Public Education and Building a Base

How to build a coalition and encourage community participation

Building a coalition to fight fracking in your community is a great way to bring together like-minded people and organizations interested in or already working on fracking. Check the first section of this toolkit, or do an internet search for organizations in your community, province or territory that are already working on fracking.

Here are some other tips on building a network of people to fight fracking:

Use existing contacts

• The beginning of a community project – which is essentially what your fight is – starts with contacting like-minded individuals, groups and clubs such as naturalists, bird watchers, social justice organizations, landowners’ associations, indigenous groups and well water users.

• Hold a meeting. Pull together a concerned citizens’ committee, which can be a small group to start. Be upfront about the aims and concerns within the group. There might not be full agreement on what approach to take, but find common ground to work from.

• Assign urgent jobs such as finding a place for the first or regular meetings.

• Strategize quickly, and be open to ideas. Discuss what actions you will take, what politicians you will target, what methods you will use to educate the public, and what the group’s goals are.

• Arrange for a first emergency public meeting.

• When you are informing people about the upcoming meeting talk to them briefly about the need to fight the project. Stick to credible facts and keep your arguments simple. Pick a few really strong ones such as fracking’s impacts on drinking water or people’s health.

Make new contacts

• At the meeting outline tasks and assign roles.

• Take advantage of social media: start a Facebook page or open a Twitter account and find a volunteer to take charge of these tools.

• Consider a website – one that is easy for volunteers to update, but with a professional look and feel.

• Set up information booths at events such as fairs, farmers’ markets, public events, festivals, etc.

• Meet people from different backgrounds one-on-one to slowly expand the network. Check out Rabble.ca’s How-To Guide on Coalition-building27 and the Community Toolbox’s article on Coalition Building28

• Once your coalition is established, hold some fun fundraisers or information events. Have dances, parties, barbecues, runs, tournaments, trivia nights, auctions – whatever works in your community for fundraising and building community opposition. This emphasizes community spirit, provides a pleasant place to discuss issues, and builds solidarity.

27 rabble.ca/toolkit/guide/coalition-building
28 ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1057.aspx
Petitions

There are specific ways petitions should be drawn up and signed. Petitions to be introduced in the House of Commons must follow these guidelines: www.parl.gc.ca/about/house/practicalguides/petitions/PetitionsPG2008__Pgo2_e.htm

Visit your province or territory’s website for guidelines on provincial or territorial petitions.

You could take it door-to-door in your neighbourhood, pass it around your workplace, take it to groups involved with the issues or who would agree with your point of view, visit local stores or businesses that might be supportive, and have it to sign at an event you are hosting on the issue. See these tips written for Council chapter activists: www.canadians.org/chapters/documents/petition.pdf

Present the petitions at the municipal, provincial and possibly federal levels, depending on the jurisdiction you are targeting. Get media attention by delivering the petitions in a creative way. For example, in 2012 as part of the first Global Frackdown, Council of Canadians staff members dressed in hazmat suits delivered buckets of “toxic fracking chemicals” (which were actually buckets filled with thousands of petitions addressed to then-federal Environment Minister Peter Kent).

Here are even more creative ideas: beautifultrouble.org/tactic/creative-petition-delivery/

Mock buckets of fracking fluids filled with thousands of petitions calling for a ban on fracking.

Council of Canadians staff walking with NDP MP Megan Leslie to deliver fracking petitions for the 2012 Global Frackdown.
Letters to the editor

A letter to the editor is a great way to get a message or information to a broader audience. Letters are read by community members, local politicians, decision makers and others and can be a great way to increase interest and support.

Here are five quick tips you can use to help get your letter published:

1. Have a “hook.” Is there something local happening on fracking that you can mention in your letter, such as a fracking company leasing land or submitting an application, or a recent news article that you can refer to? Newspapers are more likely to print letters that tie in with recent coverage or issues.

2. Keep it short. Keep your writing concise and snappy and get to the point. Good letters always begin with a strong opening (use your hook!), followed by information, facts or arguments to support it, and then a conclusion. Check to see if the newspaper has any word count guidelines – 200 to 300 words is usually what you want to aim for. A letter that is too long will not be used.

3. Be factual. If you are including facts about fracking, try to include where they came from. This will increase the credibility of your letter.

4. Include your contact information. Newspapers will always want to verify the authorship of letters. Be sure to include your phone number and email address when you send it in.

5. Try more than one paper. There is nothing wrong with trying to get published in more than one newspaper. Just be sure to tailor your letter to the publication – change your hook or add some new information – to increase your chances.

Sample letters to the editor

The following letter was published in The Camrose Canadian in May 2013.

Listening to Albertans on fracking

Dear editor,

Energy development in some form is critical in Alberta and there is wide consensus that associated risks must be minimized. We approach development and accept risks as a province and have gone ahead with hydraulic fracturing, but when our decisions impact individuals we often leave them to deal with the consequences on their own. Are we willing to compromise the livelihoods of some for the benefit of others? I believe that hearing the very human stories of those who have suffered unfairly will help us move toward a future we hope for.

Countless Albertans have important stories about energy development that have not been heard. The public discourse is controlled by a few entities that often do not leave space for landowners, farmers or other Albertans. Energy discussions in Alberta are incomplete. How can we create effective policy and regulation and make informed decisions without considering the impacts on Albertans?

Envision a province where everyone is heard, a place where city-dwellers and rural farmers alike are connected to their communities and to their land. There are many such stories to be told in Alberta, stories of richness and life. If your story of life in Alberta and energy development has not been heard, we want to help you share.

Visit www.albertavoices.ca to hear your neighbours’ stories and to learn how we can help make your voice part of the discussion on hydraulic fracturing and energy development. As U of A students and organizers of last fall’s conference in Camrose, Responsibility for the Land: Conversations on Fracking in Alberta, we understand that there are sensitive issues, and in working with you, we hope to learn from your experiences and foster a friendly relationship.

Hans Asfeldt
Camrose, AB
The following letter to the editor was published in News North in May 2013.

**Fracking research a must to reduce impact**

Thank you for your balanced editorial on fracking in the May 6 edition of News North (“Onward and downward”). The issue of horizontal fracking, including the fracking of relatively shallow wells, will become a major issue in the NWT over the next few years, initially in the Sahtu region and then in the Deh Cho.

Water is essential to life. Depending on our age, between 50 to 70 per cent of our own bodies consist of water.

When probing for life on other planets, scientists look solely for any evidence of water. Because it is essential (some would say sacred), water must be considered a human right and a public, not private, resource.

Fracking is an industrial activity that uses large amounts of freshwater, contaminates that water and then allows a significant volume of that toxic water to remain in the ground, where it can interact with groundwater, flow through faults in the ground, and potentially re-enter our surface water system.

That is one reason why many jurisdictions have either banned or placed a moratorium on fracking. Other reasons include increased greenhouse gas emissions, significant disturbances to surface lands, and increased earthquake activity.

Yes, more research and conclusive science is needed to fully assess the risks and long-term environmental impacts and costs of fracking. Simply allowing companies to begin horizontal fracking in the Sahtu or other NWT regions on a trial basis is not adequate or appropriate. Proper assessments need to be done.

The whole point of environmental assessments and regulatory oversight is to ensure that required research is carried out, full disclosure of proposed industrial activities is made (including what chemicals are being used), potential risks are thoroughly assessed and mitigated, and effective monitoring and reporting procedures are put in place for identification and public disclosure of any problems that might arise.

Oil and gas companies operating in the NWT should not be resisting public oversight of their activities, including environmental assessments.

The oil and gas is not going anywhere, so proper research and planning before extracting it through fracking, to reduce negative impacts on our water and our lives, makes sense.

Peter Redvers, Co-chair, Council of Canadians, NWT chapter
The latest threat to P.E.I.’s drinking water is fracking. Fracking is short for hydraulic fracturing. It’s a gas drilling technique that’s an extremely water-intensive process where millions of litres of fluid – typically a mix of water, sand, and chemicals, including ones known to cause cancer – are blasted into shale rock beds at high pressure to fracture the rock surrounding a gas well. This fracking releases the gas from the rock so it can flow into the well.

The P.E.I. government is still seriously considering allowing fracking on P.E.I. This, despite the fact that fracking has already occurred at least once on P.E.I. with serious consequences. We know this because on Dec. 10, 2007 there was a fracking spill near Green Gables in Cavendish. The company responsible was Corridor Resources.

Fracking for gas on P.E.I. will put our drinking water in serious jeopardy. Our drinking water is already under huge stress from other contaminants.

Groundwater is our only source of drinking water. It must be protected.

There are hundreds of reports of drinking water contamination associated with fracking in the United States and Canada.

As well, there is documented evidence of fracking’s severe impacts on human and animal health, the environment, and our climate – even small earthquakes.

At the moment, there are no active permits for oil and gas exploration on P.E.I. The leases held by Corridor Resources and other companies for almost 50 per cent of P.E.I. expired this past December. But that is most likely to change. Some experts believe there is a potential of 7.6 trillion feet of coal bed methane in the ground on P.E.I.

The process for issuing exploration rights on P.E.I. begins by an exploration company petitioning the minister of energy to offer for bid a particular area of P.E.I. The minister can give the permit for six years, with up to two years extension. Once the permit is approved, the government has no control over what process of exploration or drilling the company uses. It’s a permit to frack away.

We need to protect our drinking water. We need a permanent legislated moratorium on fracking.

Leo Broderick
The Council of Canadians and Don’t Frack P.E.I.
Social media

Social media, including Facebook and Twitter, are fast and efficient ways to get your message across, raise public awareness, and link people into what you are doing.

Twitter is a platform that allows you to send a short message (140 character limit), share news articles and update your followers. You can also get up-to-the-minute updates from politicians, organizations or companies, sometimes before it even it gets reported on by media. Twitter is a great way to share online petitions about fracking in your community. To learn the basics of Twitter, check out Rabble’s how to guide on Twitter (rabble.ca/toolkit/guide/twitter) and how to live tweet an event (rabble.ca/toolkit/guide/live-tweet-event).

Facebook is a social networking tool that allows you to connect with people already working on fracking and find new supporters to encourage to take action. You can share photos, updates and news articles and spread the word about community events to stop fracking. Here are some tips on how to use Facebook to raise awareness about fracking in your community: www.movements.org/how-to/c/facebook-activism

Check out this guide on how to organize an online campaign by Labour Notes that includes tips on building momentum for campaigns and online petitions by mobile phone, Twitter and Facebook: rabble.ca/toolkit/guide/how-to-organize-online-campaign

For more tips on how to enhance your use of social media, including tips on the perfect tweet, promoting your blog, a cheat sheet on Facebook, and how to use other social media sites such as Pinterest and StumbleUpon, visit: pinterest.com/dylanpenner/social-media/
Here are some sample tweets you can adapt to fit your local campaign on fracking:

Sample tweets to support the Elsipogtog’s protests:

#DavidAlward Don’t #frack with our #water. I want a ban on #shalegas. #NBpoli #Elsipogtog #Elsipogtogsolidarity #oilandgas #swn

#DavidAlward Get #SWN out of #NewBrunswick #NBpoli #Elsipogtog #Elsipogtogsolidarity #shalegas #oilandgas #swn

#SWN Stay out of #NewBrunswick. #banfracking #Elsipogtogsolidarity

#DavidAlward Protecting the human righttowater means banning #shalegas in #NewBrunswick. #banfracking #NBpoli #Elsipogtogsolidarity

#DavidAlward I don’t want #fracking wastewater to leak in #NewBrunswick’s lakes and rivers. #banfracking #Elsipogtogsolidarity #shalegas

#PremierAlward We want sustainable and ethical jobs in #NewBrunswick #NBpoli #Elsipogtog #Elsipogtogsolidarity #shalegas #oilandgas

#PremierAlward I want a future free from #fracking and dirty fossil fuels. #Elsipogtog #Elsipogtogsolidarity #shalegas #oilandgas

#DavidAlward, I want a ban on #fracking and creative solutions to transition off fossil fuels. #NBpoli

@RCMPNB Your obligation is to protect the people. The world is watching. #Elsipogtogsolidarity #Elsipogtogsolidarity

Talking points

As public concern over fracking grows, so too does industry spin. Here are some talking points to debunk industry myths about fracking.

× “Fracking has been used for decades.”

Governments and industry representatives often say that fracking has been used as an extraction method for more than 60 years. However, the “older” type of fracking – known as vertical fracking – is much different than the new form of fracking – multi-stage, high pressure, horizontal fracking which has just developed over the last decade.

Horizontal fracking requires much more fluids, anywhere from 50 to 100 times more, which increases the risk of accidents. It also requires that the toxic mix of chemicals, water and sand be blasted into the ground at higher pressures, which increases the risk for potential well, valve or pipe failures.

Government regulations have not caught up with this newer form of fracking. Cornell University professor and fracking expert Tony Ingraffea says that the impacts of fracking are cumulative and some effects may not be seen until decades later.

29 www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=4918403&Language=E&Mode=1
“There are no documented cases of water contamination.”

Governments and industry say there are no documented cases of water contamination. But governments do not regularly test water sources before and after fracking has occurred.

Fracking fluids contaminated groundwater in Grande Prairie, Alberta in September 2011. The Energy Resources Conservation Board conducted an investigation and released a report citing that the water table was fracked releasing 42 cubic metres of propane gel into an underground aquifer.30

In Dawson’s Creek, B.C. there have been accounts of sand, grayish water and thick sludge coming out of wells and taps.31

Jessica Ernst, a landowner in Rosebud, Alberta, filed a lawsuit against EnCana, Alberta Environment, and the Energy Resources Conservation Board for negligence and unlawful activities. Ernst’s well water is so contaminated with methane and other fracking chemicals that it can be lit on fire. (An Alberta court ruled that the Alberta Energy Regulator is immune to private legal claims, but Ernst will appeal this and pursue her case against Encana.)

In 2010, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection concluded that a fracking well drilled by Cabot Oil and Gas Corporation contaminated a large aquifer with methane resulting in the contamination of the drinking water of 19 families. Environment News Service reported that Dimock resident Ray Kemble said: “EPA officials officially told us that our water was safe to drink but then told us off the record not to drink it. Now the truth is out and we want justice.”

ProPublica found more than 1,000 cases of water contamination documented by the courts and state and local governments in Colorado, New Mexico, Alabama, Ohio and Pennsylvania.
“Fracking can be done safely.”

Research by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Endocrine Disruption Exchange Inc. has demonstrated that fracking fluids contain toxic substances known to cause serious health impacts such as cancer and organ damage, and have negative impacts on neurological, reproductive and endocrine systems.

The National Wildlife Federation’s report “Hydraulic Fracturing in the Great Lakes Basin” notes that there are approximately one dozen chemical additives that are used for fracking including acids, gelling agents and cross-linkers, iron control agents and scale inhibitors, corrosion inhibitors and oxygen scavengers, biocides and friction-reducing agents. A 2011 report by the Democratic members of the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce revealed that the leading 14 oil and gas service companies used 750 chemical components between 2005 and 2009.

The potential for fracking well leaks raises further concerns about water contamination. Andrew Nikiforuk, a Canadian journalist who has researched and written extensively about the oil and gas industries, has pointed out that “industry studies clearly show that five to seven per cent of all new oil and gas wells leak. As wells age, the percentage of leakers can increase to a startling 30 or 50 per cent. But the worst leakers remain ‘deviated’ or horizontal wells commonly used for hydraulic fracturing.”

“Fracking will create jobs.”

Governments and industry representatives promote fracking as a way to boost job creation. However, these are neither ethical nor sustainable jobs.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ (CCPA) report “Enbridge Pipedreams and Nightmares” notes that Enbridge boasts that a fossil fuel project like the $5 billion Northern Gateway Pipeline would create 63,000 person-years of employment during its construction phase, and 1,146 full-time jobs once completed. However, CCPA reveals these estimates are overblown and that it would only create approximately 1,850 construction jobs per year for three years, and a handful of permanent new jobs once completed. The report points out that between 3 and 34 times the number of direct jobs would be created if the $5 billion were invested in green jobs and industries.

U.S. organization Food & Water Watch (FWW) has produced reports showing that the estimate of new jobs is overblown and misleading. In their report, “Exposing the Oil and Gas Industry’s False Jobs Promise for Shale Gas Development: How Methodological Flaws Grossly Exaggerate Jobs Projections,” FWW points out that the Public Policy Institute of New York State (PPINYS) boasted that developing 500 new shale gas wells every year in the five counties of Allegany, Broome, Chemung, Steuben and Tioga would create 62,620 new jobs in New York by 2018. But when FWW analyzed employment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics in counties with shale gas development in Pennsylvania and compared them to bordering counties in New York without shale gas development, the organization found these claims to be baseless. In fact, FWW found that opening up the five counties in New York to fracking would...
create no more than two jobs per well in the state compared to PPINYS’ claims of 125 jobs per well. Some of the jobs would be in construction, retail or the food industry rather than solely in the drilling industry.33

Job estimates often do not make clear where the workers will come from and how the local community will actually benefit. Industry fails to consider the negative impacts that fracking would have on existing employment in other industries, such as tourism and agriculture. For example, in Newfoundland the tourism industry raised concerns about the impacts fracking would have on its $1 billion industry. Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland received international attention when UNESCO raised concerns about how fracking would affect the park, potentially jeopardizing its World Heritage Site status and the local tourism industry.


Companies are not legally required to disclose the chemicals they use for fracking. In fact, the specific combination and quantities of chemicals used are considered proprietary trade secrets.

Under the Chemicals Management Plan (CMP), Environment Canada reviewed chemicals used in the fracking process in both Quebec and the U.S. Approximately half of the fracking chemicals did not meet the CMP criteria for further investigation, meaning these chemicals have not been assessed for potential risks to the public.

Community Tours

Holding a community tour is a strategy that is being used on the West Coast to raise awareness about fracking and pipeline projects.

In the Yukon, Caleb Behn from the soon-to-be-released documentary Fractured Land traveled to Watson Lake, Whitehorse, Mayo, Dawson and Ross River in January 2013 to share his experiences on fracking: yukon-news.com/news/indigenous-activist-to-speak-on-fracking

The Yukoners Concerned About Oil & Gas Exploration/Development group is travelling to communities to host presentations and facilitate public discussions on fracking: yukonersconcerned.ca

Rising Tide B.C. organized the “Building Resistance Tour: Conversations about fracking and Pacific Trails Pipeline.” The purpose of the seven-stop tour of northern B.C. was to expose the true costs of fracking and to support frontline community resistance to pipeline expansion in rural areas: risingtide604.ca/?p=578