

Techniques, tools & tactics

So, you know what you want to achieve, but what is it you actually do to get there?

There are a wide array of ways in which your campaign can take shape. If resources allow, it is advisable to use a portfolio of tactics. Some might capture the imagination of some of your (potential) supporters but won't attract others. Most tactics will probably not have the desired impact on your target(s) but one or two might.

Whatever range of tactics you use, integrate them into a coherent plan, so that you are not just being 'scattergun' in your approach. Think carefully about what tactics might work (and indeed which might backfire), be imaginative, and wherever possible try to actually enjoy it! Dedicated campaigners can burn themselves out if they're not careful, so it's important to make sure that your campaign activities are something that you and your supporters actually enjoy.

Many techniques, tools and tactics actually discussed elsewhere in this website so do please also have a look at the sections on Petitions, Using the media, Influencing decision makers, Using the internet and Using the law to achieve your goals.

Further information

[Mark Lattimer's 'The Campaigning Handbook'](#) is perhaps the most comprehensive examination of the range of tactics that are available to campaigners. However, as it was last published in 2000, it is not the best source if information about online campaigning tactics.

Detailed information about 'e-campaigning' can be found on [The Right Ethos website](#), under the section 'e-campaigning'.

Affiliation

Affiliating with other campaign groups builds and maintains your determination and passion

Affiliation was written by Mick Nott, [CycleSheffield](#)

A worthwhile way to build a local campaign's expertise and strength is to formally affiliate to a national or international campaign which shares the same aims and objectives as your own.

Through affiliation you can get:

- access to national support for local campaigns;
- expert speakers;
- briefing documents;
- advice on the phone;
- a wider network for consultation and feedback;
- insider knowledge on how issues are progressing politically;
- access to a range of conferences and events. Conferences are a form of rejuvenation and an impetus to keep going; to know you're not on your own.

Case Study

CycleSheffield is affiliated to three national organisations, CycleNation, the Cyclists Touring Club (CTC) and 20's Plenty for Us. Through CycleNation we have access to international cycle campaign groups.

We also have access to campaigners' conferences that give us the chance to explain what we are doing, and listen and learn from others. We get a 'steer' on issues we could campaign on that would be part of a national campaign.

Through these affiliations we also get the chance to send members to relevant events for free or at a reduced price. For example, in 2013 we received free entry to a major cycling conference for local authorities' officers in Birmingham, which

provided useful insight, good contacts and showed our own local authority that we were acquiring expertise.

These activities are an important part of our professional development as campaigners and building our group's social and human capital. Members who we support to go then come back to report at a meeting and write up a report for our website.

Two of the affiliations cost us tens of pence per member (out of an individual annual sub £6). One costs us nothing. Affiliation to one, the CTC, allows our members to access services and products at very reduced rates and is a positive economic benefit for members. We spend a third of our budget supporting members to go to relevant conferences and events and we consider it money well spent as it makes us a learning, as well as a campaigning, organisation.

Community organising

Community organising is all about shifting the power dynamic, so that the community can build power, and exercise it collectively to influence decisions made about them.

Community organising was written by Kay Polley, Lead organiser, [Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities](#).

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This all culminates in an 'action' – the moment when organised people confront their target, face to face, for a desired decision. This could be in an office with a handful of people, or at a large public assembly. These are a few of the key elements to running a successful action.

Your target

You have done your research, you know who your target is, and you've got them to the meeting. The target cannot be an organisation or institution; it must be the specific person who has the power to say yes to your demand. If you don't have the right person in the room there can be no action.

Your demand

Your demand has to be specific enough to know if you have won, and it has to be realistic. Most people would say yes if asked 'Are you going to try to reduce poverty?', but there is no clear way of saying afterwards if they have done it or not.

Asking 'Will you pay all of your employees the Living Wage by 1st January?' is clear enough to declare a win if they say yes, and specific enough to hold the target to account if they don't do as they promised.

Do your research

Not only should you know that what you are asking is feasible, you should know what is going to motivate your target to say yes. What is their self-interest? The aim should be to create a win-win situation, which satisfies both the target's self-interest and the community's shared self-interest.

Be prepared for things to go wrong!

Keeping in control of the action is vital. A lot of this can be done beforehand in a pre-meeting. Decide who is going to speak and what they are going to say. Time your agenda, to the minute.

