

Public campaigning

Key idea: Public campaigning

Public campaigning is the process of engaging the public, and getting them to take some action to demonstrate their support for your advocacy project or advocacy position. The main objective of public campaigning is to demonstrate to your advocacy targets that there is significant public concern about the issue and wide support for your position. That can be particularly effective because, very often, the public are voters and are always consumers. As individuals they may not have much influence, but united behind a particular position they can exert considerable pressure. An important objective is to directly influence the public's understanding of, and attitude towards, a particular issue; and to change their behavior. A side benefit of public campaigning is that it can offer an excellent opportunity for capacity building. Linking up with partners to launch public campaigns means both can learn from each other. Your public campaign may be nationally focused, calling for a policy change in a particular country, or at an international level. You may even be calling for a range of changes in different countries. Whatever your public campaigning work, it is vital that your positions and statements are backed up by evidence, particularly your own project work.

Key idea: Appropriate public campaigning

It is vital to remember that different countries have different laws and cultural norms that will influence how you carry out campaigning work. In your advocacy action plans, you should already have considered what is appropriate, and even legal, in the context in which your advocacy work will take place. For example, in the UK, registered charities – such as Water Aid – have to adhere to guidelines on campaigning and political activities laid down by

the Charity Commission.

The rules ensure the charity operates within the law, and within its own remit.

In particular, registered charities have to be careful that their campaigning work doesn't favor, or even appear to favor, a particular political party. Indeed, political campaigning – calling for a change in a particular law – may not be the sole aim of a registered charity.

In UK charity law, political campaigning must remain 'incidental or ancillary' to the charity's main purpose.

The UK Charity Commission advises that, wherever possible, the aim should be to get support for the campaign from a range of political parties – to avoid accusations of partisanship and to increase the chance of the campaign succeeding. All relevant Water Aid programme and policy staff, and those in contact with the media, are expected to be familiar with Water Aid's Protocol : Legal requirements on campaigning and political activities.

Some of the key ways to implement public campaigning are:

Direct media: Distinct from media and publicity work (covered below), direct media involves creating advertising campaigns, putting leaflets in magazines, or directly sending them out to a mailing list, or putting leaflets or posters in places where they will most effectively reach your audience. This kind of direct media work is not easy to get right, nor is it particularly cheap. Creating posters, for example, may be cheap but they are difficult to target accurately. Advertising, if you can afford it, can be particularly effective. An eye catching advert, with clear messaging about your issue, gives you control of what you want to say and you can ask people to do something as a result. You may wish to seek outside expertise if you wish to get direct media right.

Manifesto: A manifesto is likely to be the cornerstone of any public campaigning. A manifesto is a short outline of your campaign messages, available to the public, which uses clear and simple common language to explain your position. It should state why you are campaigning, the problem you are addressing, and the solutions you are proposing. You can then use your manifesto in leaflets, in publicity campaigns and on your website, as a clear statement of your campaign asks.

Quick and useful: Getting visual

Whether producing leaflets, a manifesto, a website or even TV and magazine adverts, you will need to give your audience an easy way to recognize your campaign. Linking up all the different strands of your visual materials is best done through developing a consistent visual identity. You need to develop a logo or series of images and phrases that all of your campaign materials should feature, and you should use the same colors and fonts. Before designing any materials, give real consideration to what you actually want that material to do, who you want it to reach, and what you are asking of your audience. The public taking action: What actions do you want your campaign supporters to take? Your public campaigning may aim to 'recruit' people to your cause, and take action on it. Or it may be more directed to influencing the way the public and politicians behave. Either way, your public campaign should seek to motivate a large group of people to act in a certain way, in favor of your proposals. It may start small, but even a small group of people can help to slowly encourage more to come 'on board'.

Mass writing: A popular campaigning tool in Western Europe and the USA is asking people to send letters, postcards or emails to a particular target, raising specific concerns and requesting specific results. You will need to provide people with the necessary tools,

such as sample letters, ready printed postcards or an email template.

Petitions: Collecting a large number of signatures, with names and addresses, on paper or through a website, can be an effective way to demonstrate mass support for your position.

Consider how you will deliver the petition to achieve maximum impact, and don't forget to secure media coverage. Ensure too that you adhere to local data protection laws. Events:

Campaign events, such as speaker rallies, a march or a vigil, or even arranging a delegation to your target's offices, can attract media coverage. However, large scale events do take a lot of work, and can be very expensive. You might consider if there are any other events you can 'piggy back' onto, having an information stall or leafleting campaign.

Using the media

The media can play a significant part in public advocacy work. Television, radio and press offer the opportunity to both reach decision-makers, and to influence wider public opinion. The mainstream media is targeted at the general public, but can also have considerable influence over decision-makers and other opinion-makers who respond directly to articles in certain prestigious newspapers or certain programmes on the television and radio, particularly if they are aware of that media's influence over public opinion. Your advocacy work should, therefore, treat the media as both a tool for advocacy, but also an influential target of your advocacy.

