



CHURCH ACTION  
ON POVERTY

# Campaigning for a change

## The CAP campaign skills guide

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## What is this guide for?

This guide is designed to do three things:

- to help people campaigning to plan and implement a campaign
- to guide campaigners towards further sources of information, advice and support when seeking change in mental health.

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to the Mind and the Mencap campaigns team who first developed the “golden rules” of campaigning.

## Reality check...

Do you *really* need to campaign? Campaigning can be fun but it's often hard, dull, frustrating and unsuccessful.

Even when it's exciting, it's a bit like Charlie Watt's description of 20 years playing with the Rolling Stones — one year of playing and 19 years of hanging about.



Campaigning is usually only done when all else has failed. It involves a conversation with society, persuading people to take an unusual interest in supporting a move that would not normally happen. It means setting up and sustaining processes that are not normal or 'business as usual'. All the time the forces of normality will try to shut your campaign down, to put your issue back in its box.

If politics is the 'art of the possible', campaigning is the science and art of changing what is possible. Do it right and a campaign succeeds in inspiring its followers to go on to the next target. But unstructured or poorly focussed campaigns are hot air balloons kept aloft by burning idealism and goodwill, until they suffer 'burn out'.

So before you go any further stop and ask yourself: do I really need to campaign ? Or can I get what I want by other means — 'business as usual' — can I buy it, can it be delivered by simply asking politely, or through quiet lobbying, or by trading or through politics ? Only once other avenues are exhausted, consider campaigning.

## The “golden rules” of campaigning

- Be clear as to the aims of your campaign and what you are trying to achieve.
- Have good information to support your campaign.
- Make sure you are doing things at the right time.
- Work in partnership with others who share your campaign aims.
- Target the audience you want to reach.
- Always take time to ensure that people remain involved with the campaign.

## **Aims**

- Decide what the aims of the campaign are.
- Write them down.
- Ask yourselves three questions:
  1. Are they realistic?
  2. Can the people you want to influence understand them?
  3. Does everyone involved in the campaign agree to these aims?

**Top tip:** If you are campaigning to oppose something, always make sure you are clear about what you are for, as well as what you are against. A credible campaign is one that is able to give clear and realistic alternatives to proposals.

## **Audience**

There are two types of people you need to reach with your campaign:

- the decision makers, and
- the people who can influence the decision makers.

## **The decision makers**

These are the people who can give you what you want. Here are three questions to be asking yourselves all the time when planning your action:

- What individuals and organisation will be making the decisions?
- What are the processes (for example, committees, consultations and approvals) they will go through to come to that decision?
- Have we established when the key decisions will be made?

## **People who can influence decision makers**

You also need to target those who can influence the decision makers. You will need to balance your campaign activities between the two. It is here that public opinion can be very important, and the best way to reach broad numbers of them is through the press and broadcast media.

Publicity in the media:

- puts pressure on decision makers to justify decisions they make or propose
- puts the issue you are concerned about higher up the public “agenda” and can win people to your cause.

So if you are considering using the media, see the Mind guide on working with the press and media (see page 14 for further information).

## **Information**

At all stages of a campaign, you will need information. For example, about the people and organisations that you want to influence and on how and when the decisions effecting your campaign are to be made.

Having decided your campaign aims, be clear as to the messages you want to put over.

## **Campaign messages**

Have clear and simple messages, and keep repeating them in everything the campaign does. Think about the arguments you can use in favour of your position. Write down every argument you can think of and pick the strongest (one really good argument is enough, and definitely not more than two or three). Throw the rest away and do not use them under any circumstances.

Make sure you know everything you need to know about your issue, but don't use it all at once. Get your facts right, as just one wrong fact can undermine your whole campaign.

Ask yourself:

- What messages do you want your campaign to put over?
- How are you going to collect the information that will support and back up your campaign messages?
- How are you going to present your message and the evidence supporting it?

## **Gathering information**

The quality and accuracy of the information you bring forward to support your campaign messages are important. Collect information that will enable you to both know your facts and back up your arguments.

Show clear evidence that will convince people about your argument. Good evidence makes it harder for people to discount the campaigns' arguments.

**Top tip:** Types of good evidence to be preparing include:

- the personal testament of people who use services
- case examples of people whose life situation has been changed or affected
- statistics showing the numbers affected
- financial information showing the financial implications
- research from other sources showing how what you are proposing has worked elsewhere.

## **Presenting information**

You may have to present your information in a variety of ways, for example, in meetings, in reports and in leaflets. When producing written material:

- do not try and cram everything in. Large letters with plenty of space between each piece of information make things easier to read
- do not try elaborate designs unless you know what you are doing
- make sure it is clear to the recipient of the information what you want them to do with it.

**Top tip:** There may be a voluntary sector project that can aid in producing material. Contact your local Council of Voluntary Service (CVS), for details. Local businesses may also be prepared to print material at reduced rates.

