

**SKEPTICAL ACTIVISM**

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**CAMPAIGN MANUAL**

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**Skeptical Activism: Campaign Manual,**  
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# INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to the Skeptical Activism Campaign Manual!

So you don't take homeopathy for your headaches and/or malaria, you understand that climate change is real, and are generally an all around knowledgeable person, with a good filter for pseudo-science. Congratulations!

The problem is that many voters, consumers, CEOs and politicians are not using the best sources of information to guide their decision making, and this affects even you, Smarty Pants. This is where we move beyond being right, and into the realm of activism.

We already know we have science on our side, which is a good start. Unfortunately, there's a rather alarming body of research which shows that people are remarkably resistant to changing their minds due to "facts" alone. They're more likely to internalize the information when it comes with an emotional component, and when it's presented by people they like or respect. So an emotionally-based activist campaign, run by charming and amiable individuals, can add a science-friendly perspective to the public dialogue on an issue. And we do need more of that, because it's lovely.

But skeptical activism can also put pressure on people in positions of authority to change their ways. Are you concerned about a pharmacy selling homeopathy, implying it's as much a medicine as aspirin? You can use public pressure to encourage them to stop. Are you disturbed that a company can make false claims about their product without any serious ramifications? You can campaign through governmental channels, through the legal system, and through more public campaigns.

But even if changing the world isn't your thing, skeptical activism has other advantages. Activism can re-engage your local group. You may be part of a regional or campus group that is looking to do more than hold another Skeptics in the Pub. You may want to preemptively offer an active way to engage people so they don't drift away, or to inspire the people you haven't seen in awhile. Different people engage around different activities; how many people have joined your Facebook group that have never come to a meeting or event? Offering the opportunity to get involved in a practical, objective-focused campaign can pull people out of the woodwork.

Activism helps you recruit. Launching a single-issue campaign gives you the opportunity to connect with groups and individuals in a targeted way. The message of “skepticism” resonates with only a few of us, but something like a pro-vaccination campaign could have a range of potential allies, from health organizations to parents groups. A single-issue campaign reduces the need for people to buy into skepticism as a package deal, and successful campaigns pave the way for positive ongoing relationships.

Activism can also make you a “source.” An effective campaign can introduce your group, and your perspective, to journalists. The same journalists may have to cover a related story at some later date. There are many skeptics and skeptical groups that are quoted in articles about the paranormal and alternative health treatments. Building relationships with local journalists helps you become the go-to person when they need a skeptical perspective.

This manual is intended to be a starting point for creating change, through campaigns, persuasion, pressure and some old-fashioned direct action. You'll find tips on pressure tactics, political action, organizing, recruiting and more. This is by no means a comprehensive guide to engaging in successful campaigns, but more of an overview of some of the avenues open to you if you decide you'd like to try activism on for size.

**Helping to build a pro-science society isn't solely an altruistic activity. After all, you get to live there, too.**

**SKEPTICAL ACTIVISM**

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**WORKSHOP OUTLINE**



# SKEPTICAL ACTIVISM WORKSHOP OUTLINE

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## INTRODUCTIONS

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### WHAT IS ACTIVISM

Standing on the shoulders of giants

- Activism is not new
- Many ways to affect change
- Skepticism can learn from the past
- Different strategies, one goal
- Social change

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### WHY ACTIVISM

Beyond Being Right: Out of the Blogs and Onto the Streets

- Science is on our side
- Change is hard
- Raise awareness of a problem
- Get support to solve the problem
- Solve the problem
- Take your group to the next level
- Make a difference in your community
- Become 'known' in your community
- Garner media attention as a credible source
- Build a new audience
- Help build a pro-science society
- It works!

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### WHERE TO START

Picking an issue or target

- Is there an existing need?
- Be prepared to be reactive as well as proactive
- Community issues:
  - Health
  - Consumer affairs
- Check local media

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## PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

Is it worth it? Define a plan of action based on your group's needs.

- Campaign Review
- Goals
- Objectives
  - Primary
  - Secondary
- Measuring Success
- Target Audience
- Allies
- Tactics
- Overestimate everything
- Research
  - Regulations
  - Issues/Expertise
- Financial Needs
- Legal Ramifications
- Identify:
  - Budget
  - Time
  - Resources
  - People
- Don't do it alone!
- Diversity is important
- Know your team
- Make personal connections
- Be diplomatic
- Identify decision-makers

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## COMMUNICATE

- Message for skeptics and non-skeptics
- Don't assume your audience knows the issue
- Simplicity is key
- Find a personal angle
- Elevator speech
- Build a Media Plan
- Use humor with caution!
- Remember your core team

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## **TACTICS**

- Pressuring business
- Pressuring government
- Electoral Political Action
- Public Protests & Demonstrations
- Petitions
- Door knocking
- Public forums
- Online outreach

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## **PUBLICITY**

- Letters to the Editor
- Contact journalists
- Press releases
- Online outreach

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## **EXECUTION**

- Communication is key
- Measure success as you go
- Think on your feet
- Be prepared to fail

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## **ANALYSIS AND MEASUREMENTS**

Remember your goals? How will you measure them?

- Policy Change
- Media Hits
- New members
- “Raising awareness”

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## **EVALUATION**

- Remember to celebrate!
- Analyze Everything
- Debrief/Post-mortem
- Share what you learn

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## **BUILD YOUR OWN CAMPAIGN**



**SKEPTICAL ACTIVISM**

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**CAMPAIGN PLANNING**



## ORGANIZING PROACTIVELY VS. ORGANIZING ON THE FLY

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People may organize themselves under two scenarios:

1. To react to threats to consumers and citizens. Proposed anti-science legislation, the sale of pseudo-science, and the promotion of really dangerous ideas (e.g. Jenny McCarthy). You're forced to organize on the fly, in reaction to other people's poor choices and lack of scientific rigour.

OR

2. To build an organization or community. To lobby for pro-science legislation, better consumer protection and information, better media coverage of scientific "controversy," etc. This can only be done through a proactive effort to organize.

Any movement needs to be able to do both. If you've organized proactively, you'll be better equipped to respond when trouble comes up. If you do it right, you'll be better prepared to respond to the fashionable nonsense we often encounter, and build a better community to advocate for a pro-science culture.

Far too often we wind up fighting battles we think we've already won. We thought we'd dealt with people's fears about vaccines. Even George Bush Sr. recognized climate change as reality, and who the heck thought we'd still be fighting the evolution fight in the 21st century?

So what exactly would be an urgent issue the skeptical community might need to react to? We've seen all of these as real examples: governments look to provide more prescribing power to naturopaths, misinformed parents lobby school boards to ban Wi-Fi, citizens lobby (successfully!) to have fluoride removed from tap water, measles outbreaks in unvaccinated communities, and that whole issue about belief in climate change.

In these scenarios, time is most definitely not on your side. If you aren't organized, every minute you need to spend rallying the skeptical troops, gathering the right information, and educating the public is time you could be spending trying to stop the McCarthys of the world.

**Don't wait for a crisis to get organized. Start preparing now, and you'll be ready when you need to act quickly.**

Ideally, before you start to formally discuss planning a specific campaign, your group should:

- build relationships with "respected" people outside the formal skeptic community: doctors, nurses, lawyers, pharmacists, and even politicians where applicable.
- be able to identify friendly mainstream media sources.
- understand that "capital S skeptic" media resources are meaningless for campaign purposes if the general population doesn't find them interesting and accessible.
- discuss the possibility of taking action, and the various tactics that are available.

## WHAT IS A CAMPAIGN?

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A campaign is a series of actions taken with the aim of creating change.

Some examples are:

- Advertising campaigns, aimed at persuading people to purchase a product.
- Election campaigns, aimed at persuading voters to give power to a person or group.
- Issue-based campaigns, aimed at persuading the public and politicians to take a particular position.
- Community campaigns, aimed at a specific group, such as new mothers, pharmacies or alt-health users.

Some campaigns may be short and have a defined time frame, while others, like the campaign to stop vaccine misinformation, may be perpetual.

Every campaign will have goals, primary and secondary objectives, a target audience and tactics.

**Goals:** Think big. This can be a large, overarching issue, such as the ever increasing reality of global climate change. This is likely something you or even your group can not achieve, but wouldn't it be nice if you could?

**Objective:** Also known as winnable issues, these are things that you and your group will take on with the aim of actually creating change.

**Primary Objective:** The objective you base the start, finish, and ultimately the success of your campaign on.

**Secondary Objectives:** May not be stated within a campaign plan, but should be recognized as important incremental gains. They are also important to keep in mind as small wins to boost the morale of the campaign.

**Target Audience:** These are the people who can effect change. This could be key decision makers like politicians or business owners, or people you are counting on to exert additional pressure, such as moms, students, doctors, etc. Most campaigns will have multiple audiences.

**Tactics:** These are the specific actions you and your group carry out to achieve your objectives, with the target audience in mind. Tactics are the vehicle that carries your message.

