

Can't Stop Us Starter Kit

Extending the Impact of the #CantStop Movement

Direction

Guiding purpose of this document

To **help** other communities kickstart support movements like Can't Stop Columbus

To **empower** organizers to inspire an attitude of help and support

To **provide** a structure for creating a movement by sharing tools, insights, successes, and failures

Overview

A table of contents

Who we are:

What we've built and why we're doing this.

We're a group of Columbus citizens who helped start Can't Stop Columbus, a community-wide movement that activates our city's talents and compassion to solve real problems. We embrace courageous ideas and rapidly deliver new and innovative solutions.

The movement was launched by a tweet: could we create a hackathon to solve the unique local problems created by a global pandemic? The online solution session started on Sunday, March 15, and hasn't stopped yet.

With a focus on applications and online resources, tools, maps, services and programs, we're rapidly creating functional solutions to solve real needs of people in our community.

In the first two weeks, an online community of more than 1,000 members with 61 skill sets formed. We launched a website, held a virtual community rally and developed an enduring operational foundation.

Seventy-six ideas were submitted, resulting in 18 active projects. Six community-aiding projects were finished and released in those two weeks, and we're not quitting there.

Our city isn't alone in dealing with unprecedented problems that have arisen through the pandemic crisis, so we're sharing what we've learned so far. We want to empower communities, volunteers and leaders everywhere to take on this massive challenge together, city by city, project by project.

How to get started:

Start minimal, and build from there.

1. Mobilize the community.

Identify needs and start talking to people about taking action. Share ideas openly on social media, find out who needs help, and discover who's willing to help. Every community is different - start by validating the basics of your idea in the context of your community. This is what we recommend:

- **Be inclusive:** welcome new skills and ideas, and trust that they'll find an important place within the community.
- **Write about your idea:** [this was our proposal](#). Take a stab at defining a big-picture vision and mission statement, and then make a tangible proposal. Call your community to action - why are they in a position to help, and what can they do to start?
- **Create a dialogue:** this is a starting point, not a final solution, and make sure to get as many eyes on it as you can. It's all liable to change.
- **Collaborate:** With new help from a growing community of volunteers, [we created a refined proposal](#) based on the first one. This became the blueprints for the movement.

What we learned:

- **Our community is energetic:** it didn't take long for our initial proposal to get sent around, and we realized that this would be bigger than we expected. People were eager to share their thoughts and take action.
- **The community owns this:** everyone's voice is valuable, and the more the community takes ownership, the better. It very quickly became a lot bigger than one person or organization.
- **Define a guiding vision:** we formed a cohesive mission that helped us get help and support from companies, tools, and people.
- **Traction looks different in different communities.**

Key Milestones:

Do these before moving on.

- **Build an initial proposal document.** Introduce yourself and include in it your thoughts on why you're doing this, what you're hoping to build, and how people can get involved.
- **Get some validation and buy-in** - get third-party input on your proposal - does it seem to solve for real problems? Is it something people will take part in? Engagement on social media goes a long way.
- **Collaborate with your community on a refined approach** - this could be as simple as a collaborative Google Document - and share it.

Tools and Resources:

- Google Docs, Social Media.

2. Create a Slack

Give the community a place - create a simple Slack channel for free, and start with a simple, intuitive structure so that volunteers know where to go. Encourage people to share the link and get involved.

- **Start with the basics:** create the following public channels, and give them a clear

direction. Avoid creating ambiguous/vague channels:

- **Get Started:** where new volunteers learn about your movement, fill out participant forms, and join project and resource channels. This channel directs users toward action.
- **Announcements:** where organizers and volunteers share important updates with the entire volunteer community.
- **New Ideas:** where volunteers can share their new ideas that might turn into future projects.
- **News and Resources:** where anyone within the community shares important local and national news and valuable resources related to COVID-19.
- **Questions:** where anyone in the community can submit questions so that organizers can help with troubleshooting.
- **Give direction to energy:** The slack channel is all about organizing a community. Make things action-oriented, and encourage people to step out of their comfort zones by giving them a stable, organized way to do so. Get volunteers plugged in to the community as soon as possible.
- **Celebrate your wins together:** Little wins that are publicly acknowledged form the foundation of a strong, unified community. Make sure to highlight when volunteers, teams, and projects go above and beyond.