Key idea: Why use the media

- Get your issue onto the political public agenda
- Make your issue visible and credible in policy debate
- Inform the public about your issue and proposed solutions
- Recruit allies among the public and decision-makers

- Change public attitudes and behavior
- Influence decision-makers and opinion leaders
- Raise money for your cause

Like all aspects of advocacy, media work requires clear goals and carefully planned actions.

Before you begin any media campaign, you should properly plan what you want your media advocacy to achieve, and how you will go about it.

Key questions to ask include:

- What message do you want to convey?
- Who do you want to reach with the message?
- How will you reach this audience?
- How will you utilize each type of media?
- How will you time your media effort to complement your other strategies?
- How will you measure success?

It is important to assess your advocacy targets, and what forms of media they have access to.

Many rural communities now have access to radio, and some read national newspapers on a daily basis. Urban, industrialized populations may be more easily influenced through television, while professional audiences may respond to articles in key publications and periodicals. You should then research the media itself. Which publications or programmes already cover your issue or similar issues? How do they pick up new stories? How free are they to say what they think (is there censorship)? What is the style and format of the various programmes/publications, and how can you fit in with this? How can you contact them? Make sure you understand the role of the press in your country: is it out '*spokenly*' critical of the government or government-controlled; which audiences do they reach and what's the style and tone of different publications?

Key idea: TV and radio

Getting your message or your spokesperson on to TV or radio is one of the most effective ways of getting your message out there. Building relationships with key broadcast journalists, and always offering a spokesperson to be interviewed for current affairs programmes, is vital for achieving this kind of coverage. TV can be particularly effective, because for many influential decision-makers and opinion leaders, current affairs and news shows are likely to be a core source of information for them. Identify whether TV audiences are the ones you are targeting. Meanwhile, radio reaches a wider audience than any other medium, and is accessible to people who are otherwise isolated by language, geography, conflict, illiteracy or poverty. Radio also has the power to motivate people by building on oral traditions. Community radio stations can play a significant role in increasing participation and opinion sharing, improving and diversifying knowledge and skills and in catering to health and cultural needs. However, radio is a transitory medium. Most people cannot listen again to a show, or ask for information to be repeated. Many people also lack access to radios, electricity or the batteries to power them.

Reaching the media

Quick and useful: Your media contacts list

Building a contacts list enables you to rapidly pass your messages on to all relevant media when you have a news story. If you use your contacts list like a database, recording any contact you have with a journalist, it will assist you in building and maintaining relationships with them. In many countries you can buy a media list prepared by specialist companies, but if that approach is too costly, you can construct your own by reading, watching and listening to local media, and noting which issues specific journalists cover.

You may wish to make contact with key journalists and editors just to introduce yourself and tell them about your issues. If they have met you, they will be more inclined to come to you when they are working on a story, and they will pay more attention to any information you send. Investing time in building relationships with journalists and editors also enables you to run ideas past them, to see what aspect of your story is most suited to their needs. Getting into the media requires more than just good relations. You cannot always hope that friendly journalists will find your issue newsworthy, because often it won't be. The key to good story selling is good timing, and linking your own message with the breaking news. You should look for news opportunities, such as a natural event, a speech or anniversary to which you can link your story. Keep a record of future events in your diary that you could link your issues to. When your story is already in the news, even peripherally, it is easier to sell in your exact messages. Your task is to offer a story or photo opportunity that illustrates a new or local perspective, or which dramatizes a particular point of view. Acting fast is often the key, and so is providing all the information in one place so that the journalists' job is easier. Websites are being used increasingly in this way, providing backup information, images, quotes and more, all in one place. The most common method for getting your message to any kind of media is a press release. It is a written document that outlines concisely the issue you wish the media to cover, and is distributed by fax, post or increasingly by email to the journalists you are seeking to reach. A well written press release should make life easy for the journalists, giving them enough information in a short, punchy style to persuade them to run your story. Press releases can fulfill various functions:

- Give advance notice of an event
- Provide a report of a meeting, or convey decisions

- Announce a new campaign, or provide progress reports
- Provide background information
- Circulate speeches, report details etc.

Advocacy toolkit: Good press releases

Press releases usually follow a standard format, which enable journalists and editors to access relevant information quickly and easily.

Pushing the message

Publishing documents, producing materials and carrying out public campaigning face to face through speaker meetings and events, are likely to be an important part of any advocacy project.

Quick and useful: Getting communications right

Five factors should be considered when a communication is being prepared and approved:

- Policy consistency and consistency with organizational plans and priorities
- Your organization's identity
- Quality of product and content
- Risk to reputation
- Security risk to staff, partners and beneficiaries or to the whole organization

Reports.

