

How to Pass a Local Pit Bull Ordinance

*"There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world,
and that is an idea whose time has come."*

-Victor Hugo

Gather your group together, no matter how many or how few, to begin work to pass an ordinance regulating pit bulls. The initial meeting can be in someone's living room, a coffee shop or a full-blown meeting room. The first meeting takes only a desire and a few phone calls or emails to get started.

This How-To document is intended to be a resource that describes the steps you'll need to undertake to pass an ordinance in your town, city or county. Regulating pit bulls requires steps over a period of time. This process may be accelerated in the wake of one or more local maulings. In either scenario, there's no better time to start than the present and you'll make new friends and learn new skills along the way.

How soon can you start?¹

Meet Regularly from the Start

Locate a convenient and comfortable place to meet to work on your ordinance. There should be adequate seating and a surface on which to write or take notes. It is important to meet regularly, at the same time and same place. Meetings probably should take place weekly at first in order to maintain momentum. Initially, be careful who you invite to the meetings; a small core group of people you know and trust will be the most helpful. A fully advertised public meeting could result in pro-pit bull advocates attempting to infiltrate, monitor, disrupt or subvert your activities, using [agent provocateur](#) tactics.

Strategy, Your First Major Decision

Every community is different. The mix of elected officials, mayors, council members and county commissioners may be progressive, conservative, liberal or somewhere in between. They may be open to new ideas or closed to changing the status quo. Your locale may be rural, suburban or inner city. Your group will need to decide how receptive your local government will be to your ordinance. The degree of receptivity will determine your strategy. In some communities, it may be enough to speak personally with the mayor and a few city

¹ This document has been modified to assist those who seek to pass a local pit bull ordinance. An unmodified version of this document is posted at www.udetc.org. The original author is unknown. - DogsBite.org.

council members to ensure the passage of your ordinance.² Other communities may require extensive organizing, petition signing and a major publicity effort to pass an ordinance.³

Consider who might be open to the goals of your ordinance. Sometimes it may be a good idea to have initial conversations with one or more council members (or commissioners if you are working on a county level) after considering your ordinance. They may have helpful observations that can make your efforts easier. Other times, it may be best to involve council members as little as possible until your ordinance is brought before the full council. These considerations should be part of your early strategic planning.

Networking – Identify Friends and Foes

Identify Your Friends

Make a list of individuals, groups and organizations that are willing to work with you on your effort. If someone in your group knows someone in another group or organization, ask that person to contact the potential ally. Friendly groups can expand your efforts in gathering signatures, include your articles in their newsletters or they can supply warm bodies to help your efforts. In some cases they can do all three.

Groups that are likely to support your cause include local healthcare and first responder associations, public safety and neighborhood watch (block watch) groups and anti-violence groups, such as anti-bullying, teen dating violence and domestic violence. Other neighborhood groups include: homeowner's and property owner's associations, community service associations, park associations, senior citizen programs and churches (who perform 80% of all service work in the United States).

Identify Your Foes

Similarly, make a list of individuals and organizations that are likely to work against your efforts. It's important to know who your detractors are and what their arguments are likely to be. Strategies can be developed to minimize or marginalize your opposition or to respond to their arguments. In the area of pit bull ordinances, one can expect pit bull owners, breeders, "[responsible dog ownership](#)" groups, humane and veterinarian groups to oppose it. One can also expect them to argue the same misleading points they have been arguing for decades. Many of them can found on the below links. They may also argue that pit bull laws are unconstitutional, even though well-written breed-specific laws have a 100% track record in U.S. courts, including the [U.S. Supreme Court](#).

² Though it varies from city-to-city, you may need two city council members in support of your ordinance to place the item on the council's agenda. Contact your Office of the City Clerk to learn more.

³ If your effort requires extensive organizing – which often requires extensive funding and/or fundraising activities -- you will need to establish a legal structure for the campaign organization and adhere to local, state and federal rules (See: Page 3 to learn more). Your group also may find assistance by examining the history of your community for similar grassroots efforts and the procedures they followed. Identifying key leaders of such past efforts for their possible guidance and expertise may be well worth the effort.