Being organised and running a professional action makes your target much more likely to take you seriously and say yes. However, they might have their own ideas, and power people seem to like to steal the show! Treat them with respect, and explain beforehand how long they will have to speak.

Have a chairperson who is confident enough to move speakers on, and have someone acting as a timekeeper who can really concentrate on the timings and can back the chairperson up. If the speaker ignores the chair, consider having a backup plan such as a very loud buzzer, turning the microphone off, or a signal which tells everyone in the room to start applauding.

The crucial moment is your demand. It must be clear, and your target should be given an opportunity to respond with 'yes' or 'no'. The person asking must be prepared for the target trying to evade this – they must reinforce the question and not give up until they receive a yes or no response.

Success

Hopefully you will get the right result, so make sure everybody knows; celebrate! Thank your target, offer to work with them to make sure it happens.

Many of these community organising techniques are common sense, but I have been in many a meeting where the right target is there, but all that happens is several people rant at them angrily about a whole host of personal problems, and nothing is achieved.

If we are serious about taking action in the community we must be clear about our goal, passionate about the issue, and ready to hold each other to account, as well as our target. We must be organised.

Case study

TCC is an alliance of community groups, faith groups, and schools from across North East Wales. Any of our members can raise an issue to work on.

One of our members is St Giles' Parish Church. The church is in Wrexham town centre, and being one of the 'seven wonders of Wales' is a popular tourist attraction. However, tourists and church goers alike had seen an increase in anti-social behaviour: people drinking, openly taking drugs, and littering the church grounds.

TCC members thoroughly researched the issue, building allies with local shop owners who were facing the same problems. They found out that Police Community Support Officers were currently taking part in a pilot scheme which meant they had to be in certain places at certain times. It became apparent that this was having a detrimental impact on the town centre.

TCC invited the Police Inspector for Wrexham to attend a public assembly, which over 100 people attended. At the assembly, TCC members from St Giles' talked about how the issue was affecting them, how the elderly volunteer gardening team were regularly clearing up broken glass and drug needles. They shared stories from the business owners, who said that people were using their shop doorways to drink and inject drugs, putting people off coming into the shops and also putting them off visiting the town centre altogether. This had all been well planned and rehearsed beforehand.

The Police Inspector was then given three minutes to respond to the points raised. A lighting system showed green to start, amber when he had 30 seconds remaining, and red when his time was up. Having the lights in a place where the whole meeting could see them meant that it was very obvious if any of the speakers overran their time, and gave the chair more confidence to get the speaker to stop.

After the Inspector had spoken, he was asked to stay on stage, and one of our members delivered the 'ask': "Will you increase the numbers of PCSOs patrolling St Giles' and the town centre?". The inspector promised to do so, and on the front page of the local newspaper the next day was quoted saying how impressed he was with TCC's public assembly, and that he was scrapping the pilot scheme, to ensure an increased presence of PCSOs around St Giles and the town centre. Success!

This was a carefully run action, which showed community members as being well-informed and well organised. We had thought about the inspector's self-interest; he wants to provide the most effective policing possible, so we provided evidence which showed the current system was not working. His role is a high profile one, for which reputation is very important. Having over 100 people there, and the fact that the story was going to be reported in the newspaper, meant he would want to be seen to be taking the community's concerns seriously. Having a specific ask meant he became publically committed to getting PCSOs back into the town centre. This Inspector acted on this commitment immediately, which was a fantastic success for the local community.

Demonstrations

Demonstrating is an important democratic tool. But is a demo the right approach for your campaign?

A 'demonstration' describes various ways in which individuals and groups publicly demonstrate their opposition to a policy or a (perceived) injustice. A demonstration is non-violent. It is certainly true that demonstrations can become violent, and for a variety of reasons, but by definition, a demonstration is a legitimate, legal and peaceful form of campaigning.

Demonstrations can include:

- Pickets
- Marches and parades
- Sit-ins
- Rallies

While some stunts may take the form of demonstration, by definition they are quite different, and so are looked at separately.

They can sometimes be spontaneous, but are often planned a long term in advance. They may be focused on a single issue, as per the [Anti-Iraq War demonstration](#) in London in March 2003.

