how they behave, including their openness, friendliness, the options they recommend, evangelical efforts, misinformation provided, and overall experience. You may want to have one woman come in who feels she would like to abort and a second woman come in who feels she would like to go through with the pregnancy to compare reactions. Try to see what support these centres lend to women who choose to carry the pregnancy to term and whether this support comes with indoctrination (some women may need to use their services).

Publish your research in pamphlet or poster form, and make it available to women on campus by posting it up at women's centres, putting it out on Facebook/Myspace, giving it to secular counselors, and leaving some pamphlets on buses or near the deceptive advertisements that these centres put out. Similarly, you could create a webpage that rates these centres according to friendliness, support, indoctrination, opinion of abortion, and misinformation. Such a webpage would allow people outside of your group to share their

experiences as well. A project like this would likely take place over several semesters. Don't expect it to go quickly and only make the project as large as your volunteers can handle.

Plan B Distribution



This is also a long-term research project that seeks to evaluate the pharmacists, pharmacies, and possibly hospitals in your community. Some of these facilities may refuse to make emergency contraceptive available to women (especially young unmarried women) because they see this medication as facilitating an abortion (which it does not). Recruit a strong, confident and thick-skinned woman to go to the different pharmacies in town looking for Plan B (an emergency contraceptive brand that is currently sold by the pharmacist across the counter, but may be available off the shelf later in 2008). She could also approach the pharmacists for help, (asking where the contraceptives are kept etc). Take notes on the approachability, friendliness, and scrutiny of the staff, the availability of the contraceptive, and the overall experience.

Publish your research in pamphlet or poster form, and make it available to women on campus. Or create a webpage that rates pharmacies and allows other women to share their experience. Once you know which pharmacies do not carry the drug, you can either complain to the provincial College of Pharmacists (or equivalent), or encourage pharmacists to carry Plan B through boycotts, rallies, pamphletting, letters, and phone calls.

Relationship Building



Building up relationships with other campus group, departments, and services is an ongoing project that tends to change as group membership changes. Much effort has to go into liaising, but it is an important way of ensuring that your group is known about campus, has places to go to for funding, that women's right to choice is respected by all members of the campus community, and that your events are well-attended. Members of your group are probably members of other clubs and can act as convenient liaisons.

Some groups you may want to establish relationships with include your campus GLBT centre, women's centre, PIRG, counselors, departmental unions (Women's Studies, Sociology, English, Medical, Health Sciences, Law, Philosophy), campus doctors, the human rights officer, student clubs (Freethinkers, Feminists), as well as local

community women's centres, pro-choice groups, abortion clinics, and pro-choice activists. Again, do what you can.

Anti-Genocide Awareness Project



If the Genocide Awareness Project is coming to your campus, educate yourself by looking at the UBC Students for Choice website (listed in the *Resources* section). Their group was created specifically to deal with GAP and they have an excellent handbook that details how you should and should not deal with the problem. Make sure you include groups like the Jewish Student Association, the African/Caribbean student group, the United Church, PIRGS, etc. in the planning because they are similarly opposed to GAP.

It is best to avoid confrontation (this is what they want as it brings attention to the issue). Negotiate through the university to ensure their display remains hidden from view, and make sure there is security around. Set up a pro-choice display across from them, and make sure you have individuals on hand who are trained in peer support to help students deal with the trauma of seeing these horrible pictures.

Make sure you have information out about why GAP is wrong, sexist, racist, and anti-Semitic, and provide people with the truth about abortion. At Simon Fraser University, roller boards with blank paper were set up so people could record their thoughts and start up a non-confrontational dialogue.



Advertising

There are a number of ways to advertise. How you do it depends on the event goals and your audience.

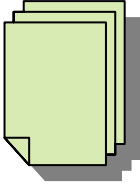
E-mail, Facebook, Website



Using the Internet to advertise an event is a good way to reach your membership or people on the periphery of your group. These are people who are likely pro-choice by conviction and who know about the misinformation out there on abortion. The Internet may not be as

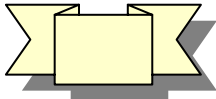
effective if you are trying to reach the wider community or are trying to educate. However, advertisements on Facebook are cheap.

Posters



Posters are important ways of advertising to the entire student population, but they often seem to go unnoticed unless they are glossy, large, in colour, and in unusual locations. The university's mailroom may also distribute posters to all of the departments if you send them enough (200-400). Don't forget to put posters up around residences.

Banners



Banners can be put up in popular locations, and spaces can usually be rented from your student society. These are more eye-catching and are a great way of getting the word out about an event, but you will have to plan in advance as spaces are not always available for rent. Having an artist to design a banner is also helpful. Make sure the banner details who, what, when, where, and the cost, and has an eye-catching graphic.

Student Paper



Putting an ad in the paper can cost money depending on whether it's in colour and the size of the ad. However, small ads usually only cost \$50 and they are seen by much of the student population.

Putting information in the classifieds or in the text message section is usually free. However, classifieds are often ignored. This also requires some forethought as you need an ad prepared and you have to submit it a week ahead of time. Getting an article written up about your event, or writing an article about choice is another way of getting some awesome free advertising, but this can take effort and editing.

