Guidance & Best Practices:

Community-Based, Grassroots Drive Electric Chapters (V1)

April 27, 2021

How to use this document

This guidance document is sectioned into FAQs around key areas of chapter development. Each section details the theory of change, best practices, examples, and trouble shoots common sticking points that Drive Electric initiatives may find useful in propping up their respective chapters.

What is a grassroots Drive Electric chapter?

Drive Electric chapters are active, organized groups of EV owners and supporters within a geographic community or region. They are made up entirely of volunteers, and a typical active membership will grow to at least 20 or 30 members. Group membership should be diverse by race, gender, age, background, and political affiliation, but are united by a passion for electrification and motivated by the desire to increase EV adoption in their communities.

Organizations are run by a core group of four to six volunteer leaders. There may be a single spokesperson, such as a 'founder' or 'co-founder' however, a leadership *team* is crucial for a successful and sustainable chapter. Chapters and chapter leadership are supported by Drive Electric staff; however, their autonomy and self-leadership is key in building buy-in and ownership.

Through events, social media, and other tools, these networks can reach hundreds or thousands of their neighbors. This grassroot organizing approach acts as a *force multiplier*. The chapter model allows Drive Electric initiatives to operate a high-capacity program at very low overhead that, with continued support, is only minimally constrained by budget or staff-hours.

A substantive chapter network can exponentially increase in the reach and capacity of Clean Cities staff. Growth of the grassroots program reinforces every other part of Drive Electric initiative because of the strategic integration between the components. Strengthening the grassroots chapters reinforces the efficacy of the other Drive Electric USA priority areas in the following ways:

- By educating and engaging potential buyers, we increase the number of EVs on the roads.
- Organizing public events creates opportunities for policymakers, utility decisionmakers, journalists, and other key stakeholders to test drive EVs and interact with EV owners who are their constituents/ratepayers/readers/etc. We can then train EV owners to turn those interactions into relationships, transforming the owners into compelling messengers who we can mobilize to participate in our education efforts.
- A well-organized chapter of EV enthusiasts with a robust consumer education program gives us an incentive to engage auto dealerships in a training and certification program.
- Building the capacity of the Drive Electric chapters increases our ability to generate constituent contact to local and state policymakers to educate on the strengths and weaknesses of EV policies, and specific policy recommendations.

What do grassroots chapters do?

Education Events

Grassroots Drive Electric chapters primarily do direct consumer education. The best EV salesperson is an EV owner, as they have the enthusiasm, expertise, and lived experiences needed to answer frequently asked questions and quell common misconceptions. The most effective consumer education tool is the 'ride and drive,' however other events and activities such as vehicle showcases, forums, ask an owner events, and presentations also have the potential to be impactful to public audiences.

EV ride and drives are our most impactful outreach tool. An effective Drive Electric chapter will host multiple ride and drives between Drive Electric Earth Day (April) and National Drive Electric Week (September). Ride and drives will vary in size and scale. As a network of volunteers, chapters can host ride and drives of any size with little to no cost. This means there is no "drive minimum" to make an event worthwhile, a small neighborhood event with three test drives is just as valuable and doable as a large community wide event with dozens of drives.

Ride and drives fall into two loose categories, workplace and public. Workplace ride and drives happen during the workday, on the worksite, for employees. The strength of workplace ride and drives comes from the captive audience and direct advertising that can be done to employees. Recruiting volunteers EV owners during the nine-to-five can be a challenge, however. Workplace ride and drives may require support from local dealerships to be the most successful.

Public ride and drives are open broadly to the public. Public events can potentially reach a wider audience, be held at any public or private location (with permissions) and can happen during evenings or weekends. Advertising for such events is casting a large net and requires different methods than workplace (such as social media and print advertising). Evening and weekend events are often more easily staffed by volunteers. However, these can often coincide with peak sales time for dealership staff.

Chapters will also take part in static education events, such as EV showcases or tabling. Static events are a valuable tool, as they often lead to more interactions with more attendees.

Events can be held independently, as stand-alone events drawing their own unique audience, or in partnership with other community groups or festivals. Events held in partnership can tap into a wider and sometimes preexisting attendee base. Participation in annual or community wide events help establish chapters as fixtures of the community and further brand recognition. However, partnership events tend to make ride and drives logistically more challenging.

Outreach

Another key activity is direct education and engagement of policymakers and other government officials. As Drive Electric chapter members are constituents, often active voters, they are of special interest to local and state officials. As well as educating decision makers, grassroots chapters are in a unique position to advocate for pro-EV and infrastructure policies.