Related links

- ∞ See: [BSL FAQ by DogsBite.org](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [Pit Bull FAQ by DogsBite.org](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [Pit Bull FAQ by Activist](#) (pdf) or ([doc editable](#))
- ∞ See: [Pit Bull Myths by DogsBite.org](#) (webpage)

Funding your Efforts

You will need money. Funding may be needed for flyers, postcards, petitions, ads (newspaper, radio, television), website, posters, billboards and meeting rooms. Most efforts to pass ordinances are self-funded, that is, the people working to pass the ordinance supply the needed funding. Sometimes there are supportive people with deep pockets in the community that can be counted on to help. Identify these folks and include them in your efforts from the start.

Important: Accepting funds from the public or any source beyond self-funded methods by members of your group requires your effort to form a legal structure (See: [Types of advocacy groups](#) and [related comparison chart](#)). Do not have a donation jar at your events or solicit or accept donations unless you have taken these legal steps.⁴

Look for ways to save money such as a friendly employee at a local copy/printing shop or businesses and organizations that offer the use of their copying machine free of charge or for cost only. It is important to have a realistic budget. Make changes to the budget as new information is gathered or as strategies change.

“To Do” List

There can be lots of “to do” items to accomplish your goal. Some of the tasks might include:

Meeting agendas	Find and reserve meeting rooms
Public relations / Press releases	Find and contact program speakers
Set up and manage e-mail list	Maintain database
Draft petition or resolution	Coordinate petition locations
Phone calling	“Tabling”
Create fact sheet	Create postcards
Create flyers (8.5x11)	Create labels
Create action alerts	Create brochure

Important: It’s important to have small, short-term, well-defined tasks for volunteers to do. It is difficult to maintain volunteer interest in open-ended or poorly defined tasks. Be specific!

⁴ Avoid placing your group in a vulnerable situation where pro-pit bull factions could report a naïve fundraising event on your part, such as a bake sale, to campaign finance regulation officials. By the same token, you can report pro-pit bull groups if you see them carrying out unauthorized fundraising activities too!

You may or may not want to form committees to address these and other tasks. Larger groups may need committees whereas individuals in smaller groups simply may volunteer for several tasks. Examples of committees might include:

- ∞ **Coordinating Committee** - Persons synchronizing activities involving multiple individuals, such as coordinating a rally, protest or public meeting attendance.
- ∞ **Program Committee** - Persons responsible for developing the agenda and themes of meetings and presentations, including obtaining speakers.
- ∞ **PR Committee** - Persons responsible for publicizing the goals and activities of your group to media outlets, community members and local businesses.
- ∞ **Website Committee** - Persons responsible for creating and maintaining a website or blog for your group and ensuring that important materials are posted to it.
- ∞ **Statement/Petition Committee** - Persons responsible for crafting the specific statement (summary) that begins the petition and creates its framework.
- ∞ **Fundraising/Sponsorship Committee** - Persons responsible for researching opportunities for sponsorship money and spearheading fundraising events.

Community Outreach

The benefits of community outreach are significant and include: 1.) More bodies to join in the effort to pass your ordinance; 2.) Larger audience for distribution of posters and petitions; 3.) Larger pool of people who can speak in favor of the resolution at important community meetings or write Letters to the Editor of your local newspaper; and 3.) More credibility showing broad support and appeal for your resolution because endorsers from the community are listed on posters and programs.

Related links

- ∞ See: [How to Write a Letter to the Editor](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Guide to Letter-Writing](#) (webpage)

Create a Presentation

Effective outreach sparks community dialogue and raises the visibility of your resolution. You might prepare a presentation that can be given as a program to organizations and groups that are potential allies. Many groups have regularly scheduled meetings, such as monthly brown bag lunches, breakfasts or membership meetings and are looking for programs. Presentations should make good use of audio/visual tools to keep interest level high. Be prepared with sign-up sheets, fact sheets, postcards, petitions, action sheets or other materials.