What we learned:

- **We started the slack channel once we got 20 people to buy in.**
- **Be specific with the Slack structure.** Most of the friction that led to volunteer falloff had to do with unintentional vagueness, confusion, and bad onboarding.
- **Start small.** Don't overcomplicate things at first - build structure where it's needed.
- **Set Precedent.** Brace for growth by adding an onboarding structure, collecting FAQ's, and starting patterns, like daily progress, weekly meetings, and so on.
- **Facilitate conversations.** Our movement is all about giving direction to a community's worth of energy, so having regular alignment helped continuously define a direction.
- **Engagement is hard:** We still struggle with day-to-day volunteer engagement; our team of Navigators (see below) has not been fully mobilized.
- **Utilize your resources:** A lot of people, organizations, and companies committed to helping, and it was initially a struggle to make use of all that support and connect it with problems that needed solving.
- **Mind the learning curve:** Slack is a new tool for a lot of people, and this can lead to inadvertent volunteer falloff. A simple tutorial/get started guide helped with this.
- See an overview of our current Slack Channel organization later on in the document.

Key Milestones:

- **Create the Slack and its channels,** and make sure it's easy to access the join link.
- **Share the join link** with everyone who's shown interest in the organization. Have them share it too. Social media accelerates this.
- **Get a critical mass of volunteers** into the Slack. 50 is a good number.

Tools and Resources:

- Slack
- Social media - Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter brought the most engagement
- Zoom/Hangouts/Skype, for meetings

- [Our Instagram page](#)
- [Our LinkedIn page](#)
- [Our Twitter page](#)

3. Form an identity

Make the movement recognizable, and make the mission clear. Create some simple branding - a logo, a name, and a mission statement - to start aligning recognition. Even simple branding lends a lot of credibility to your organization.

- **Publish your mission.** Share your rallying cry with anyone who's willing to listen. Make it obvious why you're here and what you intend to do, and how people should get involved.
- **Create a logo** and define basic branding, like colors and typefaces. This helps unify the movement and makes it instantly recognizable.
- **Put together a media kit.** [Here's ours.](#) How do you talk about yourselves? How should people write about you? This could include a basic introduction (*who you are and what you're doing*), a brief storyline (*this is how we started*), a Call to Action (*this is how you can get involved*), and contact information.
- **Build a simple landing page** on joinhelm.com for free. This can serve as a front page, and it provides visibility to projects. Add branding, mission, and a link to Slack.

What we learned:

- **Make a landing page:** An established brand identity and a simple front page (or a page built on the Helm site) helped with media outreach by legitimizing the movement and making it recognizable.
- **Establish a clear mission:** We formed a cohesive mission that helped us get help and support from companies, tools, and people.
- **Keep it simple:** [Here's our brand guidelines document.](#) We created a recognizable brand language adapted from our city's brand, using minimal design and colors to establish our identity while keeping it in line with Columbus's branding.
- **Shoutout your supporters:** They're a big part of this - make sure to create a list of companies and organizations that have committed to helping your movement. Our partners are listed prominently on [our website](#). Learn more about partnerships in the next section.

Key Milestones:

- **Create a simple logo**
- **Create a simple branding guide** - define fonts and colors.
- **Finalize your mission statement.**
- **Create a page on joinhelm.com** to make your progress visible and organized. Add a link to Slack and encourage project builders to share what they're building.
- **Create a simple media kit** with your logo, mission, an introduction into your movement, and a clear way to get involved (you can do this by linking to your Helm page).