**Examples:**

**Goal:** Educate the public about the safety and need for vaccinations, while countering the spread of misinformation

**Primary Objective:** Removal of anti-vaccination billboard

**Secondary Objective:** Through controversy, spark public dialogue about the credibility of said billboard

**Target audience:** Billboard rental agency, the public

**Tactic:** Boycott threats, as well as media work (letter writing, press releases etc.)

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**Goal:** Preventing the elimination of Wi-Fi in public spaces, especially schools

**Primary Objective:** Persuading school board not to eliminate Wi-Fi

**Secondary Objective:** Educate the public on the science regarding Wi-Fi and radiation

**Target audience:** School board officials, parents, the public

**Tactics:** Speak out at public school board meeting, provide information and website promotion to school board and public

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**Goal:** Challenge pseudo-scientific health advice in the media

**Primary Objective:** Persuade local publication to stop spreading pseudo-science

**Secondary Objective:** Get pro-science views aired

**Target audience:** Publication editors, the public

**Tactics:** Letter writing campaign about specific columnist giving inaccurate information and advice regarding alt-health products

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## MESSAGING

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Campaign messaging involves the specific ideas you will use to persuade your different target audiences. You may target each audience with a different focus of this message, but the message itself must remain consistent.

For example, a school board official will want to know that their decision to keep Wi-Fi in the school is based on sound science, as well as support of the citizens who ultimately re-elect them, so part of your messaging to them will include public opinion research, as well an explanation of the science.

On the flip side, parents may be less likely to trust academic research and the opinions of authority figures, so offering an emotionally resonant message, delivered by their peers, may be more effective.

Messaging is extremely important to campaigns. It can literally make or break your efforts. Try your potential messages out on other skeptics, friends, family and others who aren't self-identified skeptics: professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, your cranky co-worker and the know-it-all cabbie who takes you to work. And remember to run it past the people who you have identified as your target audience. This is an informal form of focus group testing.

You will never be able to completely control how your message is received, but with careful planning and testing, you'll have a much better chance of creating a successful message than you will if you just stick with the one you all thought sounded great at Skeptics at the Pub.

There have been many books written on the subject of effective messaging. This short introduction can't even approach a thorough and conclusive discussion of the topic. A simple tip to remember is to always ask yourself, "Why should my target audience care? How does it affect them personally?"

**For more on messaging as it relates to the media,  
see the Media section of this manual.**

## BUILDING YOUR CAMPAIGN GROUP

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Your campaign may begin with a small group of people, but its success may require the involvement of many.

When you have identified support for your goal or objectives, you can establish a campaign group. You may have your objectives established before forming your campaign group, but some campaigns will require group input before objectives are established. It's important to have everyone in the group "buy in" to the campaign, to avoid potential arguments and confusion later on.

The campaign group needs to be composed of people who are not only dedicated supporters of your goal or objectives, but people with the skills, time, and energy to carry out the necessary work. Your group should represent diverse skill sets. While some of you may be good spokespeople, others might be good with details and organization. Everyone should have a role to play.

When your goal or objective would affect a broad range of people, try to have representation from different affected groups on your campaign. For example, a campaign around vaccines could include parents as well as physicians. A diverse group can better craft your message, and help to reach networks that your group may not have access to.

A group of 5 to 10 dedicated supporters will be sufficient to form a core campaign group. From there, you will need to reach out to your supporters for additional participation in activities, such as phone fan-outs, letter writing campaigns and event and action planning.

Here are some ideas to help you grow your group:

- Talk within your group about people who are directly affected by your issue, and who might be willing to help. They don't have to be people that are already in agreement with you about the issue. You may need to educate them about the issues and the need to take action, but they are your best potential source of help.
- You aren't just looking for people who agree with the action you are taking, but people who have the time, energy and skills to be helpful. You will not only need to discuss what that person feels they can contribute, but any possible barriers. Sometimes you may receive promises from supporters that they ultimately can't deliver on, due to commitments to work, family, friends or otherwise. It's better to find out before they take on an integral role in the campaign, and end up dropping the ball. Work with them to find a level of involvement that they can manage.

While you may have some success making connections by e-mail, Facebook, blogs and Twitter, the most important tool at your disposal is one-on-one personal contact. In person is preferred, but phone calls can also be effective. You need to ensure you have the full attention of your potential volunteers, and you're able to have a dialogue, so you can respond to their concerns and answer any questions.

- If you're speaking to them on the phone, make sure you've caught them at an acceptable time. They need to be relaxed, and able to hear you out. If you're meeting face to face, try to find a comfortable environment, like a coffee shop near their work or home.
- Take the time to discuss the issue with your potential supporters, to explain the nature of the campaign and its goals. If they're interested, and you believe they'll be a helpful part of the group, you'll need to explain how they can help, and that their involvement will be an important part of the success of your campaign.
- You must also try to foster a positive relationship with everyone you have recruited, in order to maintain their support for the campaign. Remember, you may disagree with some supporters on a number of issues, but as long as they agree with you on your current campaign, that is all that's required. This may require some good, old-fashioned tongue biting.

The nature of recruiting is that some people tell you no. They might not support your issue, they might not agree with your tactics, or they just might not have time to help. Don't worry too much about it; rejection is a normal and expected part of recruiting. On the other hand, if you and your group cannot seem to recruit *anyone at all*, you might be developing a horrible campaign, and everyone is just too polite to tell you. At that point, you might want to reevaluate.

**Collect contact information.** At the very least, collect every potential supporter's home phone number and home e-mail address. Ask for permission to add them to your contact list, to keep them up to date.

Your campaign *must* maintain a record of contacts: supporters, volunteers and non-supporters. This is necessary to avoid duplicate work, and to keep accurate records of your progress.

**Live by the "Hit By A Bus Rule." If you were hit by a bus tomorrow, could the campaign continue without needing to start important tasks from scratch?**

## BUILDING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS LISTS

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Most campaigns are time sensitive. Having timely access to contact information of campaign stakeholders is extremely important. Thankfully, most skeptics are nerdy enough to appreciate a good spreadsheet or list, so here's a chance to put some together. Think of them as "living lists." Include as much information as you can, even if it's only the name of someone you'd like to contact, and continue to add details along the way.

Develop Communications Lists for the following groups, collecting the following information:

- Your campaign group - Names, phone numbers, email addresses, and links to whatever social media they use. Being able to contact people promptly is important, but so is knowing how fast your group can get a message out via social media, if the need arises.
- Supporters - Phone numbers and email addresses, for future updates, and calls to action.
- Target audiences - When possible, gather contact information for the people you intend to pressure/influence. Examples might include parents at your neighborhood school, community league leaders in an area where power lines are proposed, or people that attend a support group for new mothers.
- Natural Allies - Collect the contact information of people who are likely to already agree with your cause, and you might be able to convince to become supporters. Think of people like doctors, researchers, the science department of Universities or High Schools, parents groups, consumer protection groups, etc. Your first point of contact may be email with these resources.
- Media contacts - Every time you see an article in the paper, or hear a mainstream radio interview, or watch a segment on TV that has a decidedly skeptical bent, collect the name of the journalist and the news outlet. Do a bit of research to find out their contact information. Establishing rapport with the media is extremely valuable. (See the Media Guide for Skeptics for more information on how to utilize this list.)

A word about individual connections: while some people may take the lead on gathering contact information and maintaining communications, remember the importance of personal connections. If someone in your group has an existing relationship with a supporter, your target audience, or even the media, they should be your go-to person to maintain those contacts. But remember the "Hit By A Bus Rule," and document those contacts.

## WORKING WITH YOUR RESOURCES

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When thinking about resources on a campaign, the first thing that comes to mind is money. Funds are important, but other resources are also essential.

What else is a valuable resource?

- Supporters
- Volunteers
- Skills and networks of volunteers & supporters
- Allies
- Assets & Equipment
- Time!

### SUPPORTERS

Supporters are people that you *know* agree with your objectives, and maybe even your tactics. You know this through personal communication, either over the phone or in person. They are likely to sign a petition or join a Facebook group. They want to know what's happening, and might show up at an event you're staging.

Too little support means that you will need to spend time engaging and educating your community or target audience. Remember to use those personal connections when applicable.

An odd problem to have is one where too many people support your cause. If you have too large a base of visible supporters, people may not realize that their personal involvement is required. They may assume you have more than enough assistance, and you may have trouble motivating people to get involved. Always stress with supporters and volunteers that their support and work are necessary for the campaign to succeed.

### VOLUNTEERS

These are supporters who want to lend a hand. They'll gather petition signatures, get pizza for your meeting, phone supporters or whatever they're comfortable with. They might do this because they are strong supporters of the cause. Sometimes people volunteer simply for the community aspects of the campaign, or because they like you or another activist.

Always consider the potential for volunteers from among your supporters. If you are carrying out a longer campaign, try to use different volunteers for different events, to avoid burnout.

