

Interlink

Your local county voluntary council

11. Campaigning and influencing

11.12 Campaigning and lobbying techniques

Cefnogi gweithredu gwirfoddol
yn Rhondda Cynon Taf



Supporting voluntary action
in Rhondda Cynon Taff

Overview

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with our other sheet '11.11 Campaigning and lobbying - how to plan a campaign'. The techniques you could use for your campaign should derive from the planning you have done beforehand. Different campaigning and lobbying techniques are discussed here along with a consideration of the effectiveness of specific techniques.

Where to start

It is extremely important to undergo the campaign planning stages before deciding which campaign techniques you will employ. This process will inform which tactics will be useful and when to use them. If the planning is poor and the techniques are rushed or ill thought out, it could actually be counterproductive to your campaign and damaging to your organisation.

The range of tactics

There is an enormous range of campaigning and lobbying techniques that you could consider to further your campaign. Here is a non-exhaustive list set in broad categories, followed by more detailed consideration of some of the techniques and issues.

Publishing

- Letter-writing

- Leaflets
- Postcards
- E mail campaign
- Social network site campaign
- Circulars
- Articles
- Posters
- Badges

Media

- Newspapers
- Radio
- TV
- Press releases

Personal

- Telephone campaigning
- Door to door canvassing
- Face to face meetings (individuals/delegations)
- Events/public meetings
- Petitions

High profile

- Demonstrations
- Picketing
- Marching
- Displaying banners
- Public protests
- Direct action

Letter-writing

This can be a good starting point for making initial contact with your campaign targets. Letters might seem a little slow and old fashioned in the age

of new technology, but your target will have something to study and refer back to. It is also less likely to get swamped in the deluge of e mails that people receive every day, and because it is a physical entity it can be harder to ignore. It is also worth remembering that whilst cyber-campaigning can be cheap and has the potential to reach high volumes of people, the technology can also work against the campaigner as sophisticated filtering systems can identify and filter out e mails that are part of a larger 'volume' effort.

Try to make your letter personal by addressing it personally, asking specific questions of the recipient and asking for their personal opinion. Again this means you will be more likely to receive a response from them rather than it simply being forwarded on to another person or department.

Getting other people to write too can be very powerful, but this can easily backfire if you are asking people to use a standard format. Encourage people to stick to the personalised letter principle as this will carry more weight than receiving huge volumes of exactly the same letter. Unlike a petition or a pre-printed postcard, a letter can explain how individuals are being affected.

Think about timing if you are encouraging other people to write. Is anything happening in the external environment that might dilute the effect of your letters? Also for greatest impact, try to ensure that your target receives letters within a short space of time - 25 letters in a fortnight will have a bigger impact than one a fortnight over several months.

Other important things to remember about letter-writing include:

- Be succinct and focused - keep it to a page if possible and only cover one subject per letter
- Avoid ranting or rambling
- Only make two or three key points in your letter - better still ensure that your points include solutions
- Put all the important information in the first paragraph (who, why, what, where and when)
- Think about how to handle the supporting evidence that your letter may require so as not to overwhelm the recipient - perhaps summarise it on a separate sheet
- Thank recipients for their time and politely ask for a response

Lobbying politicians

Politicians are often the targets of campaigns, but it should also be remembered that they themselves can have a legitimate campaigning role by virtue of being a politician. However, this role also sits alongside their party political role, their constituency role and their role in whatever democratic body they are elected to.

When attempting to influence politicians it is important to be absolutely clear about what you want them to do. For example, do you want them to:

- Speak in debates?
- Write letters?
- Ask questions?
- Have meetings with others?
- Vote in a particular way on a particular issue?
- Seek publicity?
- Join your campaign?

- Change policies?
- Change or create new laws?

Politicians are busy people who are bombarded with information all the time. You need to think carefully how you are going to capture and keep their attention in a very crowded environment. Here are some more thoughts on how keep your issue out of the bin and on their desk.