## **Timing**

Knowing when important decisions are being made enables you to plan effectively. Below are some of the timing issues to be aware of:

- Make a diary of the dates when important decisions are to be made by the decision makers.
- Ensure that the people you are trying to influence are properly briefed before meetings.
- Immediately before the meeting, contact these people again to remind them of the issues and respond to any questions they have.
- If people have helped you at a meeting, thank them as soon as possible afterwards.
- When working with the media, be absolutely sure when deadlines are coming up.

## Partnerships

Working in partnership with other organisations who share the common concern is always more powerful and increases your chance of winning.

Look out for other organisations and influential individuals you can get to join with you in the campaign. Consider as partners organisations outside the 'usual suspects'. For example, professional groups, trades unions or local businesses. Make sure that partners are clear about and agree with any joint objectives.

**Top tip:** Take time and effort to ensure that your partnerships are maintained. The partnerships you can establish with key individuals and organisations will be the key to success in many campaigns. You should:

- Regularly maintain contact with your partners.
- Keep them informed of what you are planning.
- Seek their advice.
- Plan joint action with them.

## Involvement

Different skills are needed to run a successful campaign. Some people are good at certain things and some at others. Always make sure people's differing skills are recognised and utilised. Campaigns can falter when just one or two people do all the work and just a few take all the decisions. Utilise all the groups skills and be on the look out to recruit people who have the skills that are missing at the moment.

Joint work:

- brings different skills and experiences to a campaign
- shares the workload
- fosters a feeling of solidarity
- helps maintain momentum.

**Top tip:** For campaign groups to work, people need to be involved and participate in the decision making. People like to receive recognition for their skills and contribution and some people may need encouragement. Work to maintain the unity of your group.

Share work around and encourage people to take on tasks (working with others if they are unsure how to go about it). Have regular meetings to review how things are going and decide on next steps. Start small and build up. Keep going back to your aims and checking on progress.

## Some campaigning methods

### Letter writing

A letter gets the message across directly. If lots of people write to the same person, it also shows the level of support for your campaign.

- Keep letter short and to the point. Make it clear in the first sentence what you are writing about. Include a short personal example, if relevant.
- Make it clear exactly what you want the person you are writing to do.
- If possible, send typed letters. If you handwrite it, ensure your handwriting is easy to read.
- If a number of people are writing letters, decide on the key points you all want to get over, but do not write the same letter. Include individual experiences in the letters. This shows the widespread concern on an issue.

### Petitions

Be cautious before deciding on having a petition. They are simple to do, but asking people to write individual letters can often be more effective than trying to collect large numbers of signatures.

However, collecting signatures is a very public activity. This raises the profile of your campaign, encourages people to support it, and enables you to plan a publicity event when you present it (for example, to a decision making body such as the local council). Simple and effective ways of preparing petitions are listed below.

When preparing petitions:

- have a simple leaflet to give out to people setting out the main messages of your campaign. Suggesting things that they can do as well as signing the petition itself to support the campaign.
- start with something like “We urge the Government/Borough Council ....”. Have columns for names, addresses and signatures.
- do not use the address as a mailing list without the permission of those signing. You could add a column for people to tick if they want to be kept in touch with the campaign.
- if you are sending the petition out to people, put on the bottom of every petition form the date they should be returned by and the address to return them to.

### Publicity stunts

These can bring your campaign to the public’s attention, and are an enjoyable way for campaigners to participate in the campaign.

- Be clear as to what message you want to get across. Be creative, but keep it simple. Stick to one idea.
- Think through the event in advance. How will it work? What time must people arrive? Who is bringing the banner and how will this get there? What might go wrong and how will you deal with that? Who will talk to people who want to know what is going on?
- Do not make a stunt last for too long. If people start drifting away, the end will feel flat. Gather people together and thank them for attending and celebrate with them afterwards.

# Handling meetings

This part looks at two types of meetings:

- public meetings you may hold as part of your campaign
- meetings you have with decision makers.

## Public meetings

These are a good way to get a message across to interested members of the public. They can attract new supporters to your campaign and get a new campaigning group off the ground.

### Arrangements

- Decide on a date and who you want to speak. If it is important to get a particular speaker(s), check the date with them first.
- Book a venue that is accessible by public transport, has access for people with disabilities, is easy to find and is affordable. An early evening meeting is best. Book the room half an hour before the advertised start time to allow you to set up.
- Publicise the meeting. Ask other local voluntary and community groups to let their members know about it. Free local media listings can be used for publicity.

### Preparation

- Have a team on the door with information and publicity to welcome people and to give them information about the campaign.
- During the meeting, circulate a sheet of paper where people who want to be kept in touch with the campaign can write down their contact details.
- The Chair should welcome people to the meeting, explain the purpose and introduce the speakers. Allow plenty of time afterwards for questions and discussion. A question and discussion session can be started off by questions or points being raised by people already involved in the campaign.
- Getting the meeting to pass a resolution can help publicity and gives authority for the active campaigners to carry on with the campaign.
- Inform people at the meeting of what is going to happen next and how they can take part. Announce the date and time of the next stage of the campaign, for example, a meeting for active campaigners.