## **SKILLS AND NETWORKS OF VOLUNTEERS & SUPPORTERS**

Think about your active supporters. Who among them can do the following?

- Develop phone scripts
- Co-ordinate volunteers for activities such as phone banking, leaflet delivery, door knocking
- Network with other community groups and other potential allies
- Act as media spokesperson
- Moderate public events
- Decorate events
- Lead a protest
- Gather relevant information from credible sources
- Conduct research to use on the campaign
- Run your social media portion of the campaign

## **ALLIES**

These are people who are likely supporters, but are outside of your normal sphere of influence. They may be: concerned citizens also affected by bad decisions, members of churches, community or advocacy groups, labour unions, or political parties. They may be able to provide additional support to the cause, so don't forget them. What level of support can you expect, and how will you recruit these allies?

## **ASSETS & EQUIPMENT**

What does your team have available that will be useful? Computers? Cell phones? Printers? Large vehicles? Access to meeting space?

## **TIME!**

This is key. Some important considerations with time are:

- How much time will it take to carry out an action or campaign with your resources?
- How much time do your volunteers have available to help?
- What are your deadlines?

If you have an urgent situation, you may need to sacrifice thorough planning to carry out your action on time. If you are planning a proactive campaign, it is best to err on the side of taking too much time, so that you're not rushing, and making mistakes.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Some decisions you might be faced with:

- No budget for mailing? If you have enough time and volunteers, you can hand deliver your material door to door.
- If you don't have enough supporters to pack a large government building, why not stage a sit-in at an individual legislators office?
- No time or funds to stage an event of your own? Are you able to speak or present material at an event of likely supporters\*? Or, can you disrupt an event being held by your opposition\*\*?

\*Get their permission first!

\*\*You can decide whether you want to let them know you're coming.

Once you assess what you'll be working with, you can consider which actions are appropriate to your level of resources. You can also begin searching for people to fill any noticeable gaps.

## TACTICS

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You have a broad range of tactics to choose from, many of which have been used throughout history by groups attempting to affect social change.

Public demonstrations, whether light and fun or angry and confrontational, can be used to pressure businesses, government or other organizations. The “pressure” is drawing public attention to an issue, with the implication that ignoring the issue could cost a business money, or cost a politician votes. They can attract a lot of media attention.

But not all campaigns require media attention. A group that is able to convince hundreds of individuals to write letters to a small community drugstore, requesting they stop placing homeopathic treatments in the same aisle as real medicine, can have a powerful effect.

Try to determine which type of tactic would be most likely to carry your message effectively to your target audience, to persuade them to act.

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## ELECTORAL ACTIONS

**Do politics really matter?** That depends. Do you care if homeopaths have the same legal standing to prescribe medication as family doctors? Do you think politicians who pander to creationists, anti-vaccinationists and other sordid types deserve to be rewarded with power and privilege? Do you think these people should make decisions on your behalf?

While skepticism can be an avenue for seeking better knowledge, politics is about power, and it's one of the places where decisions are made. If your particular objective can only be satisfied by stopping a wrong-headed government, or getting positive legislation enacted, politics is the only game in town.

We're not suggesting that some species of noble, knowledgeable, principled and pure politician actually exists. If you do decide to become politically involved, be warned that you will not find one single politician or political party that you agree with 100%. Only you and your group can decide if working together on one issue, while disagreeing on other issues, is important enough to temporarily put your differences aside. Determine what your most important issues are, who is most likely to effect the change you want, and get to work.

And while you may not necessarily be able to remove an anti-science blowhard from office, there are avenues to pressure these unsavory types to do the right thing *anyway*, because it affects their re-election chances.

Between elections, activists engage in the following:

- Letter writing to politicians. This is most effective when hundreds or thousands of letters come in. Personal letters are always preferable to "form letters". Hand written is always better than e-mail. Letters should go to the local representative, the responsible politicians, and the Mayor/Governor/President.
- Petitioning for changes to policy or law, or even a referendum. This does not always force a government to change its ways, but is an effective way to show public support for your cause. You will need the support of thousands of citizens to win!
- Targeting government officials in vulnerable constituencies to influence decisions. If an official won in a close election, they are more vulnerable to political pressure. We all work harder when we're in danger of losing our jobs!
- Working with social movements and public policy organizations to highlight government wrongdoing. A discredited and unpopular government is likely to be more open to pressure and influence.
- Working with opposition politicians to support their issues. In return, they can act as a political voice for your cause.
- Meeting with government and opposition politicians to discuss issues and demand accountability.
- Educate the public about the political decisions that are affecting their lives.
- Donate money to pro-science candidates.
- Volunteer for a pro-science candidate.

During elections activists can:

- Promote the right to vote, and voter registration drives.
- Engage politicians and parties on important issues.
- Report the platforms of politicians and parties to the public, highlighting issues important to pro-science constituencies and your allies.
- Encourage supporters to volunteer on pro-science campaigns.
- Donate money to pro-science parties or candidates.
- Engage in third party advertising and campaigning, either against an anti-science party or candidate, or in favour of a pro-science party or candidate.
- Engage friends, family and co-workers on important issues, to encourage political change.

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## DIRECT ACTION

### What is it?

1. Direct Action is a tactic based on the principle that instead of having someone else act for you, you will, (individually or as a group) act for yourself. It's about people creating change through their own actions.
2. Direct Action is "direct" in that it seeks an immediate remedy, as opposed to indirect tactics, such as electing representatives who promise to provide a remedy at some later date.
3. Direct actions are primarily defined by their confrontational, public and disruptive nature.

Direct Action has primarily been used to create significant social change. Direct Actions can range from the small but symbolic, such as attending candlelight vigils, to the large scale and confrontational, like the occupation of the Wisconsin capitol.

Probably the most well-known type of non-violent civil disobedience is the sit-in. Typically, protesters occupy the space of a decision maker, like a corporate executive, or an elected official. They make a demand, and refuse to leave until the demand is met or negotiated. Sit-ins also take place in retail locations and public places.

There are three types of Direct Action, each with a different focus:

- Solidarity actions
- Pressure actions
- Confrontational actions

### **Solidarity Actions**

These actions put a bit of a spotlight on your cause, but are unlikely to get people to change their ways. The primary reason for Solidarity Actions is to build the strength of your group through small, symbolic acts.

Examples:

- Wearing a particular colour
- Buttons or ribbons
- Facebook statuses/groups, twibbons and other online support

A group of people wearing the same button on a specific day helps the group understand that they CAN work as a team. It also shows your target audience that you are organized and concerned. Both are very important to successful actions. These are building blocks that help you gauge interest.

**If you can't get people to retweet your cause, you may have trouble building interest in real-world action.**

### **Actions That Put Pressure on the Target Audience**

These actions increase the spotlight, and show the target audience that you are willing to escalate. They are more public, less quiet, versions of Solidarity Actions.

- \* Distribution of information at corporate offices, retail locations or a government building
- \* Displaying posters
- \* Petitions and mail-in campaigns (electronic or paper)
- \* Information sessions
- \* Public Boycotts
- \* Skits, costumes, poetry and songs
- \* Display tables at public events

Actions that put pressure on the target audience are not necessarily confrontational, but they are difficult to ignore. If you can make them "colorful" enough, they can also get media attention.

## Confrontational Actions

When done right, these actions are impossible to ignore.

- Information picket at CEO/Politician's office
- Mock public newsletters
- Phone call-ins to head office
- Mass turn-up at meetings or events
- Public protests/events
- Sit-ins and occupations

A group should usually undertake these kinds of actions after they have built up support among their members through Solidarity Actions and Pressure Actions.

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## CHOOSING A TACTIC

Regardless of whether you decide that electoral tactics or direct action is most appropriate for your group, the most important thing is to plan the right action at the right time.

Although choosing the best tactic for your issue and group will be based on many things, here are some questions to consider:

- How many people will be involved in planning the campaign?
- How much time do they have?
- How personally invested are they in the issue and the campaign?
- How many of your supporters will participate?
- What will the weather be like? Will that affect the event?
- Who is your target audience? Who are you trying to pressure?
- Do we need or want media attention? Will it help our cause or hurt it?
- Will someone react negatively? Are our supporters ready for that?
- Do we want to involve people or groups from outside our normal contacts? What are the advantages/disadvantages? If so, who?
- What materials would we need/want?
- Where would the event occur? Is that the best location? How many people does it accommodate? Is there parking?
- Will an event conflict with any major holidays?
- Are there popular events scheduled, that would pull people away from an event? E.g. A football game?

Additionally, a group should only undertake a campaign that satisfies the majority of the following criteria:

Will the Event:	Yes	No
Revolve around an issue that people can get emotionally involved in?		
Inspire the current members of your group?		
Have a message easily understood by your target audience?		
Gain support among its natural allies?		
Have tangible ways that natural allies can become involved?		
Improve the public visibility of the issue?		
Change the opinions of the target audience in a beneficial way?		
Change the policies of private companies?		
Change legislation or government policy?		
Achieve real improvement?		
Create new leaders?		
Help the community grow stronger in its ability to organize around issues?		
Set the stage for the next campaign?		
Have a clear time frame (when it began and ended)?		
Prove to be consistent with your values and vision?		
Prove to be worth the effort?		

We can't cover every question you should ask yourself when choosing a tactic. When you're planning a campaign, try to think broadly about your realistic resources, and any potential obstacles.

**You can't plan for everything, but you can try!**

Remember, any campaign should be planned so as to incrementally escalate pressure on the target audience; the longer the issue is not resolved, the more public your collective actions should become. Generally, you will want to begin with a less public action, and increase it if there is no positive response from the target audience.

## PLANNING AN ACTION

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Despite diverging views on the existence of hell, some believe that the path to it is paved with good intentions.

Even good ideas, from the best-intentioned people, will fall apart if you aren't prepared. Use charts like the one below to keep your campaign to-do list in one place. Start out by writing down as many of the necessary tasks as you can think of, and add to the list throughout the campaign. Each task should have a deadline, and be delegated to a particular person. This helps keep people accountable and on track, and also ensures that task-specific information is given to and requested from a single source.

### CAMPAIGN PLAN - SAMPLE

Task	Description	Person Responsible / Deadline
Form Core Committee	Recruit 5-7 people that can commit the time and effort to make the campaign a success.	
Determine Objectives	Decide upon the specific goals of the campaign.	
Determine Campaign/Event	Determine the most effective method(s) to achieve objectives, according to the Criteria for Action sheet. (To compare the strengths of different events, use one sheet per potential event)	
Determine Measurable Outcomes	Decide which measurable criteria you will use to identify progress/success.	
Create Event Plan	Break campaign/action into manageable tasks, with deadlines and delegation. (See Event Plan)	
Develop Communications Plan	Decide what strategies will work best for your campaign; e.g. new vs. traditional media, press releases, phone banking, advertisement, etc. Develop timelines and targets.	
Designate Media Spokesperson	Select at least one person to whom committee will refer the media. Person(s) must be able to be reached by cell phone and email, and respond articulately, engagingly and promptly to media requests.	
Assessment	Debrief and determine success of the action/campaign according to measurable outputs.	

**EVENT PLAN - SAMPLE**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>Events</b>		
Location scouting/booking		
Permits/licenses		
Event set-up		
Refreshments		
Speaker recruitment		
Sound/Video		
Other event tasks:		
<b>Communications</b>		
Messaging		
Website/blog etc.		
Write press releases		
Dissemination of press releases		
Contacting allies		
Pre-event communications materials		
Event signage		
Event communication materials		
Other communications tasks:		
<b>Assessment</b>		

Planning your action also includes deciding how to evaluate your success post-campaign. Too often an issue arises, a group reacts with a campaign, and then everyone pats themselves on the back because they did “something.” The question is, how do you gauge success? Was getting your event in the news a success if it was written about flippantly? Was your public protest at your elected representative’s office a success if seven people attended? Was your online campaign successful if you gathered 1000 petition names, but there was no change to the policy of the business you were threatening? What would you consider “success?”

## MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

While you can't measure every positive outcome of your campaign, there are a few that you can. Consider the following potential measurable outputs:

- Number of responses to invitations.
- Number of attendees/participants: anticipated number vs. actual number.
- Number of petition signatures collected.
- Number of people visiting their elected representatives.
- A short questionnaire/survey for attendees to complete.
- Number of requests for further information.
- Number of public inquiries.
- Number of media inquiries.
- Number of interviews completed.
- Number of on-message articles/features in the press.
- Number of neutral articles/features in the press.
- Number of off-message articles/features in the press.
- Number of volunteers.
- Number of new people recruited to local group.

Which ones will you be able to track during and after your campaign, to provide your group with a tangible representation of your efforts?

If you're brave, you could set a target for each measurable output. How many new leaders do you want to develop by the end of the campaign? How many people do you want at the event? Sometimes targets give people a specific goal to work toward, but if they're unrealistic they can leave a group feeling demoralized.

## EVALUATION

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First of all, congratulate yourself! No matter what the status of your primary objective, you've officially done more to effect change than the vast majority of people have done, or will ever do. Thank the people who helped out, have a party, sleep for a week. You earned it. When you wake up, it's time to get back to work. Such is the life of an activist.

At the end of every action, and especially at the end of any multi-action campaign, you will need to take time to think about its impacts and results, what you've learned, and where you can go next.

As soon as possible after the campaign (two weeks maximum, before you forget everything), arrange a time to get together with as many of your core committee members as you can, to do a formal debrief. Bring your Campaign Plan, Event Plan, and the Criteria for Action sheet that you completed before the campaign, and see how they compare to the finished product. Talk about what enabled you to achieve the outcomes you did; did people meet their deadlines, did new leaders emerge, was the message something that people really responded to, did you have more support than you had originally thought, did something happen that was unexpectedly awesome? Where did the campaign fall short? Were there things that, in hindsight, you may have been able to do to change that outcome? Try to structure the meeting so that everyone feels heard, but keep people on a productive track.

Document as much of the input as you can, so that if everyone at the meeting is killed in a freak helicopter accident, your replacements won't have to start from scratch.

It's also important to not take mistakes personally. If you missed deadlines or dropped the ball on something that was integral to the process, you *should* beat yourself up a bit. But not too much. Activism is a process, and building campaigns takes practice. Be as honest as you can with what didn't work about the event. Learn from your mistakes.

**Don't criticize yourself so much that you avoid taking on another campaign, simply for fear that you'll do it wrong.**

Having an impartial party can also help. Whether they're at the meeting or not, asking for feedback from people who weren't involved in the campaign can be very useful. This is especially true if you held a public campaign, and the people you ask for feedback aren't "skeptics."

Other activities may naturally arise out of the debriefing process. You could find out that you really have to work on your relationships with media, or on crafting an accessible message, or on building relationships with outside groups. If the mood is right, and people can see the value in becoming involved in more campaigns, the debriefing is a great time to propose a next-step campaign-prep project. They may be willing to take on tasks like setting up a media contact list, or forming a committee whose focus is making a concerted effort to build community relationships. Take advantage of the opportunity!

## HOW-TO...

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We have included this section to help you with some specific, commonly undertaken campaign components. We consider this section of the manual a living document, so if you have specific topics you would like us to cover in the next version, let us know!

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### HOW TO WRITE A LETTER

A well-written personal letter can be one of the most powerful ways to show that an issue really matters to you, your family and community. Most people today leave a comment at the bottom of a news story on the Internet, or dash off a quick e-mail to express their opinion. These are valuable ways of communicating, and we don't want to downplay them. But when it comes to political lobbying, nothing beats a well-considered, printed letter arriving in a politician's hands. And when considering a letter to an editor, remember that an onslaught of thoughtful, passionate emails on the same topic will always get more attention than a solitary letter.

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### TIPS FOR WRITING LETTERS TO POLITICIANS

1. Target the local politician that deals with the issue you're concerned about, or who represents your geographic area.
2. Be concise, and stay on topic. Your goal is to let your local politician know why this issue is important, and why they should support your campaign's position. If you have another issue with your politician around tax policy, foreign policy, etc., it's best to address that at another time.
3. Provide copies of any research or reports you reference.
4. Share your first-hand experiences when applicable. The politician should know why their decision is going to affect your life or the lives of their constituents.
5. Be polite, but firm. It's okay to express your emotions in your letter, but be careful not to launch personal attacks against the person that you're writing.
6. Make a specific request, which is often the same as your campaign's primary objective, or support for it. In addition, always request a response to your letter.
7. Send copies of your letter to the top of the ladder. It's important to let your local official know about your concerns, but higher-level representatives should also receive a copy when applicable, as should officials in charge of the area your issue falls under (health, education, etc.).

## SAMPLE LETTER TO POLITICIAN

Councillor Gullable Jones  
5305 Credulous Ave  
New Gullableville, AR 54367

Dear Mr. Jones,

I recently read an article in the Area Report regarding the upcoming council vote on water fluoridation in New Gullableville quoting you as saying “We don’t know that it helps, and we know that parents are concerned about possible harm.”

As a schoolteacher, a mother of 2, and one of your constituents, I feel the need to strongly disagree.

A recent study in Australia has shown that fluoridation does indeed help reduce the cavity rate among children. I’ve included the report with this letter.

As to the concerns for harm, there are too many studies to list that conclude that water fluoridation is not of any harm to the people who have been drinking it. In fact, Dr. Reasonable at the University of Facts has said he is willing to make a presentation to council, and provide the volume of studies if needed.

We know that fluoridation works, and we know that many children come from families that cannot afford regular dental care. I encourage you to reconsider your position and vote to keep smiles on children’s faces.

Should you remain unconvinced of the validity and necessity of keeping our water fluoridated, I would like to hear from your office as to the reasons why, with supporting documentation.

