Face to Face
Direct communication with the public

For your campaign to be successful you are probably going to have to communicate with the public: to inform them, get them onside, get them to take action, get more people involved. What this hand out focuses on is campaign actions and especially stalls and face to face communication. If successful, this can be a particularly effective campaigning tool, and also good team-building activity.

1) Developing a message
2) Deciding on an action
3) Organising and preparing
4) Delivering the message effectively
5) Afterwards

1) Have you got the message?

Your message is your key factor in designing your action, and it’s what you need to be communicating on the day. It’s the first thing you should think about before organising anything. It needs to be simple and direct and your audience need to feel they can relate to it.

To explain why it’s so important we can look at a bit of pop psychology:

What impression will your audience be left with?
Most people’s impression of what you say (i.e. whether or not they take you seriously) will be based roughly on the following:

- 55% on what you look like and your body language
- 38% on how you say it
- 7% on the content of what you say (the important bit)

What will your audience remember?
Most of what you say people will forget. People tend to forget about:

- a quarter of what you said after 24 hours
- half of what you said after 48 hours
- 80% after four days

The remaining 20% will usually stick with them a bit longer, and it’s vital that it’s the right 20% to make a difference to your campaign.

So how do you decide on your message?
The best way is to have a brainstorm in your group – everyone will need to understand and use these messages.

Campaign context
Get clear on:
- The objectives of your campaign…what are you trying to achieve?
- What is the local and/or political climate related to this campaign?
• The reasons why this campaign is so important?
  What actions would you want people to do to support the campaign?
  What outstanding facts/stats do you have to support the campaign?

If you’re planning a series of actions or this is quite long running, you may not need to cover all your aims in one action, but it’s important not to undermine them. e.g. do something that offends and upsets a decision maker whom you’re later planning to lobby.

Your Audience
Think about the type of person you think should get involved in your campaign:
Things to consider may be their:
• Age group
• Gender
• Location of residence or work
• What do they do in their spare time?
• Where do they shop, what do they buy?
• What newspaper do they read, do they use the internet?
• Other lifestyle things such as – do they have children?

Bringing the campaign to the audience
Find links between the audience type and your campaign. The message needs to make them understand why it’s in their interest to join the campaign by linking it to their life…if the road is built through the park what will it mean for them? If GM is allowed to be commercially grown what will this mean for them? If there is no personal link then human interest (such as the effect on local children walking to school past an incinerator belching out fumes) etc. will bring your message to life rather than a dry message about the technical facts of how much gas it will spew out.

Thinking up the words
Choose the top 5-10 buzzwords that you think best relate to the campaign bearing in mind the audience.

Making it succinct
Realistically, you are going to have about a minute with each person. Your message needs to be short and punchy. You may need to break your message down into smaller chunks, and in which case you should have no more than three.

It is very useful to have a key killer fact to back each one up - usually at the point where they say “really”?  
E.g.
“Your local organic producers are under threat from GM”
“Really?”
then follow this with a fact to back it up - before leading on to what they can do to help.

It’s really worth doing this
Once you have developed your messages for the campaign, you can use the same basic message in all your communication channels:

Street campaigning, Public meetings, Talking to politicians, Talking to journalists, Press releases, Letters, Action tools – leaflets and posters, Web pages
Of course which key fact you use where and exactly how you put the message may differ with these different audiences, but essentially you need to be consistent to have the best chances of getting through.

2) Deciding what to do

Assess your time and your resources. There’s no point planning an event or action that you don’t have the money, time, people or energy for. Be realistic, but not downhearted. Even small groups with limited resources can organise great actions.

You need to answer a few key questions before you decide which action to do:

- Who you want to hear your message and what you want them to do?
  You will have answered this when deciding your messages and audience
- When is the best time to do the action?
  Is it a breaking news story or is there a local event or meeting that’s relevant to your campaign.
- Where are your target audience going to be found in a place where it’s easiest to get them talking to you? If you find the High St difficult in your town, is there an alternative (e.g. park, farmers market etc.)
- How can you draw people to you rather than having to go get them?
  For examples for stalls see below in the organisation and preparation section.
- How many people have you got to do this?
  It is probably better to have a really great stall getting lots of attention with 3 people on it for the morning than it is to have a stall with one tired and vulnerable person on it all day.
- How inclusive is this – is everyone comfortable with the idea?

Getting people to commit to help:

Any successful action relies on a group of people pulling together to make it happen. If the work falls on a few others can feel disempowered and the organisers feel unsupported. If you have worked on all the decisions together and people feel like they have played a part they will usually help, however they might:

Feel nervous about talking to the public – Manage the rota so that experienced people and newer people work together. Having a brief with key messages and answers to sticky questions will help them too. All participants should get this before the action. It’s also a good idea to agree tactics for dealing with difficult situations so that they feel supported and know what to do.

Feel worried they don’t know enough – again the brief should help, plus making it clear that they aren’t expected to know anything and agreeing a strategy for dealing with questions and queries from the public (e.g. asking them to email the question to you and/or giving info service phone no. 0808 800 1111)

Not want to give up time on a Saturday – if they feel enough ownership over the action (i.e. they participated in deciding what to do) and it is fun and social enough they will. You could combine it with a social event afterwards down the pub. If they have other commitments then you could ask them to help out with making the props/ doing the recce/ press release etc. instead at a different time. If this is a problem with many members of your team then consider doing something else at a time everyone can manage.

Worry that they are agreeing to take on more than they bargained for - Explain what needs to be done, rather than “who wants to organise this demo” be upfront and clear about roles and what people will be expected to do. Offer to support people to take things on – if someone doesn’t have the confidence to take on a task on their own, suggest they help out or share the responsibility.
If you think you are going to have a problem getting enough people, phoning people directly rather than emailing or announcing at a meeting that you need extras can be more effective.

Ultimately however, if no one is prepared to commit any time you need to go back to the drawing board and find out what people really want to do.

3) Organisation and preparation

**Rota** – decide this well in advance so people can get it into their diary. Make sure there is at least two people on a stall at any time, and put experienced people with less experienced people.

**A draw** - if at all possible have something to attract the punters like a competition or free give-away. A busy stall will in turn attract more people and morale-wise it really helps you. For instance you could have:
- free face-painting for kids or something arty they can do while you talk to their parents,
- a free raffle or competition or game
- free tastings of local/ organic/ non-gm food or drink
- somebody dressed up (polar bear etc. again especially if this appeals to kids)
- a static bike which powers something which people can have a go on
- free energy saving light bulbs to give away
- planting seeds in little pots to take away with them

**Campaign materials, leaflet, props and banners** – It’s good fun making the bits and pieces to go on your stall, so this could be done as a social. Proper stands are a good investment for the group, they look good and also shelter the stall. You could consider applying to the local groups support fund if you do not have stands and do lots of stalls. Make sure that your campaign leaflet and banners chime with the same message(s) you are going to be delivering verbally.

**Media** – make sure someone is going to press release what you are doing, take any ensuing media calls on the day and do some follow up work. With an interesting twist to a stall, a good photo and a decent press release you can get a surprising amount of coverage.

**The recce** – visit the area you are going to be in to check out any potential hazards, good photo spots, where the nearest loos are, which position would be best.

**Health and Safety** – It is good practice to do a basic risk assessment. This is very much easier than you think and can be easily adapted each time you do an action. Visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) for information on this.

**Liaising with police/ council** – Make sure someone looks into this in advance if you are going somewhere new for your action. Demos etc. may need police permission and you need to check if you are on private land. This can certainly avoid awkward situations – it’s good to be able to stand your ground with confidence if someone tries to persuade you that you not allowed to do something when you’ve checked that you are.

**Be prepared** – In addition to your props and materials, always bring an events kit to include scissors, paper, biros, marker pen, string, gaffer tape, clip boards, drawing pins, couple of bin bags, notebook for questions or contact details, clear plastic to protect stall if it rains, tube of suncream, a brolly, plasters and some supplies of snacks and drink. Make sure you bring your camera too!
Having a well-briefed team – Ensure that everyone involved in the action feels sure of what they are doing. A written brief (and make sure it is brief!) provided to them in advance is helpful, and should include:

- what you are aiming to get people to do and
- the key message(s) and a fact or two to back them up
- what to say if people ask something they don’t know the answer to

you could also include:

- some stopper lines suggestions (see below)
- answers to any really obvious sticky questions that might come up directly related to your campaign (e.g. on climate: What about David Bellamy says climate change isn’t happening?...What about nuclear power?)

It’s a good idea to meet up and go through all the above together in person at some point before your action – either at a normal meeting or in a café before you start.

Do’s and Don’ts of stalls set up

How you work your stall can make all the difference to whether people engage with you or not.

Do

- Have something to draw people in
- In preference, stand in front of the stall
- Actively engage people
- Have a few good clear campaign materials which all repeat the campaign message
- Have clear and simple stands and displays. It’s worth getting good quality stands.
- Keep everyone happy and smiley by scheduling regular snack and loo breaks.
- Promote your group – make sure you have a stack of membership leaflets and/or a poster advertising your next meeting

Don’t

- Be behind the stall unless there’s a good reason to
- Wait for people to come to you
- Have lots of different campaign materials on the table

4) Delivering the message

Ok. You’ve done all the preparation and organisation, you’ve got a great stall in a reasonable location at a good time, and you are well briefed on what you are doing and the messages. Now you are in a good position to go out there and communicate your message with the public, and here’s some top tips to help you do that in the most effective way:

Be nice to talk to!

- Making a conscious effort to have your body language and open and your voice sound confident will make you feel more relaxed and confident.
- Make sure you are smiling and make natural eye contact
- Be aware of people’s personal space – don’t crowd them
- Stand in front of the stall and approach people rather than staying behind
- Have a stopper line prepared ‘I don’t want your money – just your signature!’; ‘do you want to enter our free raffle?’; ‘Do you want to help us save the park?’. Once you have their attention you can move onto your key campaign message and asks – using your killer facts if appropriate.
Listen to what people are saying back to you, if you can asking them the odd open question in response makes it a conversation – which is the essence of good communication
• Remember to get them to sign the petition or whatever the campaign objective is.

**Difficult characters.**

At some point in your campaigning you will have met or will meet with one of life’s colourful (or just plain bloody minded) characters when you are doing an action or stall. This can make some people nervous about doing stalls at all. Here are four classic types of difficult behaviour and brief advice with how to deal with each one, but the main rule is: you are not there to spend your time being hassled, answering scientific questions, or listening to someone’s story, so end the conversation and move on to talk to other people. Just having a plan will make you feel more confident.

It is unlikely, but if you do feel threatened by somebody, call the police.

**Aggressive** Occasionally someone you approach who says something nasty – usually this is to avoid talking to you. It can come as a shock but the best thing is to smile sweetly, ignore them, take a deep breath and concentrate on the next person.

**Wants to be difficult** Some people are never going to agree with your campaign and sometimes they will make a point of sticking around to argue about it. Sometimes they will claim to know more about it that you. Once you’ve stated your message and key facts – if they aren’t convinced there’s no point in engaging in a long discussion as you could be winning over other people. If they have a particular question write it down and take their details, ask them to email it to the group or give them the phone no. for our info service team 0808 800 1111 as appropriate. State that you do not think you will agree on the subject, thank them for the conversation, and make a physical ‘move on’ to do something else.

**Diverts you to their own pet topic/ says the group should be working on something else** Explain that you are a volunteer from the local group and you are just there today to talk about whatever your campaign aim is, because you feel this is very important. If necessary give them contact details of the group or info service team or ask them to write their query down with their contact details. Repeat this if they persist.

**Just wants someone to talk to generally** This is difficult as you want to move the person on without upsetting them. Gentle techniques such as reducing eye-contact, giving shorter answers to their questions, pretending to look for something may help. If you need to, you could try something like ‘Thanks for the conversation, I hope you don’t mind if I talk to someone else now as I’ve made myself a target to sign up 50 people by 4 o’clock’ or ‘I’m sorry, I’ve got a break now on the rota and I really need to phone my kids’.

**5) Don’t forget**

Celebrate afterwards! Make sure you all pat yourselves on the back, go off down the pub and/or show photos off at your next meeting. Review what went well and what you will do differently the next time.

Tell us! We always want to know about the fantastic events you do – and photos are really welcome. Email to localgroups@foe.co.uk or send to Naomi Hunt, Friends of the Earth, 26 – 28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