Tools and Resources:

- Joinhelm.com, for your front page
- Canva.com, for your logo and branding

- Google Docs, for creating media kit and mission
- [Our website](#)
- [Our branding guide](#)
- [Our media kit](#)

4. Get the word out

Make sure your community can see what your movement is building. Visibility drives not only volunteer sign-ups but also engagement from non-profits, companies, and other community organizations. Here's what we'd recommend doing:

- **Write a press release** with a clear call-to-action, and send it to every media organization and community influencer in your community.
- **Create clear calls-to-action**, and build these into every message you send out. Drive people to join the slack and share their ideas.
- **Use social media** to your advantage. Encourage people to start talking about it. Share your wins - even your little wins - and make it really easy to take part.
- **Rally the crowd!** Host live events, and give a platform for experts, influential people, civic workers, and other important stakeholders to share their perspective and encouragement with your community.
- **Form partnerships** with leaders, companies, universities, and nonprofits. These will help add knowledge, gain traction, and legitimize the movement, and most are enthusiastic to help.

What we learned:

- **Be the good news:** News and media outlets looking for positive news helped spread the word fast. We supplied a press release ([here's ours](#)) and branding materials, plus a link to the Helm site and the Slack.
- **Focus on building credibility:** Focusing on building credibility paid off. Influential leaders and organizations got on board in part due to the strong identity and clear mission we built.
- **Be careful of security:** There have been a couple of security incidents, like Zoom and Slack hijacks, that have taught us to be wary of over-sharing links. Be careful with these, and consider making the Slack invite-only after you reach a critical mass of volunteers.

Key Milestones:

- **Create social media accounts** for Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and/or Twitter - we've seen pretty good engagement through all of them, particularly Instagram and LinkedIn.
- **Form at least one official partnership** with an organization in the community. This is fairly simple - more than anything else, it's about branding. Our partners have donated everything from talent to tools to plain-old endorsement.
- **Host a virtual event** where everyone comes together to celebrate what the movement stands for and what it's building.

Tools and Resources:

- Media Kit
- Trello, for keeping track of initiatives
- Zoom, for meetings

- [Our Press Release](#)
- [Our Live Rally](#)
- [Football Player Shoutouts](#)

5. Form a strong leadership circle

Encourage people to step up as leaders, and form a strong leadership circle. Good communication is critical.

- **Legitimize the leaders:** certain community members will step up to become organizers - create a Slack channel specific to this team. These are volunteers willing to take on a formidable amount of energizing work.
- **Leadership Slack channel:** an organizer-specific channel for general discussion and alignment among every organizer. This can be used to discuss meetings, general updates, and morale boosters. Organizers will likely take the lead on operations and outreach.
- **Define roles:** Put a leader on operations (project flow, Slack management), marketing/communication, and impact (finding real, pressing problems to solve)
- **Communication is everything.** Stay aligned, have regular meeting times, and track progress on Trello.
- **Continue the discussion:** Make everyone included through check-ins. Since an organizer team is an extra step in hierarchy, make sure to avoid a power dynamic. After all, this is by community and for community.

What we learned:

- **Diversity is key.** Members of our organizing team come from diverse professional backgrounds, including project management, entrepreneurship, directors of operations, product owners, and more.
- **Communication is hard.** As we grew, critical communication got harder as the amount of slack messages and notifications increased exponentially.
- **Organizer Channels**
At this point, the team is about 22 people. Organizers use these channels to make decisions on all fronts. After solidifying our organizing/leadership team, we built out the following Organizer-specific Slack channels.
 - **Leadership:** A private channel for general discussion and alignment among every organizer. Meetings, general updates, and morale boosters are discussed.
 - **Impact:** A private channel specific to the Impact team (see above), composed of both organizers and general impact-focused volunteers.
 - **Operations:** A private channel specific to the Operations team (see above) for discussion of structure and logistics specific to organizers.
 - **Marketing/Communication (MarCom):** A separate, shared Slack channel where members of the MarCom team communicate and align to build media, increase participation, and form new partnerships. It began as a private channel, but the needs grew significantly due to the public-facing nature of the community, so it became its own Slack.

Key Milestones:

- Start with a group of at least 3 organizers - one to lead operations, one for communication, and one for impact. You might also encounter different needs in your

- community, so it may end up looking different.
- Create a Leadership channel in slack first. Unless there's a pressing need, don't worry about the impact/operations/MarCom channels until they're needed.
- Schedule your first Leadership meeting and align on direction, roles, schedules, and next steps.
- Start a Trello board and start organizing action within the Leadership team.