A telephone call is preferable and I can be reached at 867-5309.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Smith  
4367 Sanity Lane  
New Gullableville, AR 78953

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## TIPS FOR WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

1. Determine your target paper. Alternative media? Local daily? National press? Your tone and subject may change if you have a specific paper in mind, but you can always send your letter to all applicable papers.
2. Are you bringing a fresh perspective, or correcting previous flawed reporting? Be sure to reference any applicable past articles.
3. Be concise, and stay on topic. Your goal is to let the readers know why your issue is important, and why they should support your campaign.
4. Only briefly refer to supporting research or evidence. You're going for the gut here. Do not be afraid to utilize the argument from popularity, if your facts also back up your position. (And of course they do, you're a skeptic, right?)
5. On that point, personal experiences are hugely important. If your letter is going to local media, localize the message as well, referring to local demographics and institutions.
6. Do not use the cautious language of scientists. Confidence is important in public persuasion.
7. When possible, do not just communicate your problem, but also a proposed solution that your campaign offers.
8. Self-publish the letter online and share like crazy through social media. Be sure to point out any edits the media has made, so online readers become aware of what they might be missing.

**SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

The Daily Dish  
Jill Hornswaggled, Editor  
12345 Duped Drive  
New Gullableville, AR 78953

Re: City considers fluoride ban

I recently read in disappointment your June 1 article outlining City Council's plans to remove fluoride from our tap water.

As a schoolteacher I see kids every day whose parents may not be able to afford good dental care. It isn't pretty, but it could be worse. My mother remembers before the city started adding fluoride in the 70s and she will tell you, it was even worse then.

Study after study has concluded that current fluoride levels, as provided by our city, are safe and no evidence of harm exists.

I don't remember this being an election issue and I know I wouldn't have voted for Councilor Jones if I had heard him considering this before.

Jennifer Smith

Jennifer Smith  
4367 Sanity Lane  
New Gullableville, AR 78953

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## TIPS FOR RUNNING A LETTER-WRITING EVENT

1. Prepare a sample of what an effective letter on the topic would look like, as well as a fact sheet on the issue and the campaign.
2. Arrange a letter writing party with your supporters, or set aside a portion of a previously scheduled event, to ensure that people don't forget to write the letters.
3. Book a table at a public meeting, conference or festival, where people are able to stop for a moment to write.

To any letter-writing event, bring:

- Copies of the sample letter.
- Addresses of newspapers.
- Addresses and names of politicians, CEOs or whomever is applicable to your campaign.
- A variety of paper, envelopes, pens and stamps.
- Reading material about your issue and campaign.
- A few volunteers who can talk about the issues with people who drop in.

If possible, keep copies of the letters for your files. Make sure to collect participants' contact information, should there be additional action to be taken in the future.

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## HOW TO CREATE A PHONE SCRIPT

When contacting a large number of supporters or target audience members, it can be difficult to ensure that all the callers are delivering the same message. Creating a phone script can help.

When you're writing a script, keep the following in mind:

- Respect the person's time. You don't know what situation you've called into. Some people are happy to listen, but they don't want you to waste their time. You have about three minutes to make your case. Don't attempt to tell lengthy stories over the phone.
- Connect at the beginning. Most bad scripts start right off talking at the person almost nonstop. After the "Hi, is this \_\_\_\_\_?" they just start right with their request. Wrong! Try pausing in the opening and connecting. If you'd like, rather than using the old, "How are you?" try "Can you hear me OK?"
- Use the word "briefly" in the beginning. Most people you speak with are busy, so prefacing what you're going to say with the word "briefly" helps put them at ease - and lets them know you respect their time.

In one short paragraph, describe:

- Why you're calling, and what you want them to do.
- The real, tangible, and/or urgent need to do it,
- The benefits of doing what you're asking them to do, or
- The consequences of not becoming involved (don't fear monger, but do be clear as to the possible repercussions).

Briefly describe their problem, and what you want them to do about it:

"The reason I'm calling is that you might have heard about (mention situation). The fact is (brief description of the evidence and/or emotional content). A group of us are doing (action), which we hope will (your objective). I'm hoping that we can count on your support by (doing action).

Be clear about exactly what you're asking them to do.

Ask for something specific, and get confirmation:

- Will you come out to this event?
- Will you contact city hall?
- Will you be a volunteer?

If they avoid confirming, ask what you can do to help:

- Clarify a point
- Let them think about it
- Phone back at a different time

Confirm all the information that was imparted throughout the call: dates, times, actions, agreed upon follow-up, etc.

Remember that telephone scripts are meant to be heard, not read. You may think you've drafted the perfect script, only to have your callers' tongues tied into knots trying to present it. Read the script aloud, putting yourself in the listener's shoes, imagining if you were on the receiving end. Practice it with your committee, and work the bugs out before you make any calls to your contacts.

Phone scripts accomplish three very important objectives:

1. They raise the visibility of the issue and the action.
2. They deliver a consistent message.
3. They identify who is supporting the action.

To evaluate your own scripts, consider the following:

- Does it start out respectful, and involving?
- Is the message simple and straightforward?
- Is it easy to read out loud, in short sentences and easy words?
- Is it energetic and enthusiastic?
- Does it encourage the listener to take action?
- Does it seek a commitment within a specified period?
- Does the caller verify the contact information?
- Does it contain the time and location of the event or meeting?

**Plan out the maximum amount of time that you are willing to spend on each call. Remember, you're trying to reach a lot of people, and if you get sucked into a long discussion, you won't have time to make other calls.**

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## HOW TO RUN A PHONE BANK

Phone banking is useful when you have a contact list so large, you'll need many people to help you contact all of them. This can be done in separate locations, with a divided list, or you may choose to get together in available office space. You can also ask group members to bring cell phones to a meeting location.

### 1. Don't argue with the contacts

If you are speaking with someone who is absolutely hostile to your campaign, or holds a different opinion from you or your organization or another issue, don't argue! Your mission on the phone is to find out who is supportive and who is going to participate, and sometimes who is undecided about the issue. You are welcome to calmly discuss issues that are relevant to the campaign, but do not get sucked into debate.

### 2. Don't answer a question if you aren't sure of the answer

If someone is asking you something you're stuck on and you don't know the answer, say so! You are not expected to be an expert on all things, and someone else from the campaign should be able to help you out. Familiarize yourself with the issues and campaign materials. Have them on hand for reference. If you do not have the information you need, tell the person that you or someone from the campaign will call them back. Be sure to take down the person's name, phone number, and their concern to pass along.

### 3. Zero tolerance

You are not expected to take abuse. If someone is abusive, hang up. Please keep detailed notes of your call, and let the campaign know right away of any problems.

### 4. No negative campaigning

This is important. Negative campaigning is the dirty style politics of mudslinging and running down your opponents. You do not need to do this. Focus on the issue at hand, and achieving your goals. You may speak with some people who have a negative opinion of people on the other side of the issue. Do not get sucked into these conversations. For example, you may get people who want to complain about all the problems that may be happening; use this as an opportunity to talk about how your campaign can help overcome these problems.

If someone asks your opinion of some of the people making the poor decisions surrounding your issue, you can say a few things such as "I respect/like him or his

work, but I think we can do things differently." Or simply "I think our position will be better for the community/public/children/organization."

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## **5. Do not "lead" your contacts**

You want to ensure your information on possible supporters is as accurate as possible. You will need to be careful of "leading" people to say they will support or help. An accurate indication that someone may be supporting, or even definitely not supporting, is more useful to the campaign than an inaccurate indication that someone is supporting.

## **6. When to leave a voice mail**

Ideally, someone's first contact with the campaign will be speaking to an actual person. If you are calling to identify support or recruit volunteers, it is best **not** to leave a message. An exception would be if this is someone you already know and have an established rapport with.

If you are phone banking simply to provide information, or invite people to an event, leaving voice mail messages is recommended.

## **7. When to call**

This is entirely dependent on who you are calling. If you can, find out the hours typically worked by your target audience. If you are unaware of their hours, here is a guideline to use:

Monday - Thursday: 10:00am to 8:30pm.

Friday: 10:00am to 8:30pm - however, if there is an event happening that evening, you may want to stop calling earlier as you will not get good results.

Saturday: 10:00am to 8:00pm.

Sunday: 1:00pm to 8:30pm. Start later so people can sleep in and/or go to Church.

## **8. Note taking**

Identifying the support level of your contacts is key. Make sure you take note of it using the marking system! If you hear anything else that you think is important, please make a note. Make sure you update any contact information the campaign is keeping.

## **9. Marking system:**

1. Has stated clearly that they support the campaign, no hesitation. Would like to keep in touch regarding events and actions.
2. Agrees with your position on the issue but may not support the campaign.
3. Is undecided, but open.
4. Is against the campaign.

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## HOW TO DELIVER LEAFLETS

In some campaigns, you may develop a leaflet to be delivered. This can be for information purposes only, with information on your issue and campaign, or it may be an invitation to an event such as a rally or community Town Hall meeting.