Display Board / Screens

Many universities have an electronic/manual board in a central location where advertisements can be displayed. They are usually seen by everyone on campus. Putting ads up here is usually very expensive, and requires a great deal of forethought (you have to book almost a year in advance). Also, the advertising may not be worth the cost as



people may still not be drawn to your event. Many campuses have TV screens where advertisements can be displayed for free.

Overcoming student apathy is difficult, and attendance is a constant struggle for clubs as students are busy and are often uninterested in social justice issues. Advertising is crucial to ensuring attendance.

Overcoming student apathy is difficult, but do not feel discouraged if your event is not as well-attended as you would like.



Evaluation



After an activity is over, make sure to carry out a group evaluation of the event or activity. Assess an event according to its purpose — if it was a celebration, did everybody have fun?

Did your event reach its intended audience? What problems occurred? How would you improve it for next time?

If it was a coat hanger project, for example, how visible was the display? Were people reading and absorbing the information? If it was a membership drive, how many new people showed up? Also, assess the logistics. Was it easy or hard to organize? Did the organizers have enough help? What was perfect, what would you improve, and what would you eliminate? Most importantly, ask yourself if your project reached its intended audience.

It is also important to do a yearly or biyearly group evaluation to assess your mission statement, establish new goals, and evaluate the overall successes and failures of your group. (For example, we're too insular, we need to be more welcoming, but we do put on some really amazing events!). At such meetings, look back to what you have done well and to what you have done poorly, and develop an action plan for further improvement. You may also want to expand or contract your group's vision or mission statement to exclude or encompass new issues. Remember that as membership changes and your group grows or shrinks, the vision, purpose, and focus of your pro-choice group will also develop and transform. Just set aside a meeting at the end of the year or do a potluck at someone's house to address these questions.





Resources

Here are some great resources to get your group started:

Websites

- Abortion Films: <http://www.abortionfilms.org/?lang=en> (Trilingual French, English, German, with international/EU focus)
- Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca> (Bilingual)
- Action Canada for Population and Development: <http://www.acpd.ca> (Bilingual)
- Canadians for Choice: <http://www.canadiansforchoice.ca> (Bilingual)
- Canadian Federation for Sexual Health: <http://www.cfsh.ca/> (English)
- Canadian Women's Health Network: <http://www.cwhn.ca> (Bilingual)
- Canadian Youth For Choice: <http://www.cyouthc.ca> (English)
- Catholics for a Free choice: <http://www.catholicsforchoice.ca/> (Bilingual)
- Feminist Campus: <http://www.feministcampus.org> (US based college coalition of pro-choice groups)
- I'm Not Sorry: <http://www.imnotsorry.net> (a place for women to share their stories English)
- IPAS: <http://www.ipas.org> (English & Spanish, international/development focus)
- Medical Students for Choice: http://www.ms4c.org/ca_region.htm (English)
- NARAL Pro-Choice America: <http://www.naral.org> (US focus, English)



- National Abortion Federation: <http://www.prochoice.org/canada> (Trilingual – French, English, Spanish info relevant to US and Canada)
- Pro-Choice Action Network, Vancouver: <http://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org>
- UBC Students For Choice: <http://www.studentsforchoice.com> (English)

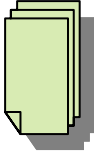
Books

Here are some helpful books about choice:

- *The War on Choice: The Right Wing Attack on Women's Rights and How to Fight Back* (It's American but has helpful ideas on how to thoughtfully fight anti-choice)
- *Winning the Choice on Abortion: How British Columbians and Canadian Feminists Won the Battles of the 1970s and 1980s* (Though BC-specific, it speaks to the larger Canadian history of the abortion rights movement, and pays attention to all feminists rather than focusing simply on Dr. Henry Morgentaler)
- *The Politics of Abortion* (Very academic, but Canadian)

Here are some helpful books about group structure, organization, and Activism:

- *Action Group Guide: Your Resource for Activism with a PIRG* (Only available if your campus has a PIRG, but it is university-specific and details how to run a meeting)
- *Grassroots and Nonprofit Leadership: A Guide for Organizations in Changing Times* (Has a good description of the different group models and information on evaluation)
- *Securing the Future of Your Non-Profit Organizations* (Has good information on volunteer appreciation)
- *Grassroots: A Field Guide to Feminist Activism* (Great for young feminists)



Posters

- www.Myspace.com/115058992 (English) Has great posters but you need to have a Myspace account
- <http://www.protectchoice.org> (English) Has some great campus fliers and hand outs.
- <https://www.applyweb.com/public/contribute?s=rsrcstor> (English) Has a number of posters and other resources, including an activism kit but they cost a bit (\$2-20)



Films

See the website abortion films: <http://www.abortionfilms.org>

- Before the Time Comes (Le temps de l'avant)
- Choice: The Henry Morgentaler Story
- Democracy on Trial: The Morgentaler Affair
- Henry : a documentary

How To Establish a Pro-Choice Group on Campus

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www.arcc-cdac.ca/presentations/campus-group.pdf

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**Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada**

**Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada**