

Case Study:



Grassroots campaign against an immigrant detention center in Farmville - 2009



Contents:

- Campaign Narrative
- Summary and Reflections
- Appendix: Organizing Template

INTRODUCTION

We are writing this document as our humble attempt to evaluate a campaign that took a lot out of us and hopefully gave as much. On one hand, in the short-term it was a failure. On another, it was the first extended campaign for what has been a multi-racial, multi-class network of activists in the state of Virginia for six years, and showed those of us at the center of the network where we need to grow, and further refined our community in struggle and the kind of work we want to be doing. This evaluation is part of this – we hope folks will learn from what we achieved and offer feedback on where we failed. This is a dialogue. We expect and treasure any thoughts you have.

The evaluation is divided into three parts – a general narrative of the campaign which runs down the who, what, where, how, etc – a reflection piece which evaluates what was achieved, what we struggled with, and what we learned – and a sample organizing template used in outreach during the campaign. Enjoy.



NARRATIVE



The People United is a network of organizers working for social justice in Virginia and the surrounding area.



September 2008 organizers with The People United (TPU) learned, through a news article published in the Richmond Times Dispatch, of plans to construct a for-profit, 1,000-bed immigrant detention center in Farmville, VA. A reporter who attended a public meeting held in Farmville with town officials and investors in the project wrote the article. At the time the article was published, the decision was already final and plans for construction were moving ahead.

The news article was poorly written and left many questions unanswered, so a regional organizer with TPU began some primary research and discovered that the private corporation, Immigration Centers of America – Farmville, was newly created by real estate developers and had no experience in corrections. After phone calls to ICE, the Farmville City Manager, the three principal investors in the project and the Virginia Tobacco Foundation, which funded some of the start-up costs through an infrastructure grant, TPU wrote and distributed an article that was eventually published by the Institute for Southern Studies in their online news magazine, Facing South. Grassroots Leadership, the Detention Watch Network and the ACLU National Prisons Project provided background information on immigrant detention and problems with private detention centers. Other research included a visit to Farmville to talk with a university professor and the editor of the local newspaper, and visiting the construction site.

The People United approached allied groups in the region at this time regarding joint action to oppose this new center, including the Virginia Immigrant People's Coalition and one of its most prominent members, Mexican@s sin Fronteras, the largest immigrants rights organization in and around Virginia. The Virginia Immigrant People's Coalition was struggling to keep itself together and could not devote energy to a new campaign. Similarly, MSF was struggling with difficult and all-consuming issues in Prince William County and, while interested and supportive, could not engage at that time. Because of the immediacy of the issue, The People United decided to start the campaign and keep the invitation to allied groups open. Plans to construct the center proceeded and TPU believed any chance of stopping it depended on quick engagement. Furthermore, two important outreach opportunities, in prison and immigration-issue conferences in Virginia, were rapidly approaching.

TPU made a request of the Farmville Town Manager to hold a public meeting so that concerned groups could ask questions publicly and present information on the pattern of human rights abuses in private detention facilities and the negative impact of prison construction on the economies of small towns. The town manager promised to call back



with a response, however did not follow through. TPU distributed an action alert and hundreds of people called the Farmville Town Manager and three principal investors in the project to demand a public meeting. The mayor said they would take the matter under advisement and have the town manager reply in writing. He did two weeks later, denying the request for a meeting stating that the public hearing process was closed. This exchange was reported on in the Farmville Herald.



VIPC, MSF and other allied groups responded to an urgent call and gathered for a strategy meeting. Grassroots Leadership responded with guidance and resources in support of the campaign. Organizers traveled and drummed up support for the Richmond meeting. TPU filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the Farmville Town Government.

Of the 40 people who attended the first meeting, VCU students were the largest contingency. Also represented were most members of The People United organizers collective, JMU Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) from Harrisonburg, Anarchist Black Cross of Richmond, an organizer from Grassroots Leadership, and immigrant members of immigrant solidarity groups in Charlottesville and Louisa. After a presentation on research done by TPU organizers on the Farmville center and by Grassroots Leadership on private detention centers in general and previous organizing efforts, the group adopted the campaign and set three goals:

1. Stop construction of the center
2. Educate potential allies and the general public about immigration and immigrant detention issues
3. Build a stronger, better-connected network in the region, better prepared to respond to issues like this in the future.

Sub-groups formed including Media, Research, Allies Outreach and Farmville Outreach, and Action/Strategy. This structure directed the campaign for the next several months. From October through January, this group remained vigorous and active.

The initial strategy was to raise awareness and concern among Farmville residents and to put pressure on Farmville town council. We first looked for publicity opportunities. The town council's public monthly meetings seemed like the easiest, with guaranteed presence of council members and coverage by the Farmville Herald. The People United members attended and spoke out every month. One month, a TPU organizer returned to the council with an immigrant leader from Louisa County. She had prepared a written speech that she read to council, TPU organizer reading the English translation as well as testifying themselves. The front-page headline in the next Farmville Herald was "No New Jails is Plea to Council."

Town council members are elected officials in Farmville, and the primary decision-makers on whether the plan would proceed to its completion, so were our primary targets. We



identified indirect ways to influence them as well, through the chamber of commerce, Farmville Herald, church and citizen groups, individual citizens, and business owners.



voices.