- Avoid lobbying politicians via the media - lobby them directly. The media is a good way of raising awareness of the issues and the campaign more broadly, but it is useful to go to politicians directly.
- Politicians react to what is raised on doorsteps - so it is useful to consider how you can get their constituents to raise your issue.
- Prepare politicians for both side of the argument - otherwise they are vulnerable to attack by opponents.
- Identify politicians' individual (campaigning) issues of interest.
- Provide clear, concise, readable, jargon-free briefing material - it must contain key messages and clarity over what you want them to do.
- Don't expect them to have your level of expertise about your issue.
- Don't presume that your cause will be their main priority - there are many good causes and competing demands.
- Don't be overly persistent.
- Arrange face to face meetings, possibly with a small group or delegation, and provide opportunities for politicians to have personal experience of the campaign.
- Be rational and objective and avoid ranting.

- Try to get cross party support and use cross party coalitions.
- Think about how politicians' aides/staff can assist. Where they exist they can be useful contacts.
- Discuss with them how best to get publicity and respect that they may also be experienced campaigners who could have good ideas.
- Keep them informed of all campaign activities/press conferences etc.
- Don't play political games with politicians - you will probably lose!

Using the media

Local media are always looking for stories, but it is not the case that your issue will necessarily be given the publicity you would like, or be covered in the way you would like. Just because you think your issue is important, it doesn't mean that they will.

You are more likely to receive coverage if your issue is of interest to the wider public, or quirky or unusual in some way, or has some strong human-interest element attached to it. Find out who the key reporters are in your area and make yourself known to them. Or make initial contact with newsdesks if you don't know which reporters or producers you need to speak to.

Ring your local media and invite them to all your events, such as public meetings or demonstrations. And if you hold high profile events that will attract media attention, make sure you have fully briefed people on the sidelines to talk to the press, and key individuals available for interviews. At all stages of a campaign, try to have a variety of people available for interviews, and ensure they all understand the key points that they need to make.

Write letters to your local newspaper, but they must be clear and succinct and of interest to the wider public. Also contact newspaper editors - they may be prepared to take a positive view of your campaign and get fully behind the issue. Ring your local radio phone-in programme, or try to persuade them to run a programme on your issue.

Be sure to issue press releases at all key stages of your campaign, but remember that only a small proportion of press releases ever get published. The purpose of a press release is to give journalists the facts about an issue and enable them to get more details where necessary. The following points are worth remembering when preparing a press release:

- Keep it short - one side of A4 if possible.
- Date it at the top so that it is easy to see that this is a current issue.
- Have a short, eye-catching headline
- Keep the information simple (and in a style to suit the publication).
- Have a short first paragraph - just two or three sentences summarising the entire message. Remember that sub-editors cut from the bottom
- Avoid jargon.
- If you are using quotes, try to ensure they are from named, and if possible, senior individuals. Make sure that person is available for comment and fully briefed.
- Put your contact details at the bottom- be sure to include a mobile phone number as journalists may want to contact you outside office hours.

- Proof it, and get someone else to proof it too, before you issue it - mistakes are unnecessary and could cast doubt over the credibility of your campaign in some way.

Conclusion

Campaigning and lobbying can be necessary to effect change. It can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, so it is imperative that busy, often under-resourced third sector groups take a planned and structured approach to developing their campaigns. We have shown that there are a wide range of campaigning and lobbying techniques that can be deployed according to the particular circumstances of any given campaign. However, it is worth remembering that what is said, who says it, and how it is said is just as, if not more important than the method chosen to say it.

Further information

Voices for Change Cymru is a WCVA project supported by the Big Lottery Fund. There are now more opportunities than ever to make your voice heard and this project provides services to help third sector organisations influence policy and legislation at local and national levels.

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www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Organisations Campaigning Effectiveness Team:

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/index.asp

Disclaimer

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