

HOW TO: MAKE AN IMPACT



**Friends of
the Earth**

Effective public campaigns do more than raise awareness. Network Developer **Katie Higgins** examines how creative campaigning on the streets can engage and inspire decision-makers and the public to actively support your campaigns, as well as boost your group's profile.

April's Big Ask Day of Action saw an unprecedented level of local group activism generate over 300 media hits in local newspapers, radio and TV – delivering a strong demand to more than 100 MPs to include aviation in the Climate Change Bill (pictured, right). Co-ordinated media pressure, creative props and enthusiastic, passionate local group members sent a message loud and clear to Westminster.

And now, we can build on this fantastic success and make an even bigger impact on our campaigns this summer. Here we pull together the best tips to help you get creative, get out there and get results when campaigning in public.

PREPARATION

Campaigning is about bringing your message to a wider audience by capturing their attention and inspiring them to take action. Thinking carefully about each step you take will help you achieve your campaign aims and objectives.

First of all ask what are you trying to achieve? How will your action bring you closer to this goal? If you have additional aims as a group, such as building relationships with your local media or engaging new audiences with your work, you also need to take those into account.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- ▶ Who are you trying to reach?
- ▶ What do you want them to remember or do?
- ▶ How will you get your message across?



Credit: Jess Dolan

LOCATION, LOCATION

Being in the right place at the right time can make all the difference. You might have a favourite spot in town for running a stall, but if you're doing a press stunt, staging it in front of an iconic building in your area or somewhere relevant to your campaign could make all the difference to looking good on camera and capturing the media's attention.

If you are collecting signatures on postcards think about where you might find sympathetic audiences – for example a farmers' market if you are campaigning on food. You'll need to find a visible and prominent spot where the flow of people isn't too fast and furious – you'll need space for passers-by to stop and talk to you.

If you want to engage new audiences, you could set up near your local mosque, church, youth or community centre.

Credit: Calliste Lelliott/Friends of the Earth



Credit: Baithazar Serreau



LOOK THE PART

Making your stall as eye-catching as possible will ensure you grab attention. Always use a Friends of the Earth tablecloth and t-shirts so you look professional (see above). Sticking to a theme ensures you won't confuse the message you are trying to convey – only bring leaflets and postcards for one campaign, as well as some information about your group. A leaflet dispenser will keep your stall neat and tidy. Display boards with photos of your group actions are a great way to enhance the overall visual impact.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Friends of the Earth has a range of materials available to help you look like the team of professional campaigners that you are. From t-shirts to tablecloths, make sure your local group has the publicity materials it needs by contacting the Activist Information Officer on 020 7566 1677 or localgroups@foe.co.uk.

For a list of publicity materials available visit: http://community.foe.co.uk/local_groups/running_your_own/resource/publicity/resources.html

CREATIVITY COUNTS

Props, flags, costumes, masks, role plays, music... throwing a pinch of creativity into your action plan can be great for turning heads and getting your action into the local media (see above). The plane props and Gordon Brown masks used on the Big Ask Day of Action are a good example of making sure visual ideas are tailored to your campaign message. But many groups have come up with their own innovative ideas for getting noticed.



- DON'T FORGET!**
- Leaflets telling people who you are. Make sure you include details of where and when you meet and how people can get involved.
 - Sign-up sheets to join your mailing list.
 - Material relevant to the campaign. Avoid turning your stall into a library or bringing along literature on too many campaigns - stick to one theme.
 - A camera to capture snapshots for your scrapbook and to send to local media contacts.

COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE

Now you've got people's attention, how do you get them to act? Your strategy will vary, depending on who you are trying to reach and why. But if you're going to be out and about, your audience is likely to be diverse. Here are our tips for engaging members of the public:

- ▶ Brainstorm ideas on how you could adapt your message for students, parents, the elderly, cyclists, motorists etc.
- ▶ Find a local angle to help your message resonate in your community.
- ▶ Think of a snappy opening line to engage people in conversation.
- ▶ Be confident – even if you don't feel it.
- ▶ Keep your body language relaxed and open. Try not to slouch or cross your arms, which could come across as defensive or unapproachable.

