



So, you want to do a Yes Lab!

[What is the Yes Lab?](#)

[Does a Yes Lab suit your org?](#)

[What you'll learn](#)

[How does a Yes Lab work?](#)

[Some options for Yes Lab sponsorship](#)

[What's next?](#)

[A little background](#)

Hello, world-fixer! We're very excited that you want to do a Yes Lab. Please take a moment to read over this document and find out if the Yes Lab is right for your organization (if we're sending you this, we already think that it is). Once you've decided you're ready to take the next step, we'll ask that you answer a few questions for us on this [highly enjoyable questionnaire](#), then [email it to us](#). We hope to hear from you soon!

What is the Yes Lab?

The Yes Lab is a series of brainstorming and trainings helping activist groups carry out high-impact, media-getting creative actions on their own, around their particular campaign goals. It's a way for social justice and campaign organizations to take advantage of all that we Yes Men have learned—not only about our own ways of doing things, but those we've come in contact with over the decade and a half we've been doing this sort of thing. So far we've performed several successful Yes Labs, with some fruits already showing, and others on their way soon. (See "A little background," below, for more background and testimonials.)

"The Yes Lab offers an amazing new opportunity for any group working to draw attention to the crimes that powerful governments and their stenographers in the media routinely sweep under the carpet. After a few consultations with the Yes Lab, we were able to hatch our very own Yes Men-inspired [intervention](#). Using the tools Andy and Mike forged through years of path-breaking creative activism, we not only got our voices heard in the media debate, but transformed the debate in ways we'd previously thought unimaginable."

—Laurence Fabre, Committee for the Reimbursement of the Indemnity Money Extorted from Haiti (C.R.I.M.E.)

Does a Yes Lab suit your org?

A Yes Lab may be up your alley if:

- You're a progressive organization (or coalition thereof) ready to carry out a high-impact project for a clear campaign goal.
- You're interested out-of-the-box thinking, and stimulating the creativity, inspiration, and radical talents of your team(s).
- You're ready to commit staff time and energy to this, including one staff coordinator who can make it happen, and one higher-level person who can make decisions you can stick with. In a smaller org, that would be the actual leaders; in a larger one, unit leaders who have autonomy.
- You've got staff with energy and imagination, and at least a few people who can get things done—computer and web-savvy people, design-savvy people, good writers, etc. Those people can be one and the same, of course, but they probably won't fully overlap. (If need be, the Yes Lab can supplement your staff with folks from our national network of talented activists, artists and secret agents.)
- You can commit the time a good action requires. Like any well executed performance, while the end result may sometimes look polished and relatively effortless, the kinds of projects we specialize in take a lot of effort.
- A budget for the work; see "Some options for Yes Lab sponsorship" below for more on costs and funding possibilities.

If all that is a "yes"... then the Yes Lab may be for you!

What you'll learn

Some things your organization and team members might learn in the course of your action, that you can apply to other projects:

- Using public spectacle effectively and powerfully in your campaign work
- Using humor to open minds, share ideas, and change the world
- Writing for a specific audience—avoiding "activist" language and knowing how to make the most of your eye-time
- Brainstorming techniques: how to tap your team's creativity
- Organizing an effective mass action with two hundred or more volunteers
- Fun-filled infiltration techniques of otherwise off-limits contexts
- Producing video news releases and other video pieces
- Various techniques listed at challenge.theyesmen.org
- Etc.

We'll also provide a set of learning tools to help you and your org remember lessons into the future.

How does a Yes Lab work?

In a typical Yes Lab project, an activist organization will come to the Yes Lab with a target—a particular company, politician, or corporate front group, or a bad government policy, or even an abstract idea—as well as a campaign goal: to affect public debate, push for legislation, embarrass an evildoer, etc.

The Yes Men will work with the group remotely (by phone or Skype) to help them refine campaign goals, define the “ask,” name action teams, etc. We’ll then lead an in-person brainstorm (one, two, or three days, in a location convenient to you) to develop the smartest, most effective actions around those goals, as well as conduct needed trainings. Afterwards, we’ll check in on the project until it’s successful—because we want it to succeed as much as you do!

If Yes Lab participants put in the needed work, the actions developed can garner a great deal of visibility for an issue—much more than a few paid ads—and can be a powerful tool within a full campaign. Also, you’ll have an absurd amount of fun.

Though we’ll develop a loose curriculum tailored to your needs, and though Yes Labs can be of varying length (typically from one to three days), the general content will include:

- Presentation of “Yes” activism: developing effective, mediagenic activist projects around the issue at hand
- Brainstorming until at least one project is chosen
- Fleshing out chosen project(s) fully, and developing a complete action plan complete with timelines and deadlines and chains of responsibility
- Trainings as needed, with Yes Men and external trainers—covering media handling, improv, writing, video editing, etc.
- Mapping out teams and determining additional staffing needs (e.g. comic writer, press release expert, videographer, acting trainer, prop-maker, animator, etc.—which can come from the Yes Men’s network if necessary)
- Optionally, fun activities connected with the issue at hand—for example, a kayak or bicycle tour of a local area of relevance to the project

By the end of the workshop, you’ll have all the tools you need to accomplish the action, and the Yes Men will help you complete it from afar.