Grassroots chapters are inherently networks, as such, they can build coalition and unite key community stakeholders around policies and other actions to help overcome market barriers. (This may be done through forming a "stakeholder committee," as discussed below.)

Well-versed in local driving habits, chapters can conduct outreach to potential site hosts for EV charging to educate and encourage them to install EVSE equipment. Chapter members are powerful and well-informed advocates for EV charging in their workplaces, community attractions, and local businesses.

An impactful grassroots chapter will also engage with car dealers to educate, prepare, and connect them to the EV consumer market. This relationship should act as a pipeline so that EV events, specifically ride and drives, have the potential to generate "warm leads" that can be funneled to local EV dealers and are more likely to result in sales. The ability to generate warm EV leads is a benefit largely unique to Drive Electric chapters. This is also the biggest asset that chapters and Drive Electric programs can bring to a dealership when proposing Electrified Dealer programs. This relationship is mutually beneficial as chapters can offer access to warm leads and captive audiences, and dealerships can provide vehicles and support to chapter events.

Finally, leaders of the group can become a source of reliable information, expertise, and thought-leadership on EVs – linking broader EV-related information and activity to action at the community-level. Over time, stakeholders and Drive Electric group leaders might be successful in getting local government, utilities, or others to fund some of these activities.

How is a grassroots chapter different from electric car clubs?

While similar, a car club consists of people who have a love for specific brands and/or EVs broadly and want to share that love and their vehicles with each other and perhaps others. Meet ups and car cruises are common events put on by car clubs. Grassroots chapters may also put on events like this to engage their members and build relationships. However, Drive Electric chapters are externally focused on education and advocacy. Their mission and primary function are to advance EV adoption in their communities.

How is a grassroots chapter different from a local/regional stakeholder committee? How might they work together?

Stakeholder committees consist of all key stakeholders relevant driving EV adoption, often within a specific region. These likely include government officials, utilities, car dealers, fleets, local businesses, and (importantly) EV owners. Stakeholder committees convene entities with a vested interest in identifying and overcoming market barriers. Spanning multiple industries and sectors, stakeholder committees can create a unified voice and accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles. The Committee can provide advice and inform the various efforts of a Drive Electric initiative, and its primary function is to facilitate regular communication and work on a common agenda. Stakeholder committees may also set and carry out their own goals through internal working groups. This coordinated effort compounds the potential impact that the members, including the Drive Electric initiatives, would have separately of driving increased EV adoption across the state.

The stakeholder committee can be closely related to the grassroots chapter. It could be convened by the Drive Electric initiative; however, it also might be a separate group that is run by local government or another party. A key distinction is that stakeholder committees convene industry professionals and decision makers to work towards common goals. A grassroots chapter brings together owners and enthusiasts to educate and advocate around EVs within their community.

These two models are related, but their framework is inherently different because they are likely to be oriented around different goals. The stakeholder committee is designed to coordinate the work of key stakeholders based on their roles. The grassroots group is designed to educate the general public and advocate for EV adoption.

It is possible that a collection of local and state-level stakeholders become fully supportive of electrification and take every conceivable action to support it. Under this scenario, individual EV owners might play a complementary role as part of this group. However, the risk is the loss or lack of that independent voice to drive action. Individual EV owners may feel their work is not needed, and the group becomes inactive. If this happens, their perspective, expertise, and volunteer efforts are lost.

A successful grassroots chapter should work closely with EV stakeholders from that community, however, for their efforts to be successful and sustainable, the groups should remain distinct.

Why form grassroots EV chapters?

Enthusiastic EV owners are the most influential and credible source of information about EVs, especially to other drivers and would-be owners. Chapter members are often active and deeply embedded in their community and are (or can be) influential with other key stakeholders who respond to political or market factors. They are (or can become) home-grown experts and thought leaders whose influence can be based on this expertise as well as their numbers. They are a vital source of intelligence and insight about local EV market conditions, policies, and key local stakeholders.

In addition to the obvious consumer education benefits, outreach events increase community and brand recognition of both the local chapter and the Drive Electric initiative as a whole. An impactful chapter will have connections with local residents, businesses, government leaders, NGOs, centers of worship, etc.