TPU presence at town council meetings continued for most of the next six months. At one meeting, the hall was overflowing with campaign members and students from Longwood University, in Farmville. Organizers from Harrisonburg, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Louisa and Richmond met in advance to agree upon talking points and then packed the agenda so that the entire public comment time for the meeting was dominated by our

Other actions included:

- **Farmville's Christmas Parade:** The People United members printed fliers in red and green with Christmas-themed graphics that gave simple, concise talking points about the center and contact information for people who wanted to know more. About 15 activists attended the parade and distributed 500 fliers. One member of TPU organizers collective walked in the parade on stilts wearing a "No New Jail" sign around her neck, eliciting cheers from a surprising number of the crowd.
- **Ongoing Action Alerts:** We distributed alerts asking people to call, e-mail and write letters to the Farmville Herald Editor with a message of opposition. A number of letters to the editor were published as a result
- **Parody Website:** Another member of TPU organizers collective created a website which parodied and bore a striking resemblance to the Farmville Chamber of Commerce site. Text was written for the site that mocked Farmville as a town so desperate for money that it would welcome any industry no matter how sleazy. It also mocked the Orwellian doublespeak of Farmville and ICA, their concerns for immigrants and building a "citizenship education campus" instead of a detention center. The website included a feature that allowed visitors to e-mail every member of the town council and chamber of commerce with the click of a button. This resulted in over a hundreds e-mails being sent.
- **Canvassing:** Groups of organizers traveled to Farmville several times for door-to-door canvassing of residents and business owners. Responses ranged from indifference to outright hostility, only a minority being concerned or supportive of the campaign. No residents or business owners contacted in this way ever engaged or participated in the campaign. On one of the visits, Spanish-speaking immigrants (including a mother and small child) felt so intimidated by the hostile response from some of the business owners that they stopped participating in visits for the rest of the day. Churches and student organizations were also approached. There was very little response from churches. One student organization, Longwood Young Democrats, showed interest and agreed to engage the campaign, but ultimately did



very little. On each of these visits, the TPU group would stop by to say hello to the newspaper editor, introduce him to members of the immigrant community, and leave information with him, like a Washington State University study addressing the negative impacts of prison construction on small town economies¹.

At the next strategy meeting a plan for the next several months was developed that called for intensive outreach at the local level and a rally and march in the spring. TPU regional organizer prepared an organizing template for local groups to use in their mobilizing efforts (see page 13).

Media and Detainee Deaths

At the end of November, we began to hear rumors that a detainee had died in Piedmont Regional Jail (also in Farmville) under suspicious circumstances. Reaching out to the community of legal support organizations, we eventually found someone who had talked first-hand with detainee witnesses. The superintendent of the jail gave no information and ICE would give only a generic statement. Our FOIA request was denied, because under Virginia FOIA laws, both jail and medical records are exempt.



We sent a media release about the death, referencing a similar death in Piedmont two years earlier, and the plans for the new detention center. A small group held a vigil outside of the jail, which was covered by an independent journalist who later published the story in a national news magazine.

The news media was beginning to notice the campaign at this point. We were contacted by a reporter from NPR's All Things Considered who wanted to meet us in Farmville to do a feature story on the campaign as part of a series on immigrant detention. A group of immigrant and citizen organizers in the campaign met her in Farmville in late December for interviews at the construction site so that she could record some door to door canvassing of business owners.

Ken Woodley, the editor of the Farmville Herald, got in touch to say that he would be reversing his editorial position, which had previously been in favor of the prison. When the editorial came out, it became apparent that the visits to Farmville had been effective. Woodley talked about the economic hardships faced by immigrants in their home countries finding it hard to blame them for coming here in search of a better life. He called for plans for the detention center to be replaced by a center



Prisons Offer Few Economic Benefits to Small Towns" - www.wsu.edu/pages/publications.asp?Action=Detail&PublicationID=9420



that would assist people in achieving legal status. While the analysis left a lot to be desired, it was a huge shift and a tangible indication that we were having an impact.

In January, a group of detainees in Piedmont saw one of the Farmville Herald articles about the campaign and had a family member on the outside do an internet search to find contact information. They were outraged at the Herald story about the detainee death in November, which only parroted the ICE press release. They got in touch to ask for our help in getting out the truth about the medical neglect and guard brutality that contributed to the death of German immigrant Guido Newbrough.



We obtained the names of four detainees who wanted to talk, and connected them with English and Spanish speakers who visited them at the jail. There were numerous lengthy phone calls. At first, it was difficult to proceed because the detainees were very concerned about repercussions if it became clear they had spoken out. One of the challenges was that the detainees wanted an attorney to agree in advance to advocate for them if there were any repercussions. This proved impossible to arrange despite consultations with several legal advocacy organizations. Eventually, through a weeks-long process of visits and phone calls, we worked out an agreement to share their stories with the media.

TPU had been meeting with the father of Guido Newbrough trying to connect him to legal representation for his wrongful death lawsuit. Through this, he learned that a reporter for The New York Times was very interested in the story. Other media outlets, including The Washington Post, expressed interest in the campaign and we were receiving inquiries; however, if the story broke in another paper first it was likely that the editors at The Times would cancel. After a stressful several days of holding off other media and scheduling nearly impossible inmate interviews, the story broke in The New York Times. This resulted in a large number of media inquiries at the local, regional, national and international levels. Fortunately, The Washington Post decided to go ahead with their story anyway.

Despite the storm of national and international publicity, it still required the usual amount of work to get coverage in Virginia, and even so, some papers did not pick the story up. We did however get a good number of hits locally, including several significant stories by Virginia Public Radio.

The NYT article revealed new information about Piedmont. An expert medical examiner concluded that Newbrough's death was easily preventable had he received treatment and simple antibiotics in a timely manner. After the death of Abdouli Sall two years prior, ICE investigated Piedmont over similar allegations but refused to release the results. The ACLU National Prisons Project had filed a FOIA request and the results were in the article. At the time of Sall's death, ICE found medical care severely deficient, to the point of endangering



detainee health. However, no steps were taken to address any of the deficiencies. This information provided the opportunity for us to apply pressure from a couple of different angles--the first was competency. As mentioned previously, ICA had no correctional experience and previously stated that they intended to bring in highly qualified staff from Piedmont to run the place. Also, the medical director and assistant superintendent of Piedmont both served on Farmville Town Council, the body to have ultimate oversight of the new facility. These new revelations cast serious doubts on the ability of the principal players to manage this project. The second was viability. As ICE investigated Newbrough's death at Piedmont and The Times story ran, we began to hear reports from inside of large numbers of detainees being shipped out to other facilities. Although an inquiry to ICE resulted only in lies and denials, it soon became clear that they were removing all detainees from this facility. This was a big blow to Piedmont, which relied heavily on that income, and 50 guards were laid off as a result. We continued to mediate between the media and the detainees through this process resulting in a large article in The Washington Post.

ICA was having trouble with its financing and was already months behind schedule in beginning construction. The controversy at Piedmont further complicated that situation for them and continued to increase the pressure on town council to back off from these plans. Ken Woodley published another editorial in the Farmville Herald where he reiterated his moral concerns, and added practical ones calling for a halt to plans for the new detention center.

During this time, changes were happening to the organizing structure of the campaign. The meetings were poorly attended and a number of key people who had taken on responsibilities early on were dropping out; the responsibilities were falling on fewer and fewer shoulders.

It also came to light that there was controversy over the decision around The People United taking on the campaign in the absence of involvement from the Virginia Immigrants People's Coalition and a perception that the campaign was not open to regional involvement by other groups. A series of conversations and meetings about this were held resulting in the VIPC endorsing the campaign, and bringing it under that banner.

Farmville Rally



Mexican@s sin Fronteras, a principal member of VIPC, took a very active role at a crucial time to making the rally and march a success. MSF organized a bus and car caravan with stops in Northern Virginia and Culpeper, where a group from Winchester met them. This required a lot of internal organizing. They also provided the sound system, a band, and a number of important perspectives for the stage program. A group in Harrisonburg held weekly meetings for a couple of months in advance of the event in an attempt to fill a bus. The bus ended up not being available, but they



brought an equivalent number of people in a caravan. Groups in Richmond and Charlottesville held fundraising/outreach events to boost attendance and helped augment the turnout from both of those cities. It is important to note that there was some active outreach and cooperation from radical environmentalists looking to establish better connections across issues and support this struggle. This group provided the band for both fundraisers mentioned above and also performed at the rally, even translating one of their songs into Spanish for the event. They also set up a couple of university speaking gigs for TPU using their contacts and campus club budgets. This resulted in increased attendance at the event as well as some funding.

The stage had already been set for publicity and we got good advance press. Press coverage the day of was substantial but also disappointing. VA Public Radio did another excellent piece, but the AP did not send a reporter. Instead, they picked up The Richmond Times Dispatch story, written by the same reporter who wrote the original, poorly written article that sparked interest in starting this campaign. In it, he estimated attendance at 150. This was the story that the vast majority of newspapers who covered the event printed. One of our organizers pegged the crowd at 400, which was likely high, but the

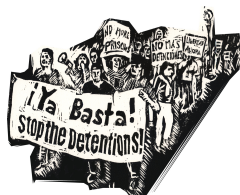


Harrisonburg group distributed 150 bright orange t-shirts when they arrived, which people promptly put on. At the height of the rally, orange t-shirts clearly accounted for less than half of the crowd. A person-by-person count at the bitter end of the march, long after many people had left to go home, counted over 200.

Another boost to advance publicity, and one that probably helped increase the event and turn-out, was the legal wranglings over the march permit. We approached the ACLU of VA for help when Farmville presented us with archaic protest ordinances that would have made our event impossible. Among the restrictions were: no amplification or loud noises, no signs or placards larger than 2 feet, no persons under the age of 18 participating and all participants marching in a single-file line. The ACLU took the case and both of our groups promptly sent press releases. The ACLU wrote to the Farmville City Attorney requesting changes to the obviously unconstitutional policy and asked for a rapid response so that we could decide whether to file a lawsuit or not. This generated media coverage and an unexpected victory when Farmville backed down, assured us that the permit would be granted, and re-wrote their protest ordinance to correct the constitutional problems.

Losing Steam

Energy waned after the protest, and it took us over a month to convene a meeting of VIPC organizers to evaluate the campaign to date and discuss next steps. At this meeting it was felt by many that we needed much stronger participation from Farmville residents to impact the town council. A series of actions was planned including a public forum in Farmville and more canvassing and student/church outreach. On the agenda for future consideration was a campaign of direct action. We also discussed the functionality of the coalition and made



some plans for a more active steering committee. After this meeting there was little follow-up to those plans. The next meeting planned for on-site in Farmville was cancelled and never re-scheduled.

Later that summer, we received the news that building permits had been issued and construction was set to begin. The project was scaled down to about 3/4th of its original size because of continued problems with funding. Other news was that a similar center was being proposed for Franklin County, WV, and that there had been a death due to medical neglect in the criminal unit at Piedmont and the family was asking us for help.

TPU convened another meeting and again evaluated the campaign so far including discussion of the various factors behind it running out of steam in recent months.

The following action plan resulted from that meeting:

- Write this case study for distribution to groups involved in the campaign or others doing similar work
- Write a shorter less detailed version for public release
- Contact legal advocacy groups to let them know that we would like to establish contact with detainees in the new facility when it opens
- Start work on setting up a tour of new facility when it opens
- Develop an emergency response plan to react in the event of any incidents at the new facility
- Offer support/content to the ACLU of WV in organizing a public forum about the proposed new detention center in WV
- Meet with the family of Michael Baker, who recently died on Piedmont, to offer our support in whatever course of action they would like to pursue
- Conduct research into GSI, the warehousing and distributing company proposing the for-profit immigrant detention center in Pendleton County WV
- Develop an action plan to expose the intentions of GSI in opening the WV facility



Summary and Reflections

-What did we achieve?

Throughout the campaign we were able to bring together a multiracial core group of over twenty activists that had never worked together before. This was certainly facilitated by being one of the first fully bilingual grassroots campaigns in Virginia's history. Not only were rallies, media events, and town council meetings fully bilingual actions with interpretation provided, but also all planning meetings and strategy sessions made use of simultaneous interpreting equipment. Dozens of activists and organizers were exposed for the first time to organizing that prioritized multilingual space. In a state like Virginia, where



immigration has increased dramatically in the past twenty years, this has gone a long way in introducing what must be an integral component of our movement building work down the road.

Due to media attention from the Farmville Herald (which we eventually pressured to change its editorial position and oppose the facility), various statewide media outlets and eventually international coverage from The New York Times, we were able to connect with and advocate on behalf of immigrant detainees held at the Piedmont Regional Jail who contacted us after a mention of the campaign in a local newspaper. Eventually, all immigrant detainees were removed from Piedmont Regional Jail. While this was a demonstrated consequence of the campaign it is by no means a victory to claim. We don't know where many of the detainees ended up and for all we know, after ICE decided to save face they received harsher treatment as a result. However, we did build relationships with media and legal advocacy groups that may assist in responding to requests for advocacy from within the facility if and when it is opened.



For all intents and purposes, the culminating event of the campaign was the rally and march in Farmville which turned out hundreds from over a dozen communities across the state. This action, like the entire campaign, required intensive organizing from our all-volunteer core group. This included intensive meetings with Farmville Town Manager Gerald Spates and eventually attorneys from the ACLU to insure a march permit would be granted and the action would remain accessible to many who were legitimately concerned about police targeting of immigrant communities. Multiple bands and speakers were coordinated for the rally, march t-shirts were produced, and vast mobilization efforts were coordinated in Harrisonburg, Manassas, Richmond, and in Tidewater Virginia. All told, the Virginia grassroots (not a single non-profit with any budget) - lawyers, students, working-class white communities, hundreds from primarily Latino immigrant communities, and to a lesser extent, black and Native-American communities - turned out for a raucous and high-energy mobilization---all during Spring's first nice day for downtown shopping on Farmville's row of antique and novelty shops. The march left many feeling the momentum to reinvigorate the Virginia Immigrants People's Coalition and other efforts to continue in collaboration that for months had been left relatively dormant.

The march and rally was likely the first mass display of political angst in Prince Edward County since resistance, organized mostly within Farmville's black community, to the decision in the 1950's to close public schools instead of integrating. It is also worth reiterating here the very tangible achievement of this campaign—that of getting Farmville to rewrite its archaic policy around protesting. Through collaboration with ACLU VA we brought to light and exposed Farmville's politically repressive protest ordinances.

-What did we struggle with?

The goal of this evaluation is to focus primarily on internal struggles. However, one external challenge we faced had significant ramifications on our campaign internally. As mentioned



above, we didn't find out about ICA's construction plans until well after the proposal had been approved and Farmville Town Council's formal community input process had ended. Revisiting our goals for the campaign –1 – Stop construction of the center, 2 – Educate potential allies and the general public about immigration and immigrant detention, 3 – Build a stronger, better-connected network in the region able to respond to issues like this in the future – it's apparent that our first goal was ambitious at best, especially given that our campaign was being driven by one primary organizer for much of the time and the group in general had never worked together. This lack of previous relationship affected our ability to identify appropriate roles and tasks and to communicate accountability.

The core group's most vocal and directive members all came from experience organizing in an anti-authoritarian context and desired an open process that would allow for newly politically active folks to get involved and have their voices heard. This context certainly provided outlets for newly politicized members of the campaign to continue building skills. However, this led tasks, like coordinating the media team, to be given to virtually unknown activists who showed up to one meeting, with admittedly little experience. We struggled with transparency around experience levels and never openly talked about the campaign also serving as a learning opportunity given deliberate mentoring.

As the campaign was bilingual throughout, significant effort was made by just a few interpreters to create and maintain multilingual space. These interpreters were experienced activists and organizers and rarely able to fully participate in any of the strategy meetings. Interpretation capacity was certainly a limit that we struggled against repeatedly.

Without being on the same page around goals running up to the March mobilization, and with capacity stretched very thin to pull it all together (again, much of the work being done by a very small group), the campaign lost a lot of steam after its conclusion. We feel this was emblematic of the struggle in all of our movement work (and perhaps especially so when organizing in a volunteer context), to create cultures of economic, spiritual and physical sustainability as we pursue nuts and bolts political goals. Some had money to make, others felt disenchanted as delayed construction resumed, and some may not have known how to plug in again as more experienced activists backed off.

A more abstract but just as important struggle to mention has to do with dynamics around racial solidarity present in the campaign. The activists driving the campaign were primarily white and bilingual - Spanish/English - many with histories of Latin America solidarity organizing. This facilitated connection to Latino immigrant communities. However, in the U.S. South where white supremacy has a long, violent, and bloody history primarily targeting black communities, white solidarity with African-American-led organizing is that much more important. It is also more challenging for many white folks than creating relationships of trust with newly arrived Latino immigrants. While connections were made between immigrant leaders active in the campaign and African-



American prison justice organizers at a statewide conference, it's important to at least recognize that in Richmond, still a majority black city, where most meetings were held, only once was a black activist present. Again, in the South, where getting folks in the same room together can, in itself, be a campaign victory, we struggled.

We also struggled with both responding to immediate needs (like torture inside the Piedmont Regional Jail) and building a campaign that could transcend this particular issue, leaving something to be built on for future radical political work.



-What have we learned?

First and foremost we learned to more realistically evaluate our capacity and to set a reasonable timeline accordingly. Notwithstanding the late notice we received of plans in Farmville, we were up against an immigrant detention system of stockholders with significant corporate and political power and the consequences of increasingly repressive immigrant criminalization at the national level. Taking our time means prioritizing the building of relationships across lines of difference; it

means explaining campaign goals and strategy two, three, four times when necessary; it means making sure we move as a group even when that group moves a little slower.

We have learned that leadership development is key. Asking someone to do a task without asking what support they need is not leadership development. We've learned the importance of checking-in regularly to see how things are coming along, and intentionally pairing more experienced organizers with those wanting to learn. When wanting to make decisions agreed to by the whole group and spread around the task load, this kind of transparency is essential.

We've learned that all goals and intention aside, sometimes organizing is often a magical process. We didn't stop the detention center from being built, and that was a huge blow. But even as is this is being written, the fruits of new political and personal relationships forged and strengthened during this campaign are being born. It's hard to know where things will lead us, but there's value in learning that we don't know where it will lead us, even if we were to repeat the same process.

-How can we take what we've learned and use it to inform action moving forward?

We realize our primary goal—stopping construction of the center--quickly became the focus of the campaign as opposition spread and momentum built. The secondary and tertiary goals were rarely discussed intentionally as campaign strategy was developed. Recognizing this, we are actively thinking of ways to bring organizational and education-oriented goals up to the forefront of our work. For example, in Pendleton County West Virginia, where a new detention center is being planned, we are thinking more in terms of political education



around the roots of immigration and immigrant detention – through a community forum or media actions – than around stopping the detention center itself. This is due to an evaluation of our capacity and an understanding of the long-term and base-building work needed in our communities.

Most importantly, our current organizing comes from a place of creating sustainable structures. The People United Board of Directors has become a working organizers collective where long-lasting relationships and relevant political analysis can be built and nurtured – a springboard for action. In addition, we're looking into starting a Virginia-based popular education and retreat center, understanding the importance of rural/urban connections, and physical space that we can grow into - to incubate movements where we're literally looking for new ground to stand on.

Above all we want to apply rigorous evaluation to each of our campaigns as we move forward and not solely as we're winding down.

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Appendix A – Organizing Template

Goals Identified at First Meeting:

- 1. Stop the immigrant detention center from being built*
- 2. Increase awareness of immigrant's rights issues and problems with private correctional facilities*
- 3. Build a better-connected movement that will last beyond this struggle and be better prepared to respond next time something like this emerges.*

Strategy

Of the goals mentioned above, first and foremost, we want to stop construction of this prison. To do so, we need to influence one of the three players: Farmville Town Council, Immigration Centers of America (ICA) and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

ICA – Motivated by money. Public opinion matters only as far as it affects their profits. They do not depend on individuals for their profit, but on ICE. This makes them challenging for us to influence.

ICE – Part of Department of Homeland Security. Working to implement federal policy. Accountable to elected officials, but at the federal level. Difficult for a local or regional group to influence.

Farmville Town Council – Local elected officials. Concerned about their public image. Vulnerable to pressure by local institutions, citizenry, media. Also vulnerable to concerns about Farmville's image regionally and nationally. Multiple points of pressure accessible to local and regional groups.

We can think creatively and find ways to exert influence on ICA and ICE, but given the pressing nature of this situation, we recommend focusing our efforts on Town Council for the time being where we have the greatest opportunity to make an impact. We propose to exert pressure on Farmville town Council in the following ways:

- Uncover, support and increase resistance to the detention center at the local level. Solicit public statements by institutions (some of this will require strategies and tactics directed at influencing specific institutions, like the chamber of commerce). Generate consistent positive coverage in the Farmville Herald in the form of articles and letters from Farmville locals. Garner visible and vocal support in the business community, among church and civic groups and among individuals.*
- Generate pressure at the regional level. Show council and chamber of commerce that a new detention center will give Farmville a bad image, hurt tourism, decrease enrollment at Longwood and Hampden-Sydney, and discourage new businesses from opening there. Achieve this through letters, postcards, calls and e-mails to targets, regional mobilization for demonstration in March, news articles outside of Farmville, statements by institutions outside of Farmville.*



Tactics/Actions

To accomplish any of the above requires a base exponentially larger than the 25 or so of us who are working on this issue consistently. We propose two months of intensive grassroots community organizing in cities around the state building up to the proposed March 7th demonstration. This organizing will be carried out in such a way that we are constantly progressing towards goals 2 and 3 in the attempt to accomplish goal #1.

Grassroots community action around this issue will be most effective with substantial participation from the affected communities, Farmville residents and Immigrants.

Farmville Outreach

Representatives of Institutions – One arm of Farmville outreach will be to solicit statements of support, public comments at Town Council, letters to the editor and other forms of support from Representatives of Institutions. At one point, we discussed the Allies Outreach group writing a letter to the presidents of the two universities, the hospital and the chamber of commerce, requesting in-person meetings to assess their position. If this has not happened yet, it should be our very next step in Farmville as it is important in informing how we will approach and interact with members of those institutions and whether we will attempt to exert pressure on them to achieve the goals mentioned at the start of this paragraph.

Farmville Businesses – The coordinator of Resources Information Help for the Disadvantaged (www.rihd.org) has offered to come along on a weekday trip to Farmville to talk with her contacts in the business community. Businesses can be asked to display a sign in their window, sign onto a letter to the town council and chamber of commerce from the business community, write letters to the editor, and request a meeting with their city council rep. We propose developing a packet of materials, including a copy of the WSU study, to be developed specifically for the business community. We recommend that any groups going to Farmville before this is developed avoid targeting businesses. Tactics such as taping a flyer on their door might be viewed as hostile and lessen our chance for a discussion with the owner that could pave the way for future cooperation. The packet should include a cover letter with talking points that do not emphasize the more radical points on our agenda, but stress Farmville's public image and the potential economic impacts of the proposed detention center. Once we have a few contacts in the business community who are sympathetic, we can ask them to call for a meeting of business owners in Farmville during which we could present a report and solicit involvement.

Farmville Churches – At least three national governing bodies of churches in Farmville have statements opposing private prisons on moral grounds. Grassroots leadership has copies of these. Grassroots Leadership has volunteered to be a resource for outreach to faith communities. Also within our group is someone who has contacts within the VA



Council of Churches. We recommend that during early January visits to Farmville, canvassers are on the lookout for contacts within the churches that might be sympathetic as well as make a list of all Farmville Churches. We then recommend that the Farmville outreach group have a conference call including Grassroots Leadership to develop an action plan around Farmville faith communities. Types of actions faith communities could undertake are similar to those listed for businesses and institutions.

Farmville Students – Outreach has already begun to student organizations in Farmville with at least one group at Longwood College having responded positively so far. Students can lobby within campus for an institutional statement, contact their parents, alumni associations, etc to seek allies. Alumni associations can be very powerful in influencing colleges. In addition to reaching out to student organizations, flyering, bulletin boards, dorm canvassing, and tabling can all be used for student outreach. Student organizations can be asked to take actions similar to those in the preceding paragraphs. Campus newspapers should be contacted whenever we do a release.

Farmville General Public – Everything that we do in Farmville is outreach to the general public and all of our tactics and actions there should be considered carefully with the question in mind: Is this consistent with the message that we want to present to people in Farmville? Ways to reach out can include flyering at events, like our successful day at the Christmas parade, door to door canvassing, through getting our messaging into the Farmville Herald, vigils, marches, demonstrations and public forums. An escalation of tone or tactics should be considered carefully and hopefully in consideration with local allies.

Farmville Media – As of now, we have had contact with the Farmville Herald and the Longwood student paper. Early Farmville outreach should include a cataloging of media in Farmville. This could include but is not limited to: TV and radio stations, other newspapers, church bulletins, civic and student organization newsletters, blogs and other online sources. All of these can be added to our general media list as well as kept in a separate list that receives special attention. This list should also include the AP bureau closest to Farmville and a selection of Spanish language outlets.

We have a relationship with the Farmville Herald editor. We should stay in close touch with him and continue to develop this relationship. The goals of this are two-fold. First, to increase and expand the sympathetic coverage. With ongoing contact, we can suggest new story angles to him and connect him with people to interview since he seems to be interested in “the immigrant perspective.” He may even be persuaded to do a feature story that tells more of the point of view of an immigrant family. And he may be amenable to publishing a guest editorial. Second, we should push for him to reverse his editorial position. This is a tall order since he has already spoken in favor of the plan. But local leaders in the above categories can help with influencing him. We can evaluate as we go and request a meeting for this when the time seems right.



Farmville Civic Organizations – Early Farmville outreach should include cataloging any civic organizations we find out about and getting in touch. We already know about the NAACP and should request a meeting as soon as possible. If we are able to achieve a meeting, ideally a diverse delegation from our group would attend. Questions during canvassing could include trying to find out the ways people are organized socially in Farmville. Are there neighborhood associations or civic leagues? A rotary club? We need to develop messaging appropriate to each of these groups and not be afraid of contacting the ones that don't seem like natural allies.

Farmville Immigrant Community – There was a small but visible presence of Latino immigrants at the Christmas parade. There was one statement of support spoken in Spanish from the sidelines of the parade. We need to find out where people live? Is there a mostly Hispanic neighborhood? Spanish language services at any of the local churches? We need bilingual organizers to canvass, too. There is a Mexican restaurant on the South side of town. A few of us should go in one day during off hours and ask to speak with the manager. Handled skillfully, this could produce a lot of information. (see section on immigrant outreach below)

Easy Things for Allies to Do – If someone even gives the hint that they might want to help, we need the answer to how they can on the tips of our tongues and the resources at our fingertips. There is a wide spectrum of levels of involvement that people will want. Some will join our group, come to meetings, take initiative – that's great but most people won't. We need a variety of things to offer them. One level is to sign a petition. Doesn't get any easier sign on the dotted line and hand the clipboard back to you. Another level is to sign the pre-printed postcard, another is handwrite a personal postcard or letter. If you have time to wait, have them do it on the spot and take it to mail it for them. This way, you know it actually gets mailed. When canvassing or meeting with potential allies, it's always good to have a clipboard with the petition, and a folder with postcards, letter-writing guides, and whatever literature we are currently distributing.

About petitions – one concern, if we use them as a tactic, we need enough of them to have credibility. Farmville is a town of 7,000. If we present them with petitions but only 100 signatures are from local residents, we'll look weak. On the other hand, we should do some research about city council and decision-making. Does Farmville have a ballot initiative? How many signatures does it take to bring a referendum? This could add a whole new dimension to a petition drive.

Visible Farmville Presence – We need to have a visible public profile in Farmville.

City Council - The City Council meetings are a built-in opportunity for us that is easy to exploit. Each of the two times that we have been there so far has resulted in a local news article. With each visit there, we should remember that we are speaking not only to the council but to the readers of the newspaper as well. By the 2/11 council meeting, we should aim to have a number of Farmville local residents ready to testify.



Debate – A public challenge has been proffered and reported on in the newspaper. We should pursue this. They look bad if they refuse and we can publicly destroy their arguments if they do. Next steps would be an open letter sent to the newspaper. We can advertise and hold the event anyway, even if they don't agree to come. If it is during the second half of February, it gives Farmville outreach time to organize some attendance and we can use it as a stepping-stone to getting more local participation in the 3/7 demo.

3/7 March and Demonstration – We can make this the event of the year. A high-energy rally with music, speakers, bilingual rap by one campaign organizer. A march with chants in English and Spanish, giant puppets, stilts, percussion. It doesn't take thousands. 200 can make a high-energy, visually impressive presence. Maybe they'll deny the permit application and we can have lawyers tussle with them generating days or weeks of media controversy that helps our build-up. Invite local sympathetic groups to have a speaker at the rally, offer puppetry and street theater classes to local groups in advance, refine our media message a month ahead of time and crank it out.

Farmville Messages

- A private immigrant detention center will hurt the local economy. There will be a few new jobs at first, but studies have shown in the long run private prisons slow economic growth. Who needs that kind of pressure in this economy? And who wants to take a vacation, open a new business or send their child to school in a prison town?

- There have been human rights abuses and scandals everywhere one of these places has opened. Many details/examples available. Don't let this become what Farmville is known for.

- These people have not been convicted of any crime, are only here working hard to support their families. Part of our job is to create spaces for working people from the immigrant community to tell their stories and share their perspective like done previously at city council meetings.

Immigrant Outreach

Language and cultural barriers make this especially challenging, but if our work is going to be solidarity and not just advocacy, this needs to be prioritized. It is also crucial to the story we want to tell.

We are not strong in this regard right now, and in fact, have lost through attrition many of the gains we made last year in organizing with the Virginia Immigrant People's Coalition. Harrisonburg does not have mobilizing power with the immigrant community, but has opportunities to reach out to the community in an organized way for input and information sharing. We also have this in Charlottesville and Louisa to a lesser extent.



When a few key TPU organizers return next month, we will have some renewed avenues to explore in Richmond. The People United produces a semi-monthly Spanish language news bulletin in Charlottesville, Louisa, Harrisonburg and Culpepper. The next issue comes out in mid-January and will feature these efforts.

Ways to Start if You Aren't Already Connected –

There are many people who, while not activists, are working to provide services to the immigrant community. ESL teachers, court and hospital interpreters and immigrant-specific service agencies all offer potential for connecting with a bilingual person who may be sympathetic to our efforts and willing to help you get some access to the Hispanic community. Larger towns and cities often have a service-provider coalition of sorts. In Charlottesville, it's Cresciendo Juntos, In Harrisonburg, the Hispanic Services Council, in Lynchburg, the Alianza Latina. If you ask around, you might find one in your town. Again, these are not activist groups, but there are potential allies there and usually at least one person who has been waiting for someone like you to come along because they have been frustrated by the lack of activism. Ask people you meet in these groups to introduce you to someone from the immigrant community who might be interested, or if there is a meeting or gathering where you can make an announcement, or if they would be willing to distribute some Spanish-language lit for you. If you can't find a person to help you locally, ask within our network. We have a number of bilingual people who may be able to come and help you get started.

Another strategy is to offer an event of use to the community, such as a know-your-rights and raid-readiness training for immigrants. We are part of a network that might be able to send a training team to your area. We offered one in Charlottesville last month and will be working on one for Lynchburg as a stepping-stone to involving the Lynchburg Immigrant Community in this struggle. This training is useful in and of itself, but also offers you some access to the community as an organizer in a very positive context. Get in touch if you want to try and set one up. If you are really thinking for the long haul, you could offer your own ESL class. There is a great curriculum called English for Organizers that makes the English class more conducive to having discussions about social change.

If you have some relationships developed, or even contacts within some existing groups, you could have an informational meeting about the planned new prison. Don't expect hordes of people signing up to get involved. In fact, be careful how you even make the request. A large dose of humility is in order. Many in the room may have endured hardships that they try not to even think about in order to get here and are all too aware of the risks they face by speaking out publicly. You may find someone who is eager to get involved publicly. But offer other ways to participate too. You can be the conduit for the point of view for someone not able to take the risk involved in attending themselves. Ask the question: If you could talk to the people of Farmville, what would you want them to know? Then take good notes. Tell about the plans for the upcoming demo or City Council



meeting and ask for input, then do your best to incorporate it. Schedule a report-back meeting so that you can let them know how it went and hear their suggestions for what to do next. This way, over time, trust develops and people become more willing to get involved.

Remember that driver's licenses are a huge issue for the immigrant community. Many drive back and forth to work each day with white knuckles, hoping they won't be arrested and deported. Be ready to do some extra driving to help people get to meetings and demos. And be prepared to make phone calls instead of relying just on e-communications.

Base Building

In our organizing within affected communities, we are not starting from a position of strength. We need to mobilize resistance quickly. This will require reaching out to our own communities in the cities where we live all across the state. There are many active, sympathetic groups in each of these places. Most of them are already really busy with the issues they are working on and are not going to get involved with this struggle to the extent of getting involved in our organizing committee. But if we are creative in the ways we approach them and strategic with what we ask them to do, we can demonstrate to Farmville Town Council that there are thousands across this state who think what they are doing is a really bad idea and will not come to Farmville, spend money there, enroll in it's schools or locate a business there as long as these plans continue.