Tools and Resources:

- Trello, for outlining initiatives
- Slack, for communication
- Zoom/Hangouts/Skype, for meetings
- Google Calendar, for setting up meetings
- Our Trello is a pretty basic operational flow: To Do, Doing, URGENT Doing, Ongoing, New to Done, Done, Blocked, Backlog/Paused, Resources.
- Trello cards are color-coded by category (Communication/Finance/People, etc.) and assigned to specific organizers.
- We have a biweekly 30-60 minute standup meeting to discuss progress on initiatives.

6. Communicate.

You've built up momentum and you've put structure around it. Now, all you need to do is keep it going and keep building. Continue to be a resource to your community, and make sure to keep everyone - volunteers, partners, stakeholders - in the loop.

- **Make it sustainable.** Good organization, communication, and little wins go a long way towards building a sustainable movement.
- **Make progress definable,** and communicate it regularly. What new projects have been created? Where is help needed?
- **Share thoughts:** encourage everyone in the community to take part in dialogue. Host brainstorming sessions, and invite everyone to take part. Tell stories about how people within your community have found ways to help.
- **Keep celebrating little wins:** Little wins that are publicly acknowledged maintain a strong, unified community. Highlight when volunteers, teams, and projects go above and beyond.
- **Make sure people know how to help.** Keep calls-to-action clear, and refine your Slack workspace. Add or take away structure depending on what becomes necessary.
- **Share progress:** use the joinhelm.com site or a spreadsheet to publicly keep track of the projects being built, what they're solving for, and when they launch.

What we learned:

- **Falloff:** We had trouble with our engagement funnel - a lot of people were energized to take part, but quickly dropped off because the onboarding process was daunting.
- **User Experience:** The overall user experience of community involvement has been hard to perfect. We rely mostly on Slack, Airtable, and a couple of other tools, which can be hard to learn for non-users.
- **Engagement:** We still struggle with day-to-day volunteer engagement; our team of Navigators has not been fully mobilized.
- **Navigators:** As we began to receive far more volunteers than we had projects, we sensed there was significant attrition. So we stood up a team dedicated to helping

volunteers find their place within our organization. [Navigators](#) help match new or idle members of the Can't Stop Columbus community with projects that are looking for help.

- **Airtable:** We needed a better way to handle how information about new volunteers and ideas was collected and organized, and Airtable has been a good tool for it.

Tools and Resources:

- Slack, for sharing messages and little wins with the movement community
- Social Media, for sharing messages and little wins with the broader community
- Joinhelm.com, for viewing projects
- Airtable, for keeping track of projects
- [Our Helm page](#)
- [Our website](#)
- Our Airtable template

Going further:

Our movement has grown rapidly. This is what we've learned as it's grown.

Leadership

Who the organizers are, and how they came to be.

- Our organizational team is split into three categories: marketing/communication (Marcom), operations, and impact.
- **MarCom Team** builds media and community awareness for the Can't Stop Columbus effort, increases participation, facilitates engagement, and forms new partnerships.
- **Operations Team** keeps things organized and makes sure work moves quickly and painlessly, optimizing workflows, project pipelines, and communication within the movement.
- **Impact Team** is in charge of pulling in challenges, evaluating and aligning our efforts for optimal impact, avoiding duplication of efforts, and understanding real problems that exist within the greater community
- The members of each of these teams are all part of the general **Leadership Team**, where we can stay centrally aligned on initiatives.
- The organizing team is composed of volunteers willing to take on a formidable amount of energizing work. They come from diverse professional backgrounds, including project management, entrepreneurship, directors of operations, product owners, and more.

Navigators

As we began to receive far more volunteers than we had projects, we sensed there was significant attrition. So we stood up a team dedicated to helping volunteers find their place within our organization. [Navigators](#) help match new or idle members of the Can't Stop Columbus community with projects that are looking for help.