WHEN IT'S ALL OVER

- ▶ Pat yourselves on the back. Campaigning can be tough, so make sure you celebrate the day's achievements.
- ▶ Thank everyone who took part and make sure group members feel valued.
- ▶ Reflect and evaluate. At your next meeting, discuss how the action went, what worked well and what you'd do differently next time.
- ▶ Don't forget to do your admin. Whatever your action, it's bound to generate follow-up work. The sooner you chase press releases, get new people signed up to your email list and postcards sent back to Friends of the Earth, the sooner you can sit back and relax after your hard work.

TALK THE TALK

People's perception of what you say will be roughly based on the following – 7 per cent verbal (the words you actually say), 38 per cent vocal (what you sounded like when you said it) and 55 per cent visual (your body language while talking). You don't have to be word perfect nor a world expert on the issue, simply talk with conviction and open, confident body language.

- ▶ Be positive and friendly when approaching people.
- ▶ Listen to what people say and avoid lecturing – all good communication is two way.
- ▶ During the course of an afternoon of campaigning, you aren't going to convince everyone you meet to take action or support your campaigns. Make sure you have a closing strategy worked out in case you find that you are getting stuck in a conversation which isn't going anywhere – so you don't waste too much time. You could wrap up a conversation and move on by:
 - Saying "It's been interesting talking to you but I should let you go now." And walk away or towards another group member.
 - Having an agreement with your fellow group members to look out for each other and to politely interrupt a conversation if it's been going on for longer than 10 minutes. This provides an opportunity to finish a conversation that is not going well, or to introduce the member of the public to someone else in the group if they are keen to find out more.
 - Discussing with your group what each of you feels comfortable talking about. If you know each other's areas of expertise in advance then you can call on the right person to help with enquiries from members of the public that you might not be able to answer yourself.
 - Remembering to stay safe and comfortable with what you are doing. If you are not happy talking to someone, or if you feel that you are being pushed into a potentially vulnerable situation, then walk away. Be polite but firm with the person you are talking to but make it clear that the conversation is over and explain to your fellow group members what has happened.

INVOLVING DECISION MAKERS

Case Study: Wendy Attwell, Welwyn Hatfield Co-ordinator, gives her advice on engaging MPs

A couple of years ago, we invited our local MP to join the group. We 'sold' the benefits to him, explaining that it would keep him in touch with concerns of constituents and engaged in the local community. He now receives our weekly emails – we know he reads them because he often sends a quick reply or comes and says hello when we're running a stall at local events. It's great because he gets a heads up on campaigns and events we are planning and so has time to look into it and formulate a proper opinion – it makes him much more engaged in the issues. He has a very high local media profile and is keen on upholding this, so for the Big Ask Day of Action we invited two local newspapers to attend. We asked what time would suit him and planned our action to

fit his schedule. In the end it worked out perfectly as he brought along an extra photographer who was due cover another story on him the same day!

RESOURCES

Local Groups Handbook

Every group should have a copy. It contains case studies, practical advice and resources to help you with every aspect of running a group. For help with planning engaging actions, boosting your profile and communicating with the public see:

- Chapter 3: Action
- Chapter 4: Profile

Publicity materials

Contact the Activist Information Officer on 020 7566 1677 or localgroups@foe.co.uk to order publicity materials for your group to help raise your profile

For a list of publicity materials available, see: http://community.foe.co.uk/local_groups/running_your_own/resource/publicity/resources.html

Other How Tos

Previous pull-outs are available to download at: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/

- How to get your message across
- How to run a kick-ass stall
- How to raise your local profile
- How to celebrate and share your successes



Credit: Welwyn Hatfield Friends of the Earth