We want these groups to take action in two areas. First, commit to sending a carload to Farmville on March 7th. Second, we want them to make their opposition felt in Farmville with a letter, card, call statement from their organization, series of letters to the editor, etc.

In a nutshell, we need committees to form at the local level and implement a modified version of the Farmville plan detailed above. This will involve stepping outside of our usual organizing circles and really widening the network of people we are in contact with.

Reach Out to Existing Allies

As a first step, meet with your committee and brainstorm all the groups that you want to contact. Ask each person or group that you contact to suggest others who might be sympathetic. Here are some ideas for a start:

- *Student organizations at any campus in your area. Many campuses have an SDS chapter (although most of them are already in this campaign), a chapter of Amnesty International, look over the entire list and contact anything that seems even close.*



- *Other social justice organizations, think broad here - liberal, revolutionary and everything in between, like the local Peace Education Center, anti-war network, Food not Bombs group, local NAACP chapter.*
- *Organized labor groups. Yes, these are few and far between in VA but some connections do exist. The UEW is active here and there is some activity from the UFCW. SEIU is also organizing the personal care workers.*
- *Hispanic service providers (see immigrant section above)*
- *Faith-based groups. Many churches have a social justice committee and/or a Spanish language Sunday service.*

Then start getting in touch. Ask for a specific meeting, or some time on the agenda of an existing one, or just show up to support one of their events and bring some flyers of your own. Be sure to keep "the ask" reasonable. Give them a very specific doable task, depending on where we are in the campaign at the time.

Why should they help with this issue?

- *It's not just about immigrants, it affects us all. All of our civil liberties, labor rights, wages and working conditions are being eroded by the way immigrants are being treated.*
- *We need a network of mutual aid and support among radical and progressive groups. These next couple of months are a crucial time for us in this campaign. This is a struggle we can win. A small amount of help from you now could go a long way in energizing social movements in our region. This affords you the opportunity to expose your cause to many sympathetic people who will be more likely to support you when the time comes.*

Keep Records

Keep a list of who you met with and how they responded. If they commit to sending 100 postcards, write that down. Follow up later to see if it happened. It is helpful for us to know how many people are responding to the town council and this list will save you some work generating contacts next time.

Local Media

We have a media working group who will send and follow up on our releases, but this can't replace your work at the local level. You are the news to local outlets and your involvement in this campaign makes it newsworthy. If we want to show town council news articles from all over the state highlighting the controversy there, we need people working at the local level to make it happen.



- *Research your local media outlets. Find out what reporters have covered immigration and or prison issues in the past. Get their contact info and send it on to the media working group.*
- *Pitch them a story. Reporters and editors have to work to find news to report on. If you give them an interesting story idea, you have made their job easier. Don't be afraid to call that newspaper reporter on the immigration beat. Maybe they wanted to cover our March 7th demo in Farmville, but their editor said no. Knowing that you were bringing a group from your local area might suddenly make it newsworthy.*
- *Write letters to the editor. These might get printed in the most-read page of the paper, but they also communicate to the paper that the local audience has an interest in the story, making it more likely that they might cover it in the future*
- *Organize a local solidarity action. Can't come to Farmville this weekend to help with canvassing and flyering but still want to help? Chances are a lot of other people from your area are in the same boat. Hold your own demo outside of the federal building or some other appropriate symbolic or highly visible public location. This is more likely to make the local news and gives local people a concrete way to stay engaged.*
- *Keep a file of any media coverage you get, including letters to the editor and send to the media working group.*

Current Asks (Simple, limited, specific things people can do) – 12/20 until our general meeting on 1/11

- *Save the date of March 7th and organize a car/van load from within your group to come to Farmville*
- *Make a postcard that is specific to your group or geographical area, send as many as you can to each of the members of the Farmville Town Council*

As of this writing, three different groups are taking initiative with specific postcards:

In Louisa, a group of immigrant women took a group photo of some of the children and made a postcard with a message along the lines of: "Don't give us a prison, build a library or hospital instead."

In Charlottesville, a letter is being distributed at Las Posadas, a Christmas tradition in the Hispanic community, stating that we, as Charlottesville residents are opposed to plans for this prison.

A group of Richmond activists are getting together for a letter-writing party with hand-written letters sent to Council members.

Let's get at least 30 different groups around the state each sending a unique postcard to city council members. We suggest content including all of our talking points. We also



want them to hear the message: “We will not visit, vacation in, shop in, locate a business in, attend school in or send our children to school in Farmville until plans for this detention center are rescinded.”

Things Members of our Core Group Can Do Now

- *Organize a letter-writing party, set a time and place, provide some snacks or make it a potluck, turn on some good tunes or ask a musician or other artist to perform, have plenty of postcard and stamps, letter-writing guides, address lists and have at it*
- *Organize a benefit show or other fundraiser to help pay for postage, printing and gas. This doesn't need to be a monumental effort. It could be as simple as cooking a nice, but inexpensive dinner, inviting people and asking for donations.*
- *Make you list of potential ally groups in your area and make the “current asks” ASAP*
- *Start the local media research and compile your list. You never know when something will happen and we will need to respond quickly. The better prepared we are, the better coverage we will get.*
- *Form a local communications network so that we can gather input from local interested people and groups, and disseminate updates to them without having to ask everyone to join an insanely busy list-serve as their only way of keeping informed*

Pressing Needs for Our Core Group to Take Care of

- *Streamline our communications and decision-making process*
- *Develop clear, professional-looking resource packets. For the media, before 12/30 – For Farmville and other general outreach, by a few days after that (the packets will be similar).*