Lastly, public consumer education events to create opportunities for policymakers to test drive EVs, connect with EV owner constituents, and learn about the benefits of EV adoption. Often those setting EV policies have never driven an electric vehicle and do not personally know any EV drivers. EV events create the opportunities, often for the first time, for decision makers to hear first-hand from EV drivers. In doing so, or in test driving themselves, state and local policy makers can learn about the personal and communal benefits of electric transportation and understand the needs of their EV driving constituents.

Focusing grassroots organizing and outreach events in key legislative districts furthers a Drive Electric initiative's broader policy work. Educating constituents around EVs lays the groundwork

for future mobilization efforts, such as phone call and letter writing campaigns, around pro-EV policies.

As regional groups comprised and lead by volunteers, Drive Electric Chapters are a low-cost strategy to educate and drive the market locally. They extend the impact of an organization (such as a Clean Cities Coalition) that cannot be active "on the ground" in every community. However, with the support of paid staff, chapters can exponentially expand the impact of a Drive Electric initiative, and create a far-reaching, high-capacity program, with minimal budget and staff-hours. This grassroots organizing framework is consistent with the original Clean Cities model of doing work "where the rubber meets the road."

How can we develop leaders and set grassroots chapters up for success?

As with any successful group, leadership is critical. The most successful model tends to be a core leadership group. The sweet spot is probably around 4 to 6 people. Since chapter leaders are volunteers, best results are seen when members of the core group are collaborative and share leadership. A single, strong leader who takes on all responsibilities and tasks is much less likely to be successful. Any number of events that would prevent that individual from leading (becoming burnt out, moving, etc.) could then derail the momentum and organization of the group.

A core leadership group that can expand and change to meet the needs of the chapter will be much more resilient and be able to withstand changes to the leadership team. The individuals of the core group must see themselves, and the leadership team, as a dynamic entity that serves the chapter and its mission to advance EV adoption. They must be welcome and inclusive to a wide variety of members and leaders. When leadership becomes 'exclusive' it makes the chapter brittle and unlikely to adapt and succeed in the future.

One of the Drive Electric staff's most important job is to work with and support this core group to identify and involve new people in the main leadership core or leadership committees (discussed below).

The best way to bring new members into the fold and develop them as potential leaders is to give them a clear opportunity to take on responsibility. Setting new members up for success is a clear path towards confident leadership and continued engagement. Examples of initial leadership opportunities include organizing a ride and drive event, holding meetings, or doing outreach with various stakeholders.

As the organization grows, the chapter should find ways to expand beyond the core group to create sub-groups or committees. These might include committees to focus on specific activities – a ride and drives committee, policy committee, charging infrastructure committee and so forth. Staff and chapter leadership can ask new people what they are most interested in doing or just suggest some specific role for them to play. Staff and core group leaders can encourage people to take on specific roles rather than just attending meeting and sitting on the sidelines. Some people will prefer to be peripherally involved until they get really excited about something and decide to make it a personal priority. Staff and leadership should be on the

lookout for these people and set them up for success if and when they get a spark of inspiration.

How do we start to form new chapters?

The first, foundational step is to identify and connect with existing EV owners in the community. Existing owners can be identified through EV Noire members, PIA members, car clubs (e.g., Tesla, Bolt), Facebook groups and other social media, known contacts who drive an EV (including local political, business, other leaders), members of environmental groups, referrals from supportive dealers, and other places.

Connect directly with these individuals. If communications are positive, meet in person. Discuss the vision for the group, build rapport, establish shared purpose and goals, and build excitement.

This is a numbers game. Do not put all your EV owners in one basket. Keep a running list and file on interested people – who they are, various things about them. Have conversations ongoing with multiple people at once.

Once staff has identified the makings of a core group, organize a meeting. Help people get to know each other, share ideas, passion for EVs, and the excitement of doing things to help adoption grow. Share the purpose for the group but leave plenty of space for individuals to share their ideas. Create a shared vision and brainstorm activities that the group can pursue. Establish a regular meeting cadence, perhaps once per month.

Prioritize finding a meeting time and location that works for all members of the core team. Prioritize diversity and inclusion and create a leadership team welcoming to everyone. Identify potential barriers that may keep people from participating in a leadership roles and address them (i.e., does the meeting conflict with afterschool pick up, rush hour, or religious holidays).

Establish a regular agenda for the meeting and help the core group keep their agenda running smoothly. It is OK to invite new people to join the group but be careful to keep the core group a manageable size, so meetings remain productive and on track. A manageable size may depend on the group and skills of the leaders to manage meetings. The staff should not run the meetings, just support the leaders.