Or demonstrations can be made up of potentially disparate groups, voicing their campaign messages on a range of issues. Such demonstrations are often timed to coincide with important political events, anniversaries or visits from key policymakers. This is the case with the [G20 demonstrations](#) in London in April 2009.

Considerations if you planning a demonstration

There are a number of considerations that you need to make before planning a demonstration:

- Fundamentally, why a demo? While legal, demos are by their nature provocative and unpredictable. Is part of your campaign strategy to actually be provocative?!
- What impact are you seeking? Is a demo the best way to achieve that impact? (Demos, while highly visible and often attractive to the media, often do not actually achieve their goal. The Anti-Iraq war demonstration, cited above, for example was the single biggest demonstration that has ever taken place in the UK, but did not change the UK Government's policy on the issue).
- Following on from this could a demonstration be counter-productive in terms of influencing your target(s)? (If, for example, through part of your campaign strategy you have already got your local MP on side, it might alienate him or her if you then also hold a demo outside the Town Hall!)
- Do you have the resources (time, money, logistical know-how, a solid support base, publicity costs, insurance) to make it a viable proposition in the first place?
- How many existing and new supporters are likely to join your demo? (A low turnout to a demo could be worse than not having one at all)
- While no one can accurately predict if and how the media will cover your demo, is there a strong chance that the media will represent your campaign negatively?

- Is it quite possible or even likely that your demonstration is 'hijacked' by other groups who have their own agenda (which may considerably undermine the message or the peaceful nature of your demo)?
- Similarly, does your campaign have an opposing, countervailing group, who might organise a counter-demonstration?

There are no clear answers or solutions to any of these questions. But they are questions you should at least consider very carefully if you are thinking about planning a demo.

Case study

The [Student Stop AIDS](#) 'Patent Pool Party Campaign' aims to ask pharmaceutical companies to join up and put their patents into a pool so that drugs for HIV/AIDS can be cheaper and more accessible, especially in poorer countries where the virus is prevalent. Here is a [video](#) of a day of action which showcases a number of demonstrations which happened mainly in one day, the main event being a 'flash mob' on Oxford Street in London. Later in the day many of the demonstrators met up with their MPs to ask for their backing on the 'Patent Pool Party'.

So a day of action can incorporate different activities and if filmed and photographed, like in this case, it can be a great way to build up a varied library of image.

Direct action

Direct action can be controversial, often provocative, but not necessarily illegal.

Direct action is a controversial campaigning tactic because even peaceful direct action can be highly provocative. It can be seen as a last resort tactic, when other aspects of a campaign strategy have failed (or it is assumed that they will fail) - although for some campaigns and campaigners it is a central feature of their approach.

There is a thin line between demonstrations, stunts and direct action, but for our purposes here, we distinguish it by referring to it as a tactic that is not necessarily symbolic, but involves a deliberate disruption of a status quo.

In the [Campaigning Handbook](#) Mark Lattimer argues that:

'Direct actions, as impressive though they may be, rarely secure permanent change. But in disturbing the status quo and establishing in its place, however briefly, an alternative, they can prove that change is not only possible but within our grasp.'

There's also a very interesting article and debate about the effectiveness of direct action on the [F-Word website](#).

Direct action per se is not necessarily illegal, but the law is certainly complex on this subject. Many historic, landmark campaigns (including the suffragette movement and the civil rights movement in the US) involved direct action that broke the law at the time - and with hindsight people generally believe that these campaigns challenged laws that are now almost universally accepted as unjust. This does not mean that campaigners should simply break any law they see as unjust.

Campaigners should ensure they understand the laws relating to using direct action, and their implications, here is the [Activists Legal Project's advice](#) on what to expect if you find yourself charged after direct action.

Organisation

Campaigning usually means taking on organisations; so how organised are you?

Organisation was written by Mick Nott, [CycleSheffield](#)

It doesn't matter what you campaign about and whether you are doing it on your own or a group of you are doing it, you do need to be organised. Whatever size your campaign group is then somebody has to:

- agree what your purpose is;
- organise meeting places, time, dates;
- keep a record of what was said or agreed;
- ensure that meetings are run effectively and fairly;
- account for donations, funds or subscriptions;
- arrange and put stuff in social media sites, websites, newsletters;

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- write and send out press releases;
- and so on.