Some options for Yes Lab sponsorship

Every Yes Lab and subsequent action has associated costs, ranging from low to high thousands, depending on the scope of the training and project. The budget to carry out the project itself is of course initially unknown, but typically has been quite low.

Up front we require a financial commitment from the sponsoring NGO for two reasons: (a) it takes us time and effort to do this, and the Yes Lab needs to grow somehow; and (b) your buy-in serves as a commitment that you'll carry the project forward, even if it takes a lot of work (which it does). So even if some or most of the funding is coming from an outside source, such as a local university, the NGO should also contribute some funding.

For ourselves, we're suggesting a consulting fee (for the main days of workshops) that would include helping you prepare for the brainstorm, and following up with team-building and so on for the projects that result (which could be as many as six, as in a recent Lab), as well as ongoing consulting on the project within reason.

Here are several models for how a Yes Lab can be sponsored and funded:

(a) Entirely by an NGO. The NGO (or coalition of NGOs) funds the Yes Lab, and we (Andy and/or Mike, and others) come to a place convenient to your participating members to do the 2-3 day Lab. This is the most efficient, easiest model. You, the NGO, have total ownership over the project, and the most control over how it happens.

(b) By an educational institution, with significant participation by the NGO. In this case, the institution will usually want the Lab to occur on school premises, with students participating. These students can be pre-selected, and can be extremely bright, talented, and useful. However, they will almost certainly not be able to see a project through by themselves; for that, they'll need the ongoing structural help of the co-sponsoring NGO—at least one strong figure to give ongoing guidance and direction to efforts. It's like having a whole staff at your disposal, but not an entirely reliable one.

(c) By an outside donation. In exceptional cases, when the NGO cannot afford a financial participation, the commitment of staff time, space and energy, etc, serves as its commitment and buy-in. The costs in this case are covered by outside funding, which the NGO should be active in seeking.

What's next?

If you're ready to jump in, please fill out and [email us](#) this [highly enjoyable questionnaire](#) (as well as any questions you might have) and you'll be hearing back from one of us shortly!

Background and testimonials

We Yes Men have been doing our thing for [about 12 years](#), and we've helped develop a slew of methods to get press attention for critical causes. Almost all of our work has been in collaboration with activist groups; our [BBC announcement on behalf of Dow Chemical](#) came out of a collaboration with Greenpeace, for example.

Last fall, we picked up the pace of our collaborations dramatically. We [re-branded the U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) in collaboration with the Avaaz Action Factory, [successfully embarrassed Canada](#) in collaboration with ActionAid and a group of young Canadian activists, released a [much-improved "climate edition"](#) of Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* together with a coalition of large environmental NGOs, and launched [a sea-based "assault" on the U.N.](#) together with several small activist groups, and one large one.

The Yes Lab, which launched last spring, helps activist groups carry out actions like these, and entirely new ones, with a little help from the (admittedly large) experience we've accumulated.

"Of my now 5 years in climate organizing I think this was the most effective and meaningful [action](#) to have reached Canadians.... and served as a forceful complement to all of the NVCD taking place across the country. Coverage of the action framed it as more influential than all of direct action's and 350.org day of climate action combined."

—*Canadian Youth Delegation member, in reference to the "Blame Canada" project*

"The impact of the Yes Men projects during Climate Week NYC was far beyond our wildest hopes. I have tremendous respect for how much they were able to achieve and I credit their dedication, discipline and creative genius."

—*Susan Alzner, Global Campaign for Climate Action, in reference to the "Survivaballs" and "New York Post" projects*

"The fight for a sane climate policy has science behind it, and justice, and prudence. That's not gotten the job done, so we need some organizing too—including the witty and piercing kind of organizing the Yes Men specialize in."

—*Bill McKibben, Founder, 350.org*

"I've been inspired by their work. They are some of the most brilliant activists that we have working in this country."

—[Tim de Christopher](#), climate activist who, through impersonation, single-handedly saved over 100,000 acres of pristine land from oil and gas drilling

"For years, I've cared deeply about activist issues. But this is the first time I've felt I could really have an effect."

—*Student, Columbia College, Chicago, after Yes Lab brainstorm in September 2010*

"The Yes Lab provided the perfect incubator for our students' activism. Their perspective on protest will never be the same."

—*Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin, Associate Professor of Journalism, Columbia College, Chicago*