Establish a digital presence so the group can easily be identified, located, and contacted. Create social media channels and appoint a few enthusiast core group members to manage the accounts. Use them actively to recruit volunteers, establish a knowledgeable and welcoming presence, and connect the chapters work (advancing EV adoption) to local and regional issues.

How do we keep chapters strong and growing?

A chapter in motion will stay in motion, and a chapter at rest tends to stay at rest. The best way to keep for a chapter to stay strong and growing is to stay active. Chapters can specifically leverage ride and drive events and social media presence to drive engagement and the opportunity to connect with new people.

Use activities to meet and engage new people. Invite excited members to help support future activities and follow up in a timely manner with actionable ways to do so. As members get more familiar and the core leaders get to know them, ask them to lead their own events.

Committees can be great ways to bring more people into the fold while building chapter capacity. conduct other activities. These also can serve as their own core groups. Maintain an open and inclusive dynamic with the main core group and core committees. Make sure new people (especially those not traditionally represented in EV spaces) are welcomed and encouraged to get involved. Advise the core group and committees as needed on running effective meetings and conducting other business.

Celebrate success. This includes events, policies, and other group initiatives. Working together, having fun and being successful will build enthusiasm and relationships around a shared passion for EVs and the difference they make in the community and world. With "virtuous circles," victory begets victory.

As original core group members get tired, help them rotate out of leadership and encourage others to get more active. Encourage the group to remain flexible and open to new ideas about what kinds of activities will work. Build shared best practices but allow evolution in how those are defined.

Help the groups raise money to support efforts and depend less on funding from the "parent" Clean Cities coalition. Keep fundraising efforts simple and discuss whether funding can be shared between the grassroots group and coalition. This may involve creating mechanism for how funds can be received, accounted for, and shared back out. Work out these issues with full transparency to maintain trust. Raising and managing funds established a sense of ownership and empowers members of the chapter.

Events are opportunities to mobilize not just the community, but chapter members as well. Engaged volunteers who feel connected to the group and its mission make more passionate and reliable EV advocates.

After the initial core group has been established and the chapter is set into motion, chapter building and sustainability can be thought of in two buckets: Capacity Building and Capacity Mobilizing, aka how do chapters find their people and how do they activate them to make a difference.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is the way we increase *our ability to make impact*. This is a thoughtful, ongoing process that includes developing strong relationships and lists. Interpersonal relationships are the foundation for all organizing work. Without solid relationships within chapters, between chapter leaders, and with the communities they serve, any further efforts would be difficult if not impossible. Members who feel connected to each other and the cause become more engaged and reliable volunteers. Chapters can establish relationships by:

- Having one-on-one meetings, calls, or video chats with new members
- Making active use of social media or messaging groups
- Hosting social events, networking opportunities, or meet and greets
- Reaching out to new EV owners through dealership contacts, or contact cards left on EVs/EVSE

Through building and maintaining good relationships, chapters gather data, and compile useful lists. Lists help visualize chapter network by gathering a significant quantity and high quality of information. This is vital for inviting attendees or recruiting volunteers for event planning. Additionally, the personal and professional networks of individual members can helps foster connections and opportunities for the chapter's event, policy, EVSE, and dealership efforts. A good list will include information like:

- Contact information
- Vehicles make and model
- Involvement level in the group
- Neighborhood
- Place of employment
- Community organizations (houses of worship, volunteer groups, etc.)
- Leadership positions (Neighborhood associations, board of directors, etc.)

Some of this, such as community involvement and leadership, is gathered organically as members become more engaged and friendly over time. Other, such as contact information and involvement level, should be established and recorded as soon as possible.

Capacity Mobilizing

We mobilize when we gather the capacity (relationships, networks, passion, commitment, etc.) we have built, and *direct it towards a shared goal*. This goal can be as small as a small planning meeting, to a community-wide event, to the launch of a new initiative. If capacity building is preparing to move the needle, capacity mobilizing are the actions we take to move the needle.

Most chapter mobilization occurs around outreach events. However, chapters play key roles in additional activities such as dealer engagement, EVSE site host identification, and policymaker education-

The "DRIVE Electric USA" project will fully develop state-based "Drive Electric" programs that will engage individuals, utilities, legislators, dealerships and others towards removing adoption barriers and accelerating plug-in electric vehicle use in our states. Learn more about the project at www.DriveElectricUSA.org.

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) under the Vehicle Technologies Program Office, Award Number DE-EE0009228.