- A Slack bot (CTA Bot - see above) keeps track of urgent needs that navigators can help fill.
- Navigators use an Airtable to track their interactions and avoid overlap.
- They take the lead in staffing office hours, where two on-duty navigators welcome and orient new members by responding to their introductions.
- The Navigators team ensures that new volunteers have completed the intake process.

- Additionally, Navigators keep a pulse on overall engagement, and act as liaisons between the community of volunteers and the organizing team
- They also identify and keep track of potential community sponsors or grants, new projects, and network connections.

Our Current Slack Structure

This is the center of activity for the Can't Stop Columbus movement. It's where volunteers communicate and projects get built. It's also really hard to get right. Here's a high-level overview of how it's currently organized - keep in mind that we've been at this for a while, and your needs will likely differ from ours:

General Channels

All 1200+ of our community of volunteers have automatic access to these general channels, where they get acquainted with our movement, share broadly-applicable information, and see updates relevant to the entire community.

- **Get Started:** a read-only public channel where new users learn about our movement with an intro video and a tutorial message, fill out participant forms, and join project and resource channels. This channel directs users toward action.
- **Brainstorm New Ideas:** a public channel where volunteers can share their new ideas that might turn into future projects. Brainstorm sessions, which happen virtually over Zoom, are also announced here.
- **Announcements:** A public channel where organizers and project leaders share important updates with the entire volunteer community. The New Channel Bot updates this channel when new channels are created.
- **Daily Progress:** a public channel for committee members and project leaders to report their progress and their blockers to the entire volunteer community.
- **News and Resources:** A public channel where anyone within the community shares important local and national news and valuable resources related to COVID-19.
- **Questions:** A public channel where anyone in the community can submit questions so that organizers can help with troubleshooting.

Organizer Channels

These are channels specific to the organizing team - at this point, about 22 people. Organizers use these channels to make decisions on all fronts.

- **Leadership:** A private channel for general discussion and alignment among every organizer. Meetings, general updates, and morale boosters are discussed here.
- **Impact:** A private channel specific to the Impact team (see above), comprised of both organizers and general impact-focused volunteers.
- **Operations:** A private channel specific to the Operations team (see above) for discussion of structure and logistics specific to organizers.
- **Marketing/Communication (MarCom):** A separate, shared Slack channel where members of the MarCom team communicate and align to build media, increase participation, and form new partnerships. It began as a private channel, but the needs grew significantly due to the public-facing nature of the community, so it became its own Slack.
- **Navigators:** A private channel for Navigators (see above) to align about urgent needs and initiatives, and share insight with organizers.

Project Channels

Project ideas get submitted to the Project Airtable, and once a volunteer steps up to lead a project, an organizer creates a new channel for that project. Team members get added into the channel by project

lead, organizers, or Navigators to start collaboration and building. It's best if these channels are kept smaller - the range we've seen is between 10 and 40 members.

Resource Channels

Besides Navigators, there are two slack channels where volunteers can find project-specific help and expertise: Guilds and Urgent Needs.

- **Guilds** are communities centered around specific, technical topics (UX, data, copywriting, strategy, etc.). Guild members are experts in their fields, and volunteers come to them for questions, input, and advice.
- **Urgent Needs** is a channel for high-priority items are necessary for projects to move forward. Project leaders share pressing needs to the channel, and volunteers can get plugged in immediately via urgent items.

Slack tools and bots

- [GreetBot](#): We wanted to improve the onboarding experience while making sure new volunteers knew where to go next. This is a bot that helps onboarding by directing users to important channels and providing additional context about the organization.
- [Zapier](#): We were looking for a Slack integration that could populate one channel from posts in a bunch of other channels, and Zapier did this the easiest. It's an integration that alerts a certain channel when a new project slack channel is created in order to help navigators and organizers stay informed about new projects.
- [Integromat](#) - We needed an easy way to schedule Navigator updates, and Integromat makes scheduling easy. We use it as a CTA (Call To Action) Bot: A Navigator tool that lists immediate needs for community and projects by summarizing needs and tagging relevant volunteers.
- [Google Calendar](#): Used by Organizers to set up and organize Zoom calls and calendar reminders in Slack.