Many local campaign groups are run by people who are not paid to campaign, usually campaigning in their spare time, and have been educated and trained in other fields. Many local campaigns have to take on local government and/or local or national enterprises who will be organised; they will have departments and executives with varying roles and responsibilities, financial experts, public relations departments etc. The human resources of campaigning are asymmetrical. Therefore, to make your campaigning effective, it is important to be clear on how you are all organised.

Being formally organised as a group is necessary if you are to progress to being a charity or to develop as a social enterprise.

Reviewing and revising your campaign group's work and who is doing what for what purpose also means looking at things like the group's terms of reference or its constitution, so that you are content that your organisation is consistent with its stated aims and procedures. All good healthy things for an organised group to do - get organised!

Case Study

CycleSheffield has over 300 members and has an executive with specific roles and job descriptions so that we don't duplicate work and so we know what we are doing when we collaborate. So we have the usual, e.g. a Chair, a Meetings Secretary, a Treasurer, a Membership Secretary etc and each has a job description. Some members adopt more than one of these roles. To make sure we are being effective we reflect, think about, and discuss our individual and collective skills and our group's campaigns and its internal working. This understanding has helped us find 'holes' and create new or revised roles in our organisation.

We had a row amongst members and we realised that we needed Trustees to oversee governance and resolution of disputes. We had too many things going on at once and realised we needed a campaign manager to coordinate our efforts, for example, to set criteria to start a campaign but also to agree when a campaign is finished.

Being organised as a group carries authority and weight with local authorities or other enterprises. For example, we have started to liaise with our local police force on cycling matters and they have said that with our organisation and its

manifestation on our website and Facebook page, we are a group worth engaging with.

Stunts

Stunts can be an effective way of getting media and public attention.

Stunts are an increasingly popular campaign tactic. As they are designed to be visual, and often amusing, they are attractive to the media, and lend themselves well to use on video-sharing websites.

While also public, compared to demonstrations, stunts will involve far fewer people, and should therefore be easier to execute.

It is really important that the stunt clearly links to your campaign message and a still image of the stunt can convey something of its substance.

And given that stunts are mostly designed to get media attention, make sure you contact the press well in advance! If, for whatever reason, you are not able to get press to the stunt itself, make sure you take high quality photos of it yourself, and send them, along with a press release to editors of relevant newspapers or magazines.

Case study

Friends of the Earth launched a campaign called ['Final Demand'](#) in October 2011 demanding that energy companies provide cheaper and cleaner fuel to households across the UK. The [video](#) below shows a stunt which took place outside Westfield shopping centre in London and it also tied in with an online petition that supporters could sign.

For the stunt FOE campaigners stood outside Westfield and pretended to be from one of the 'big six' UK energy companies. With a second glance you can see the slight changes in the energy company names. This stunt caught a lot of people's attention as you can see in the video, not only the people who stopped and listened would have grasped what was happening, it was a busy area and there would have been others walking past whose attention would have been caught.

Case study

[Everyman's](#) 'Prostrate for Prostrate' stunt. The charity Everyman, which provides support and advice to men with prostate and testicular cancer, carried out a stunt by getting 24 men (representing the number of men who die each day in the UK from these diseases) to lie 'prostrate' in the street. The stunt was timed to coincide with the start of Everyman annual Cancer Awareness Month. At the same time, they launched an ad campaign that replicated (and therefore reinforced) the imagery of the stunt. The stunt and ad campaign were designed to highlight the need for more funding into research.

©Everyman

So, the stunt ticked a number of important boxes:

- It was visual.
- It had a sense of fun behind it.
- The stunt's nature had a clear symbolic connection to their campaign messages (i.e. 24 men in the stunt to represent 24 deaths a day, and lying down still, or 'prostrate')
- There was a campaign 'ask'. The stunt was designed to bring attention to their fundraising appeal (although there could be any number of other practical outcomes you might seek from your stunt).
- They designed it to get media attention, and issued a press release about it to connect the stunt to the issues behind it.
- It integrated well into another strand of their work i.e. their ad campaign. While you may not have the resources to run an integrated campaign, there is something powerful about being able to reinforce messages through different media.

For lots of inspiration about great stunts, visit [Taylor Herring Public Relation's 50 Top Publicity Stunts](#).