Like e-mail, leafleting can be an efficient way of delivering a message to a large number of people. However, it is also going to be less effective in making the personal connection that you'll get from phoning or door knocking. Many people may not read the leaflet, or may need more information than can be provided before they'll agree to support your cause.

### Tips for effective leaflet delivery:

#### Neighbourhood delivery

This will require planning. You need to map out your target areas and create individual maps for each volunteer dropping the leaflets off. You may even door knock during leaflet delivery, if you have the time and resources available. This can be effective if you're holding an event in the immediate area, or know that there are a large number of people in the communities you are targeting who are interested in your issues.

#### Event delivery

You can send volunteers to an event to deliver leaflets, as long as it's an event planned by your campaign, or one where your activity would be welcome. Some examples:

- Outside a sports arena/stadium where people are getting off public transit, or entering/exiting the stadium/arena before a game or a concert.
- Outside the entrance to a music festival. You can also ask if the festival will allow you to deliver your materials inside, sometimes for a small fee.
- At a Town Hall meeting or lecture regarding a related topic, or affecting a similar community of interest.
- At a conference discussing a relevant topic, or organized by a professional association or student group with ties to your issue.

Whenever possible, obtain permission from the organization whose event you are leafleting. This is less important with large scale events like football games and stadium concerts, but Town Hall meetings and conferences organized by groups you may look to for support should be consulted before you show up with a team of leafletters.

**Event leafleting allows you to reach a large number of people quickly. Some of them may also stop and talk to you.**

### **Community delivery**

If your issue is relevant to student populations, a university or college campus is a great place to engage the public and deliver materials. Popular public parks may also be effective. Less effective is delivery outside of grocery stores and shopping malls, people will be busy with their errands and potentially less responsive. However, if your campaign is related to a particular store or business, targeting those places is a great way to get your message across.



**SKEPTICAL ACTIVISM**

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**MEDIA MANUAL**



# MAPPING A MEDIA STRATEGY

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*The information in this section is taken almost completely unedited from Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing, by Charlotte Ryan. It's a comprehensive guide to running a solid media campaign with very little money. We strongly suggest reading the entire book if you plan to make media a large part of your campaigns.*

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## THE STARTING POINT

### CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

- How widely recognized is the issue?
- What audiences do you need to reach?
- What targets do you need to pressure?
- Where does your group need strengthening?

### PREPARE YOUR MESSAGE

- What framing(s) of the issue currently surface in public debate?
- What is your framing of the issue (definition of the issue, who is responsible, what is the solution)?
- What images/cultural themes will carry the message?
- What documentation/research is available and useful?

### WEIGH YOUR RESOURCES

- Do you have ongoing relations with mainstream media?
- Do you have volunteers that are familiar with mainstream media's news norms and needs?
- Do these volunteers have sufficient time to do consistent media outreach, and to be accessible?
- If you lack sufficiently skilled labour inside your group, can you borrow or buy help?

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## THE GENERAL DIRECTION

### DO A PRESS SURVEY

Of the media covering this issue,

- Which media reach your committed supporters?
- Which media reach potential activists, who already agree with you and might be mobilized?
- Which media reach the public who could be potential sympathizers?
- Which media reach your strategic targets, key insiders and decision makers you have targeted in your political strategy?
- How do these media currently cover your issue?

### SET PRIORITIES

Based on the survey results, focus on the media outlets that are most likely to cover your story, and are attainable with your current resources. Besides the regular news, consider:

- Letters to the editor
- Op-eds
- Canned op-eds
- Local access cable
- Features
- Radio and podcasts
- Talk shows
- Community papers
- Weeklies
- Opinion columns
- Blogs

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## PACING FOR THE LONG HAUL

### DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY REPORTERS

Instead of one-shot outreach:

- **Check in with key reporters occasionally.** Don't wait for them to call you.
- **Send background mailings:** reports, updates, etc.
- **Invite key reporters to meet your volunteers and supporters.**
- **Monitor coverage** and give reporters/editors constructive criticism. Suggest possible stories.
- **Brief editorial boards.**
- **Arrange a workshop** for reporters covering your beat.
- **Plan "reality tours,"** that bring reporters to the front lines.

### FOCUS ON THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF DIFFERENT MEDIA

- **Consider the kind of media.** Radio, TV, print and Internet-based media have different needs.
- **Consider the geographic spread.** International, national, regional and local media will cover different stories.
- **Consider the frequency of media coverage:** hourly, daily, weekly, monthly.
- **Consider the demands of distinct formats:** op-ed, feature story in Living section vs. straight news.

# CREATING A PRESS RELEASE

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A press release should be a central tool in your media kit. A professional press release can put you on the map with journalists. It will let them know that your group exists, or remind them that you're out there, and show them that you have a well-informed opinion on a specific issue, or a broad topic.

The same release can also help you build alliances. It can explain your positions and platforms to groups that you work with, or to groups that you've identified as potential allies on a particular issue.

Finally, in these days of shrinking newsrooms and dwindling budgets, a press release is ready-made content for a reporter on a deadline. If your release is well written, informative and engaging, there's a good chance that your text, and your perspective, will find its way into a story with very little editing.

## WRITING THE RELEASE: DOS AND DON'TS

Content and style both contribute to the success of your press release. It has to be easy to understand, but also (literally) easy to read.

### DO

- **Give it a date.** Timeliness is key.
- **Write a snappy headline.** Try to summarize the story.
- **Keep it concise,** preferably to a single page. Try to use no more than three sentences per paragraph.
- **Make it interesting.** Grab a reporter's attention, and she'll bring her audience with her.
- **Number the pages.** If you go over one page, end the first with "More follows." Start the second with a new paragraph, and close the final page with "Ends."
- **Who, what, when, where, why and how.** Try to get this vital information into the opening paragraphs.
- **Let the reader know who you are.** Make sure your organization and its mission are clearly identified.
- **Include a quote from an identified spokesperson.** Have a procedure in place so that, if you're writing the statement for them, the spokesperson knows what he or she "said" before a reporter calls.
- **Provide contact names and phone numbers.** Make sure your key people have a copy of the release, and the necessary background information, and that at least one person is available outside office hours.

- **Check deadlines in advance.** Make sure your release arrives with ample time for journalists to follow up with you.
- **Follow up with a phone call.** Find out if your release was received, and be ready to send another copy right away.
- If the release is about an event or a photo opportunity, include information about when and where photographs can be taken.
- If you need to include extra background information, put a short “Notes to Editors” section at the end of the release.

## **DON'T**

- **Don't assume the reader will know about the issue,** or your position. Summarize the situation so they know why they should care.
- **Don't write too much.** Long-winded, rambling prose undermines your impact.
- **Don't include extraneous details.** Keep to the important points, or you risk confusing the reader.
- **Don't use “insider” language.** Jargon, technical terms and abbreviations will alienate and confuse anyone who doesn't know what they mean
- **Don't try to write the reporter's headline.** Tell the facts simply, and avoid clever puns, repetition, and clichés.
- **Don't make claims you can't prove,** and avoid exaggeration. Overstating your case can destroy your credibility.
- **Don't ignore presentation.** Spelling mistakes and bad grammar damage your credibility. Get someone to proofread your release before you send it.
- **Don't ignore media interest in your press release.** Return phone calls for further comment, or they're likely to ignore you the next time.

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## FORMATTING GUIDELINES

### HEADLINE

- The heading should be centered, and in bold.
- Keep it short and to the point.

### FIRST PARAGRAPH

- **Get the five W's in right away:** Who, When, What, Where, Why.
- **Try to summarize the story in the first paragraph.** Ideally, readers should understand the issue, and your position, even if that's where they stop.

### BODY OF THE RELEASE

- **Make your points in order of importance.** Elaborate on the first paragraph. Lay out the facts, provide statistics, identify the people involved. Less important information should come later.
- **Include a direct quote** from a relevant spokesperson. It should provide a brief overview of your group's position. If you're writing a quote for someone else, get approval before using it. Remember to give the quoted person's full name and job title.
- **Identify yourself.** Include a description of your organization and its mission.
- **Never split paragraphs or sentences across pages.** If the press release goes onto a second page, type "More follows" at the bottom right hand corner and "Continued" at the top of the second page.

### AT THE END OF THE RELEASE

- **Make sure it's clear where your release ends.** Put the word "ENDS" at the bottom of the last page.
- **Provide contact information.** Give names, email addresses and telephone numbers of people a journalist can contact for more information or comment.
- **Notes to Editors.** Use this space to provide details about how a reporter can get copies of a study, photographs or other background information.

**SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE**

LOGO if printed  
(not if emailed)

For immediate release: DATE

**HEADLINE CENTERED AND IN BOLD**

A very important event occurred in our area today. By the end of this paragraph, you'll know what happened, who was involved, where and when it happened, and why or how it occurred. You'll also know how Our Organization feels about it

We'll elaborate on the event, and our response, in this paragraph. We'll introduce our most important messages early, and keep quotes concise and relevant. We'll explain why the event is relevant to the media we're contacting, and what is new or interesting about it.