### Follow-up

- Write to all the speakers to thank them.
- Publicise the success of the meeting and celebrate that.
- Plan action that will include any new people.

## Meetings with decision makers

A good way to set out your position and gauge reaction. As your campaign progresses, meetings with decision makers can become a critical part of achieving your aims.

### Arrangements

- Identify who you want to meet with, their role in the decision making process and why you think it would be useful to meet with them.

- Do not be afraid to ask for meetings with senior people in organisations. If you are already in contact with one of the decision makers but you feel it is important to go “above their head” do so, do let the person you are in contact with know that you are doing it.
- If you have requested and arranged the meeting by telephone, then confirm the arrangements in writing, outlining what you would like to discuss and why you want to discuss it with them.
- If you are going to be attending only as part of a bigger meeting (for example, at a committee meeting), make sure you know how long has been allocated for your part of the meeting and who will be attending.

### **Preparation**

- Work out beforehand what you want to achieve at the meeting.
- Ensure you have any evidence with you to back up what messages you want to get over, but do not bombard those attending with lots of written information. A short paper summarising your points is helpful and leaves those at the meeting with a clear record of where you stand.
- Think about the kind of things that the people you are meeting with will want from you. Try and anticipate any questions or arguments they may have and prepare for these.

### **Attendance**

As a general rule, individuals should not go to meetings alone. At least two people should attend. If the campaign is making a presentation to a meeting that is open to the public (for example, at a local council committee meeting), then it will be helpful for people from the campaign to observe. This helps in visibly showing the extent of the support.

### **Follow up**

- Whatever the nature of the meeting, write to both thank the people you met with, and outline if there were areas that you agreed on.
- If you agreed to provide any further information, make sure you do that promptly.
- Much of what people have to say is based on their own often very painful experiences. Make sure that people who have talked about them at a meeting have the opportunity to be supported by others in the campaign afterwards.
- Fully report the outcome of the meeting to the members of your campaign group.

**Top tip:** Think about what you achieved at the meeting, as compared to what you expected. Decide if there were things you may have done differently. If so, learn those lessons for the next meeting.

If the meeting went well, celebrate. If it did not, do not despair. Remember you are trying to get things changed and people are often very resistant to change.

## **Monitoring and evaluating your campaign**

During campaigns, you should monitor the progress you are making against the aims. Sometimes it is difficult to be sure what you have achieved. So when running the campaign, break down your overall aim into smaller steps and celebrating these as successes.

### **Learn from your mistakes (as well as the good things)**

After each step in the campaign, ask yourself what went well and what could have been done better? Not everything you do will work. After something has gone wrong, look at what you could have done better and remember it for next time. We all make mistakes. In fact, the same is true when something has gone very well. Try to work out why, so you can do the same again?

### **Progress is often hidden**

You might meet with a Council official who is sympathetic to the campaign. In public, she may still have to repeat the official council position, whilst at the same time beginning to quietly lobby on your behalf inside the council, but you will not know this is happening. Don't give up if you don't seem to make progress at first.

### **Some final advice**

#### **1. Know when to compromise**

The decision maker(s) might come to you with a compromise position, that doesn't give you what you want. But it may still make the situation significantly better than it was, and for some people affected this could be a big step forward. Don't reject a compromise out of hand. It is also important to recognise when people have made a change. If the council feel they are trying to meet you half way but all you ever do is complain, they are less likely to talk to you in the future. Say how much you welcome their concession, but point out that it only meets part of your objections.

#### **2. Know when to stop**

Ideally you carry on until you win. Many seemingly impossible campaigns have had amazing successes because somebody just kept going, maybe for years. If you are the sort of person who just won't let go, that's great. But most of us are not like that. We need some variety and some success to keep us motivated. Don't give up too soon, but there is nothing wrong with moving on. Times change and different issues may be important or maybe you just need a break for a while before going back to the issue again.

#### **3. Celebrate your successes**

Even the small ones.

## Further help with your campaign

You increase your chances of winning if you utilise the help and advice available to you both locally and nationally.

### National partners

There are literally hundreds of national charities and other organizations campaigning on issues relevant to local communities, from aircraft noise through to zoo animals. Many can offer practical advice, and in some cases they employ paid campaigners who can help you out in more direct ways.

### Church Action on Poverty

A range of information is available on campaigning, lobbying and CAP's current campaigns on debt and low pay on the CAP website at: [www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk) or from:

Church action on Poverty  
Central Buildings  
Oldham Street  
Manchester  
M1 1JQ  
0161 236 9321  
[info@church-poverty.org.uk](mailto:info@church-poverty.org.uk)

### Further resources

[www.campaignstrategy.org](http://www.campaignstrategy.org) A really useful website with loads of practical suggestions for anyone trying to save the world.

[www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk) The CPRE Campaigners' Guide: getting organised and getting results is available free to local voluntary organisations from CPRE Publications (0207 976 6433) or from the CPRE website.