Sources for support and outreach include individuals, businesses and nonprofits such as the Kiwanis Club, AARP, Audubon Society, AAUW (American Association of University Women), political party meetings, PTA, child advocacy groups, faith-based groups, etc. High school and college students can be especially helpful in collecting signatures or tabling at various locales.

Important: Take a volunteer sign-up sheet to every meeting. Include spaces on the sign-up sheet for name, address, phone, and email. Enter this information into a computer file or database **immediately after a meeting**, a forum or a day of gathering signatures has taken place. Use any software program that allows you to organize and track the information you are gathering, such as Excel, Word, Access or FileMaker Pro. All of these programs allow you to create mailing labels easily.⁵

Related links

- ∞ See: [Sample Volunteer Sign-Up Sheet](#) (pdf)

Distributing Educational Materials

Set up a table to distribute your materials at local events and businesses whenever possible. Materials can often be placed in coffee shops, bookstores, local co-op grocery stores or wherever a sympathetic audience may shop. Forums, meetings and presentations are all good opportunities to make educational material available to the public. Fact sheets, literature and articles, petitions and sign-up sheets, all should be available.

Drafting your Resolution

Review the State-by-State area of DogsBite.org to find pit bull ordinances that already exist in your state. There is little reason to reinvent the wheel and one should take advantage of ordinances that have already been validated by courts in your state. Use existing ordinances to help shape the core structure of your own.

After drafting your resolution, meet with the city council sponsor of your draft resolution (or city manager or city attorney) to determine if your document is one that will have a majority of support. This effort will be much like drafting a bill for your state legislature. You'll need a sponsor and you'll need to have it reviewed to make sure it passes legal muster.

Related links

- ∞ See: [State-by-State Breed-Specific Laws by DogsBite.org](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [More Breed-Specific Laws by DogsBite.org](#) (webpage)

Communicating with Supporters

Email Group

Communication with supporters is as important as communication with the media. The easiest way to communicate with supporters is via email. Creating an email discussion group is a great way to keep everyone informed and to notify your supporters of events and opportunities, especially fast-breaking news. There are several sources for establishing a free email list. The most common are Yahoo Groups and Google Groups. Have an email sign-up sheet with you at all times. **Set the example for others to follow by signing the sheet first.**

⁵ Free software tools include [Google Docs](#) and [OpenOffice.org](#).

It's helpful to find one or two people who can keep your lists current -- both database and email discussion list. Perhaps one person can do it all if you have a small group. If your effort is larger, it may be easier to have one person maintain the database list and another to add people to the email discussion group. Don't forget to backup your files! Store a copy of your list or database at a friend's house.⁶

Related links

- ∞ See: [Sample Email Sign Up List](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [Yahoo Groups](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Google Groups](#) (webpage)

Website

Your email list of supporters is **golden** and it can gain a lot more traction when widely promoted. If you can write email, you can set up a free blog -- it's that easy today. Go to Wordpress.com or Blogger.com and set one up. Consider the name you'd like before hand, such as "SafeDogsSeattle," then you will end up with a website address like: SafeDogsSeattle.blogspot.com or SafeDogsSeattle.wordpress.com. The first item to add to your blog is a big link inviting new supporters to sign up on your email list!

The website will become your group's public face and its public address should be listed on all of your materials including flyers, fact sheets, post cards, posters, newsletters and press releases. The website address should always be given to members of the media as well.

Your group's website can be as simple as one page. If multi-paged, you might divide it up in the following way:

- ∞ **Home page** - Summarize your group's cause; direct users to upcoming events and direct users to sign up at your email list
- ∞ **Our Goal** - Describe your group's goals -- legislative and community goals -- and why achieving both is vital to the welfare of local residents.
- ∞ **The Issues** - Describe the issues (injustices) that drive your cause and how the solutions presented by your group can reduce these injustices.
- ∞ **Take Action** - List upcoming events and meetings and ways a person can volunteer.
- ∞ **Newsroom** - List links of all news stories that local media outlets have written about your group's cause.
- ∞ **Contact** - Create two email addresses for your group and list them here. For example, info.groupname@gmail.com and press.groupname@gmail.com. The former is the general address and the latter is specific to press members.