By now, we'll definitely include all the details, such as a venue, date, ticket price, and start time for an event. We'll also explain how to get involved either by attending organizing, or providing financial report.

"I'll add a concise quote about our organization's position," said Spokesperson Firstname Last. Quotes are always followed by "said." They aren't indented or italicized, and don't use exclamation marks. "Subsequent quotes should be attributed to my last name," Last said.

Our Organization is a group of volunteers who work to raise awareness and create change around a particular issue. We do that by engaging in certain activities, which we'll describe very briefly.

ENDS

**For more information:** Your name, email address and phone number, plus a link to your organization's website, and any other useful resources. Let the reporter know if anyone else involved is available for an interview, and how to reach them.

**Notes to the editor:** If you need to include more information too technical or boring for the main body of the release, put it here. If you have reports or photographs or other source materials available, let the reporter know how to access them.

# TALKING TO THE MEDIA

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## WHY IT MATTERS

When a journalist contacts you for an interview, it's exciting, and probably a little scary. If you're prepared to make the most of it, it's also an amazing opportunity. Your interview may only result in a few seconds of coverage, but your message will reach hundreds, even thousands of people.

An interview has two key advantages over advertising:

1. It's automatically more credible to the audience.
2. Your organization won't have to pay for it.

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## MAKE YOUR STORY CONNECT

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

The news isn't just about information. It's about attracting attention. A successful story must inform *and* engage. No story is automatically significant to the audience. Stories that resonate are stories about people; what they're doing, why and how they're doing it, or how an event is affecting them. It's not enough to tell people what's going on. You have to explain *why it matters to them*.

### MAKE IT EMOTIONAL

Great stories have an emotional connection to the audience. Reporters are often looking for a "real person," to tell the story, to create that connection. Officials can explain the issues, point out the challenges, and propose solutions. "Real people" are often why the audience will actually care.

### MAKE IT A REAL STORY

A good news story is just like any other story. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. You should provide the reporter with a simple, straightforward narrative, that includes your message and key supporting points. It will make your information easier to understand, and your message easier to remember.

## MAKE IT TIMELY

When a reporter calls and asks to talk to you NOW, the clock is ticking. What is news right now will be old within 24 hours.

- **Immediacy is a hook.** It's the reason a story is being reported today, not tomorrow. The audience has a short attention span. If you can't do the interview when the story is breaking, it will be reported without your input.
- **The web has changed the meaning of deadlines.** Immediate updates are key for news websites. News organizations (and even individual reporters) want to be the first to break stories and find new information.

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## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

### THE "SCRUM"

This is the classic "on-site" interview that you've seen in the movies. Something newsworthy has happened; everyone wants a comment. Reporters and photographers crowd you in a public place. Microphones, cameras, and questions come at you from all directions.

The key to surviving the scrum is making sure you have a **CLEAR, CONCISE MESSAGE**. You can phrase it in different ways, but keep it simple and consistent. For example:

We don't want to put this company out of business. We just want them to stop selling a product that doesn't actually have any health benefits.

- and then -

This product makes health claims that aren't supported by the clinical evidence. We just want the company to stop selling a product that clearly doesn't work the way they say it does.

**When questions are being fired at you, don't panic. Take your time, stick to your message, and only answer questions that are relevant to your area of expertise.**

## THE ONE-ON-ONE

The one-on-one is the more common type of interview. Your organization has issued a news release, and reporters want more information. Or, they want your reaction to a developing story. They need a comment quickly, from an intelligent and articulate spokesperson.

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## TYPES OF MEDIA

- **Print:** Newspapers and magazines have room for more background, depth and analysis. In addition to the main story, there might be sidebars, fact lists or timelines of events. (Remember that reporters usually don't write the headlines. If the headline is misleading, don't blame the reporter.)
- **Online:** News stories on the Internet can be updated after publication, and readers will demand that they be updated with new information. Make sure you contact the reporter with updates if something changes after your interview.
- **Television:** TV stories are driven by powerful visuals and emotional engagement. You'll have to get your message across quickly. 30 seconds on TV is considered equivalent to a front-page newspaper story. Sound bites are measured in seconds. So again, clear, concise messages are critical.
- **Radio:** Radio interviews are often done by phone. News stories will only be a minute or two in length, and deadlines are usually every half hour. Current affairs interviews are longer, but don't let that fool you. In a five minute interview, you'll probably only get to answer four questions.

The more concise and clear your answers, the more opportunities you'll have to reinforce your message.

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## WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

### TAKING CHARGE

Most of the time, reporters are genuinely interested in what you have to say. They're trying to report the story accurately, and they want you to inform them about some aspect or issue. Sometimes, the person who contacts you will have his or her own agenda. Either way, it's up to you to make sure that your interview conveys the right information. You *can* guide the interview, to ensure that your message gets to the public.

Your key messages must be aligned with your group's communications strategy. Those messages are the most important part of the interview, and you should not deviate from them.

- **Have supporting points**, but no more than three.
- **Know exactly what you're talking about**, and have your facts ready. This will help you to be as concise as possible.
- **Take time to prepare**. If a reporter calls, requests an interview and mentions a tight deadline, you'll need to hurry. But you should still take a moment to collect yourself. Ask if you can put the reporter on hold, or call back in two minutes. Prepare as best you can, and then do the interview.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Time, place and anticipated length of the interview.
- The focus of the story.
- What the reporter wants from you. Information? Accountability?
- Who else is being interviewed for the story?
- Who is the intended audience?
- If it isn't live, when will the interview be aired/published?

**Expect a background interview.** This happens before the actual on-air interview. The information you provide will probably make it into the story in some way, so be prepared: define your message, define your supporting points, gather and know your facts.

### You have the right to:

- Take the time to prepare adequately. (Keep the reporter's deadline in mind.)
- Say no to an interview request. If possible, offer to find the right person for the reporter to speak to.
- Stay within your realm of expertise. **DON'T GUESS.** If you don't know an answer, offer to find out and get back to the reporter.
- Politely end the interview whenever you choose.
- Call the reporter after the interview, if you need to amend a statement or get more details about when the interview will be used.

### You cannot expect to:

- Receive the questions in advance of the interview.
- See the completed story before publication.
- Change your quotes or edit the story.
- Prevent the inclusion of opposing views.
- Issue a correction that will get as much coverage as your original statement.
- Always be happy with the way your answers are edited. The clearer and simpler your answers are, the less likely they can be used out of context.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Stay focused.** Don't multi-task. If you get distracted, you can lose the thread of your narrative, and lose the opportunity to communicate it effectively.
- **Maintain your energy.** Your passion for your message is compelling, and your enthusiasm is just as important as your expertise.
- **Have all your information in front of you,** but don't read your answers. Unless you have a lot of practice, it will sound obvious and unnatural.

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## THE INTERVIEW: TAKING CONTROL

You are the expert in this discussion. Taking and maintaining control of the interview is not only possible, it is absolutely vital. Your answers must be clear and understandable, and they must consistently redirect the focus back to your group's central message.

### THE THREE Cs

#### Concise:

- **Avoid long words and lengthy sentences.** Your comments will typically be edited to 5-15 seconds or a short sentence. Get to the point.
- **Pause and gather your thoughts,** instead of relying on filler words like "uh," "like," or "you know." You will sound both more confident and more professional.
- **Never answer with just "yes" or "no."** Follow up with a brief explanation.

#### Conversational:

- **Avoid jargon,** industry terms, acronyms, and abbreviations. Use words and descriptions that an average reader or viewer will understand. When you must use jargon, explain it - briefly.
- **Use figures** to illustrate your answer.

"This is a critical issue for our organization. Two thirds of our members have children in this school district. This bill threatens their access to a quality science education."

#### Catchy:

- **Think of a TV news headline,** or a highlighted quote in a newspaper. Reporters are looking for these memorable phrases or sound bites.

## TIPS FOR CRAFTING SOUND BITES

### The Introductory Phrase:

Introduce your important points with a short phrase, followed by a pause. This will focus the attention of the reporter, and the audience, on whatever you say next. It will also make it easy for an editor to isolate your next sentence. Make it concise and compelling, and you'll have a ready-made sound bite.

Some examples include:

- “The important point to remember is this; ...”
- “Consider this; ...”
- “Here’s something we should all think about;...”
- “A case in point; ...”
- “And it’s important not to forget;...”
- “One final point; ...”
- “The most interesting aspect is this; ...”
- “The biggest mistake we can make is this; ...”

### The Inserted Why:

When you use the word “because,” insert the word “why” before it. This draws attention to your main point, and can help create a sound bite.

We won’t sit back and let people spread misinformation about the safety of vaccines, because increased rejection of vaccination puts the health of our children and our community at risk

- Becomes -

We won’t sit back and let people spread misinformation about the safety of vaccines. Why? Because increased rejection of vaccination puts the health of our children and our community at risk

**NEVER SAY “NO COMMENT.”** You’re giving up an opportunity to say something positive. It also signals the reporter to start digging for whatever facts you seem to be hiding. If you’re asked a question you don’t want to answer, just divert your response back to your message.

**THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “OFF THE RECORD.”** Whether the camera is on or off, or you’re just chatting socially, a reporter is a reporter first, and your friend second. Resisting a good story is extremely difficult. Assume that everything you say will end up in a story, even if only as background information.

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## THE DIFFICULT INTERVIEW: STAYING IN CONTROL

### DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

When you don’t know the answer, be honest. Offer to find the answer, or the person who knows it, and get back to the reporter right away.

When you do know the answer, but for some reason can’t make it public, use **BLOCKS** and **BRIDGES**. These are short phrases that allow you to deflect sensitive questions, and redirect your answer back to your key message. **Don’t overuse them, or you’ll sound evasive or insincere.**

- “That’s only part of the issue...”
- “That’s a good point, but...”
- “That’s not my area of expertise...”
- “I think what you’re really asking is...”
- “I can’t speak to that, but what’s important to know is...”
- “That speaks to a much larger issue...”
- “The important thing to remember is...”
- “Let’s look at this from a broader perspective...”
- “Here’s how I understand the situation...”

**NEVER REPEAT INCORRECT INFORMATION, even to negate it.**  
If you create a sound bite, it could wind up defining the issue in a way that’s bad for your message.

## VERY DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

When you know the answer, but the reporter is letting you get your message across, stay calm and be polite. You're still the expert, and you can find a way to get your information out, but if you lose your temper, you *will* lose control of the interview.

Here are some strategies for handling the different interview styles that might make controlling the interview difficult:

- **Interruptions**: Acknowledge the reporter, then finish your point. Take care that you're not being interrupted because your answers are overly long or unfocused.
- **Multiple questions**: Take control. "You've asked a lot of question here..." Answer the question that allows you to keep the focus on your message.
- **Paraphrasing**: Don't let reporters put words into your mouth, with phrases such as: "In other words..." "So what you're saying is..." Restate paraphrases that are accurate so they're in your words.
- **Negativity**: Avoid using negative tone or language. Turn negatives into positives. For example: "Shouldn't you have done more to...?"
  - Don't say "no." Instead, turn it into a positive.
    - "Our organization has and will continue to work with..."
  - Or refute the point.
    - "That's not right. Our group continues to..."

**DON'T TRY TO CONCEAL NEGATIVE INFORMATION.  
Let the interviewer know how your organization  
is working to solve the problem.**

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## ENDING THE INTERVIEW

This can seem like the most difficult part of an interview. Once you've stated your message, how do you end the discussion politely?

- **Use an appropriate closing line.** “That’s all I have to say,” or “I’ll get back to you if I get more information.” These words suggest separation. End with a “Thank you,” and you can turn and walk away without being rude.

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- **Use a gesture.** Holding up your hand as if to say “stop”, or even shaking the reporter’s hand, allow you to finish the interview in a controlled fashion.
- **Once you’ve ended the interview,** don’t turn back to answer one last question.

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## **YOUR MESSAGE IS MORE THAN YOUR WORDS**

Your appearance, posture, attitude and tone of voice all convey information to the reporter and the audience. If you are calm, confident and professional, it will help the audience to trust you, and make it easier for them to take your opinions seriously.

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- If you’re going into a studio or newsroom for an interview, arrive early so you can get used to your surroundings. Be prepared to see lots of people walking around before, during and after the interview.
- Reporters are trained to be aware of their surroundings. If the interview is happening in your office or workplace, and there are photographs, documents or other items that you don’t want made public, put them away.
- Relax, and be yourself. You’re being asked to talk because you’re the expert. You know your stuff!
- Passion is good. It’s engaging for the audience. BUT
- Don’t get angry, or show that you’re feeling angry. Controlling yourself is vital to controlling the direction of the interview.
- Avoid dairy products, as they can affect your voice. Try to have a sip of water before you start speaking.
- Don’t slouch! Stand straight, or sit forward in your chair
- Dress somewhat conservatively. Avoid lots of white, bright colors, busy prints or stripes.
- Men: unbutton your coat when you sit down. Wear knee-length socks if you sit with your legs crossed.

### **TV INTERVIEWS**

- Make eye contact with the interviewer. Don’t look into the camera unless you’re specifically told to.
- Anchor your feet. Don’t move or gesture unnecessarily. If you do, people will pay attention to what you’re doing, and not hear what you’re saying.

## **PRINT INTERVIEWS**

- Don't think that being in print means you don't need to worry about your appearance. Reporters will comment on your clothes, body language, tone of voice, gestures and expressions, as a way of adding some color to the story
- Your interview will likely be recorded. If you are concerned that your answers might be taken out of context, ask for a copy of the recording.

## **RADIO INTERVIEWS**

- Words paint pictures for radio listeners. Think of creative ways to explain your message. Use examples, simple figures and interesting anecdotes.
- Don't read your answer.

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## **PRACTICE AND REVIEW**

### **BE PREPARED BEFORE YOU GET THE CALL**

- If there is a story in the news that you think a reporter might want to talk to you about, prepare your messaging and key information ahead of time.
- Make sure you have a clear understanding of any new project your organization starts, so that you can talk about it if a reporter calls.
- Have a friend or colleague conduct a mock interview, without telling you the questions in advance. Get used to thinking on your feet, and learn to be comfortable directing the conversation.
- Watch professional spokespeople being interviewed. Pay attention to what they do right (and wrong).

### **REVIEW AND IMPROVE**

- ALWAYS watch/listen to/read your interviews when they are available.
- Pay attention to the strength of your message, as well as your performance.
- If you're not happy with the message, or the way you presented it, figure out what went wrong and do it better the next time.
- Pay attention to feedback from friends who aren't as familiar with the issues as you are. If they understood your message, you've done your job.
- Don't dwell on an unsuccessful interview. Learn what you can from the experience, and start preparing for the next opportunity.
- Don't try to have an unflattering interview removed or suppressed. It won't work, and will likely generate more interest than simply publishing a polite response.

**SEE THE BLANK WORKSHEET SECTION FOR INTERVIEW PREPARATION FORMS**



**SKEPTICAL ACTIVISM**

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**BLANK WORKSHEETS**



## CRITERIA FOR ACTION

Will the Event:	Yes	No
Revolve around an issue that people can get emotionally involved in?		
Inspire the current members of your group?		
Have a message easily understood by your target audience?		
Gain support among its natural allies?		
Have tangible ways that natural allies can become involved?		
Improve the public visibility of the issue?		
Change the opinions of the target audience in a beneficial way?		
Change the policies of private companies?		
Change legislation or government policy?		
Achieve real improvement?		
Create new leaders?		
Help the community grow stronger in its ability to organize around issues?		
Set the stage for the next campaign?		
Have a clear time frame (when it began and ended)?		
Prove to be consistent with your values and vision?		
Prove to be worth the effort?		

### CAMPAIGN PLAN

Task	Description	Assigned To	Deadline	Notes
<b>Organization</b>				
Form Core Committee	Recruit 5-7 people that can commit the time and effort to make the campaign a success.			
Determine Objectives	Decide upon the specific goals of the campaign.			
Determine Campaign/Event	Determine the most effective method(s) to achieve objectives, according to the Criteria for Action sheet. (To compare the strengths of different events, use one sheet per potential event)			
Determine Measurable Outcomes	Decide which measurable criteria you will use to identify progress/success.			
Create Event Plan	Break campaign/action into manageable tasks, with deadlines and delegation. (See Event Plan)			
<b>Communications</b>				
Develop Communications Plan	Decide what strategies will work best for your campaign; e.g. new vs. traditional media, press releases, phone banking, advertisement, etc. Develop timelines and targets.			
Designate Media Spokesperson	Select at least one person to whom committee will refer the media. Person(s) must be able to be reached by cell phone and email, and respond articulately, engagingly and promptly to media requests.			
<b>Assessment</b>	Debrief and determine success of the action/campaign according to measurable outcomes.			

**EVENT PLAN**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Events</b>			
Location scouting/booking			
Permits/licenses			
Event set-up			
Refreshments			
Speaker recruitment			
Other event tasks:			
<b>Communications</b>			
Messaging			
Website/blog etc.			
Write press releases			
Dissemination of press releases			
Contacting allies			
Pre-event communications materials			
Event signage			
Event communication materials			
Other communications tasks:			
<b>Assessment</b>			

## WHAT TO FIND OUT WHEN YOU'RE ASKED FOR AN INTERVIEW:

Reporter's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact info: \_\_\_\_\_

Station/Program/Publication/Column: \_\_\_\_\_

Focus of Story: \_\_\_\_\_

What's wanted from you? (information, explanation, opinion)

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Who else is being interviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

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Time, place and length of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

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When will the story run? \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR KEY MESSAGES:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPORTING POINTS:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