Reports can be used to support lobbying activities by sending information to targets and influentials; they also provide background for journalists and partners, and perhaps even the public.

The way in which you present the results of any research is as important as its quality. In all cases, thought needs to be given to the audience, and the way the report is presented should be tailored accordingly. Remember to put in place strategies for disseminating your report. Most reports contain an executive summary, which is often the only part of a report that is actually read. A report aimed at an advocacy target should also contain a brief list of the three or four key points or actions you would like them to take.

Advocacy toolkit: Writing worth reading

Read more about the b, c of writing good copy – from how to get started to top tips for developing your reports.

Conferences, seminars and workshops A public event can be used to influence the targets you invite, and you can even invite them to speak. Such events also offer opportunities for media coverage, and to raise awareness among journalists, partners and the general public. Many NGOs use community-based workshops for citizen training and education as part of their legal rights and policy advocacy efforts. Conferences with high level speakers or compelling topics can also draw mass media attention. In many countries, a gathering of international visitors may attract media coverage.

Advocacy toolkit: Public speaking

All public events will entail someone, perhaps a member of your own team, having to speak articulately and convincingly on your issue to a large group of people. Thorough preparation, so you know your subject and your audience, is the foundation of a successful talk.

If you are well prepared, you will also be more confident.

Leaflets, news sheets and posters

Printed matter can be used as part of your public campaigning to raise public awareness among large numbers of people. They should be tailored, with particular messages and approaches, depending on who your intended target audience is. You should be clear who your target audience is and how you are going to distribute the leaflet or news sheet before you start designing and producing it. Once you have decided that a leaflet or poster is an appropriate tool for your campaign, it should be designed to have maximum impact on your audience. Your headings should be eye-catching while avoiding being sensational. The content should include a simple presentation of the facts relating to your advocacy issue, and a clear statement of what you want your audience to do about it. How you distribute the leaflets or where you place the posters will depend on your target audience and the resources you have available. If you have very limited resources, you may decide to target the distribution very specifically to key audiences.

Websites

A campaign webpage, or even micro-site, provides users with an accessible, user-friendly and authoritative information resource. It can also be a place for the exchange and communication of ideas and views. It particularly offers opportunity to engage the public through online petitions or message boards. Your website should contain the background information for your advocacy project, as well as supporting materials such as press releases, reports, stories, images and quotes. Anyone visiting your site should be able to find everything they need and, if possible, to be able to download files. Where appropriate, this will allow you to produce more concise paper materials because you can refer people to the full detail available online. However, many millions of people in the developing world still cannot easily access

websites and many people are still not used to using the internet. Poor design, including information overload, can also prevent people from finding what they need on websites.

Video and drama/street theatre

Street theatre or similar public events can help to raise awareness among communities, and engage the wider public. Vivaly, it also offers the opportunities for stakeholders to tell their own stories and become involved in advocacy work. Drama provides an opportunity to present facts and issues in an entertaining, culturally sensitive and accessible way. In many societies, drama is a form of communication through which people can comfortably express their views. However, the number of people reached is limited compared to other means, and some critics suggest that it can trivialize serious issues. Video is a relatively expensive advocacy tool. However it has the potential for impact among both audiences with low literacy (assuming the facilities for broadcasting are available) and developed country audiences increasingly attuned to audio-visual presentations rather than the written word.

Key idea: Participatory development communication: an African perspective

In the African communication environment, given the limited access that some population groups, especially the marginalized segments living in remote rural communities, have to mass communication media, the communicating capacity of the local community resides in so-called traditional media resources and channels (traditional leaders, drama, concerts, songs, story-telling, puppetry, drumming, dancing, etc.). They serve as reliable channels of news and information gathering, processing and dissemination in many rural communities, and often address local interests and concerns in local languages and cultural contexts which the community members can easily understand and with which they can

identify. Effective applications of participatory development communication approaches and strategies at the grassroots and community level should explore the use and harnessing of pervasive traditional communication instruments and resources. Traditional media often serve as effective means of channeling development issues. Traditional media provide horizontal communication approaches to stimulating discussion and analysis of issues, as well as sensitizing and mobilizing communities for development. However, one must be cautious about romanticizing the abilities and impact of traditional media in development. Like other communication and information means, they have their weaknesses and limitations in time and space; they are particularly deficient in simultaneous dissemination of information about development issues across wide and geographically disperse populations. Research and experience in the use of traditional media indicate that they are most effective in participatory communication of development in rural communities when combined with mass communication resources, especially radio. The challenge facing practitioners of participatory development communication in African countries is to be sufficiently knowledgeable of both the potentials and limitations of traditional media and about how to skillfully harness and combine them with other communication and information forms for development.