⁶ [Cloud computing](#) is here and will only grow more dominant with personal computer/device users. Still though, it's a good idea to also have "key" database and other files (such as a copy of your petition) stored **outside** of your own home at a family or supporter's home.

Important: Do not ever post a news article **in full** to your website! Just take the first few sentences and link back to the original article.⁷

Related links

- ∞ See: [Create a free Wordpress blog](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Create a free Google Blog](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Create a free Gmail account](#) (webpage)

Facebook

In addition to a website or instead of one, you can create a Facebook fan page.⁸ After you create a fan page for your cause, turn off posting abilities for visitors. (Manage Permissions > Then make sure no checkboxes are selected next to "Posting Ability"). If you do not turn off posting abilities, pit bull advocates will leave malicious messages on your page. You should also create a "vanity URL" for your fan page so that it looks like this: <http://www.facebook.com/yourchoiceofname>

Related links

- ∞ See: [Create a Facebook fan page](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Facebook Vanity URLs](#) (webpage)

Getting the Word Out (Media and Grassroots)

Media Outlets

Brainstorm with others to identify all known media outlets. These include radio and TV stations, newspapers, community newspapers and weekly publications. Don't forget university newspapers and radio stations. Identify the publications of various organizations as well. Call each outlet to ask for a fax number and e-mail to which press releases, articles, op-ed pieces or Letters to the Editor are sent.

After sending out a press release, **make a follow-up phone call to verify receipt of the fax or email**. The cheapest form of communication with the public is Letters to the Editor. The more letters people send in, the more support demonstrated for your ordinance.

Important: Remember that the media does not always cover issues, but they almost always cover events, so have some!

Grassroot Efforts

Another great way to get the word out locally is the "Tell Five" campaign (or [Take Five to Tell Five](#)). This involves finding five people who are sympathetic to your cause and asking them to advocate for it. Set a specific and small task for each person to fulfill, such as calling or writing to a city council member. Each of these five are then asked to tell five other people and repeat the process. The Tell Five campaign usually works amongst family members and

⁷ Learn more about copyright trolls at the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) and [Righthaven Victims](#).

⁸ A Facebook fan page is not a Facebook group. Creating a **public** Facebook group will open you up to hostile pit bull advocates, which is something you want to avoid.

friends so the commitment and completion levels are high (and effective). An excellent example of its effectiveness can be seen here: [Atwood Elected in Stealth Write-In Campaign](#).

Petition Drive

In some locales organizing a petition drive and obtaining signatures may be the only way to get the mayor, council or commission's attention to pass an ordinance. Before beginning, determine whether you are seeking a non-binding petition, one that is a "show of force" of likeminded constituents or a binding one, such as a [petition to get legislation on a ballot](#). Even in the case of non-binding petitions, verify the number of signatures needed and be sure to build in an average number of signatures that may be rejected as defective.⁹

Attend meetings where the audience is likely to be receptive to your cause. Come to the meeting with educational materials, including fact sheets, "what you can do" sheet, signup sheet and petitions. Set up a display table with your educational materials. Ask ahead of time if you can have a minute to describe your effort and pass around a petition at the meeting, otherwise stand next to your display and talk to people, asking them to sign your petition.

Consider tabling at local businesses where the clientele is likely to be supportive of your efforts. For example a health food store, grocery store, co-op, farmers' market or local organic food store are good places to set up a table.

If the weather is nice, you can set up a table or collect signatures for a petition in front of your post office or local grocery store.

Related links

∞ See: [Sample Non-Binding Pit Bull Regulation Petition](#) (pdf) or ([doc editable](#))

Postcard Campaign

If letters, signatures or turnout at an event or forum is needed, postcards can be helpful. Use your sign-up sheets or even the membership list of other organizations, for enlarging the pool of people you reach. Outreach to other organizations can be very helpful. Organizations that are sympathetic to your cause may give you their mailing list outright or sell it to you for a reasonable fee.

Lobbying Efforts

Make sure supportive constituents contact each city councilor, mayor or county commissioner at the appropriate time.

Ask community supporters of your resolution to call or write their city council or county commission members to ask for their support. If email is used for communication, verify that these officials have, use and read their email! Often a **letter or phone call carries more weight** than an e-mail message. Urge your supporters to attend the city council or county commission meeting(s) and to speak in favor of the resolution during the "public comment" period. (Don't overlook high school and college students as speakers!)

⁹ Contact the Office of the City Clerk to learn about specific requirements for non-binding petitions.

Public Meetings

All of your supporters should attend public meetings held by city or county officials and key supporters should speak during the "public comment" period. If your ordinance is initially passed, remember that most ordinances have to pass through several readings prior to adoption. Ensure that supporters also attend those meetings.

Important: It is critical to tell city council or county commission members, mayors and other officials how the pro-pit bull community operates. Most of the oppositional emails sent to them will stem from non-constituents. As soon as wind is caught of your ordinance, you can expect multiple pro-pit bull websites to post a message announcing your resolution with instructions to contact all city or county officials and oppose the measure. Out-of-town pit bull ordinance protesters will also come to public meetings. Yourself and persons advocating for your cause should contact local officials prior to public meetings and request that they limit admission to local voting residents.

Some sites to watch that will post news and contact information about your ordinance (there are many others):

Related links

- ∞ See: StopBSL.com
- ∞ See: BSLnews.org
- ∞ See: PitBullForum.com

Following Through to the End . . .

It is common that city councilors, county commissioners and mayors need coaxing. Several meetings may take place before a vote is taken. A resolution might be tabled indefinitely. Or a resolution might fail when the voting does finally take place. Don't allow your working group to be discouraged. Assess the current situation, review the reasons your resolution didn't pass then try again when the time is right. This may happen several times before finally succeeding. However, don't be discouraged and don't give up. You've made new friends, your confidence is bolstered and your entire working group has been empowered.

*"The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil,
but because of those who look on and do nothing."*

-Albert Einstein

Summary of Related Links

- ∞ See: [BSL FAQ by DogsBite.org](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [Pit Bull FAQ by DogsBite.org](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [Pit Bull FAQ by Activist](#) (pdf) or ([doc editable](#))
- ∞ See: [Pit Bull Myths by DogsBite.org](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Types of Advocacy groups](#) (webpage) and [Related Comparison Chart](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [How to Write a Letter to the Editor](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Guide to Letter-Writing](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Sample Volunteer Sign-Up Sheet](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [State-by-State Breed-Specific Laws by DogsBite.org](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [More Breed-Specific Laws by DogsBite.org](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Sample Email Sign Up List](#) (pdf)
- ∞ See: [Yahoo Groups](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Google Groups](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Create a free Wordpress blog](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Create a free Google Blog](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Create a free Gmail account](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Create a Facebook fan page](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Facebook Vanity URLs](#) (webpage)
- ∞ See: [Sample Non-Binding Pit Bull Regulation Petition](#) (pdf) or ([doc editable](#))
- ∞ See: [StopBSL.com](#)
- ∞ See: [BSLnews.org](#)
- ∞ See: [PitBullForum.com](#)

Additional Resources

- ∞ [The Progressive's Guide to Raising Hell: How to Win Grassroots Campaigns, Pass Ballot Box Laws, and Get the Change We Voted For -- A Direct Democracy Toolkit](#), by Jamie Court (See: [Related video](#))
- ∞ [How to Master the Media](#), by George Merlis
- ∞ [Advocacy Glossary of Terms](#), by Alliance for Justice (pdf)



DogsBite.org

DogsBite.org is a national dog bite victims' group dedicated to reducing serious dog attacks. Through our work, we hope to protect both people and pets from future attacks. Our website contains a wide collection of data to help policymakers and citizens learn about dangerous dogs. Our research focuses on pit bull type dogs. Due to selective breeding practices that emphasize aggression and tenacity, this class of dogs negatively impacts communities the most.

P.O. Box 12443 • Austin, TX 78711 • www.dogsbite.org • info@dogsbite.org