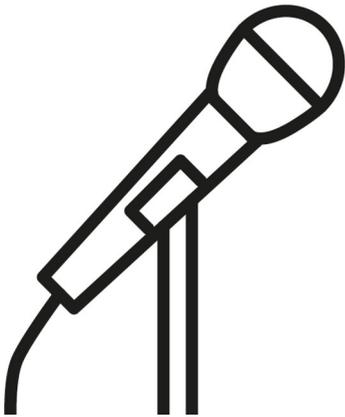


**Seeds for  
Change**  
Short guide



# **Organising public meetings**

**How to use public meetings to boost your campaign**

# Organising public meetings

Public meetings can be a great boost to your campaign by helping you reach people who aren't already involved in your group.

This guide will help you think through how to run a public meeting effectively. People who come to check out the campaign may not give it a second chance, so it's really worth making the most of the opportunity to make a good impression.

Ideally, people leave the meeting feeling that:

- your group is friendly, welcoming and well-organised;
- the campaign is important and winnable;
- they are empowered and motivated to take action on the issue.

## Top Tips



**Keep it short:** 1.5 to 2 hours. Make the most of the time by planning carefully so it all goes smoothly, and publicising it well.

**Action focused:** Decide what you want people to do for the campaign as a result of the meeting. Plan the meeting around this.

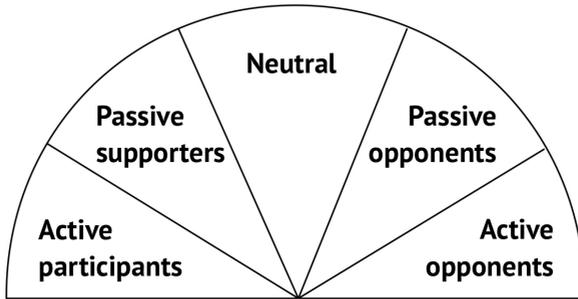
**Easy to remember:** Pick three key messages and put them across in different ways so they really stick with people.

**Welcoming and engaging:** Use a variety of activities to help different people take in information and get actively involved. Meet people's access requirements. Create opportunities for people to get to know each other socially.

# What are your aims?

Start by getting really clear about what you are trying to achieve with the public meeting: what will change in the campaign as a result? Exactly who are you trying to reach? What do you hope they will do? Plan your meeting to achieve that aim.

We find this diagram very useful:



In order to win, campaigns need active participants doing things which will be effective in your context. For example: going on demonstrations, standing up to their landlord or challenging racist behaviour at work.

People don't usually shift from one side of the spectrum to the opposite – your active opponents are extremely unlikely to become your allies! So, to build a broad base, a campaign needs to raise awareness among neutral people *and* make sure there is a clear path for those people to become actively involved if they want to be.

In a public meeting, your priorities might be:

**Shifting neutral people to passive supporters:** raising awareness among people who don't have much information about the issues so they become passive supporters, perhaps taking low key action like signing a petition.

**Shifting passive supporters to active participants:** inspiring and empowering people who already agree with your goals, exploring the root causes of injustices or helping them find effective things to do.

## Who do you want to be there?

Think through who is most likely to become active in the campaign and consider these people as you plan the meeting. The most likely sets of people are:

**Directly affected people** who experience the issue first hand. For example: people who are local to a fracking site, current and potential council tenants in a campaign about public housing. It is particularly important that these people are able to shape the direction of the campaign, and be as actively involved as they want to be. They are the people who have to live with the outcome, and who have the most expertise in the impacts of the problem.

**Supporters** who join the campaign because of their values or politics, or because they are already involved in a related campaign.

## What will change for these people?

Where do you think these people are at currently, in relation to the campaign? What could enable them to be more involved and are there any barriers?

Campaigners often assume that what people need is more information about the problem they are campaigning against. Sometimes that is true. But there are lots of other things people need in order to take action. For example:

**A feeling of power.** Try building empowerment through: giving people space to input their own ideas, or telling inspiring stories about other successful campaigns.

**Connection to others.** A public meeting can give people the feeling of strength in numbers. Create chances for people to socialise informally, and share their experiences.

**Ideas about how to be effective.** Some people will come with their own ideas about what they can most effectively do. But the meeting organisers are likely to have a head-start on thinking about strategy. Offer suggestions as well as listening to new ideas.

## A plan to achieve your aims: example one



**Context:** A renters' union in the early stages of set-up, organising a public meeting to attract and engage new members.

**Who do you want to be there?** Anyone who rents in your town.

**Assumptions:** People who come will already know about problems tenants face. Likely barriers to taking action are: fear of consequences, feeling isolated, thinking nothing will ever change.

**Objective:** Tenants join the union, and are connected and empowered to take on collective campaigns.

**Key messages:** Unions have the power to improve conditions for renters, getting involved will be straightforward and social.

**Publicity:** Stalls outside letting-offices, fliers in areas of town with lots of renters, posters in community centres, adult college and university.

**Venue:** Town-centre community hall. Chairs arranged in a large circle so people can see each other – with space to shift into small groups and back into the circle quickly.

**Information sharing:** Illustrated examples of what other tenants' unions have achieved. Participants share their own experiences, and pick out common themes for campaigns.

**Action:** Join the union. Sign letters in support of national renters' campaigns. Take part in setting date and topics for follow-on meeting for organising campaigns.

## A plan to achieve your aims: example two



**Context:** A new open cast mine is proposed near your village. A small group has formed and wants to build a local campaign.

**Who do you want to be there?** Primarily people who live near the proposed mine, with likely supporters to boost numbers.

**Assumptions:** People's pre-existing knowledge may be limited (e.g. about health impacts). In the past, deep pit mines were big employers locally.

**Objective:** Raise awareness of the problems related to open-cast mines, to lay the groundwork for an active campaign.

**Key messages:** Open cast mining poses a threat to public health and the environment, without creating many jobs. They can be stopped by an effective campaign.

**Publicity:** Door-knocking in nearest houses, fliers in rest of village. Village social media and posters in pub, post office etc. Targeted publicity for sympathetic groups in other villages/towns (e.g. environmentalists).

**Venue:** Village hall in nearest village, cakes and hot drinks. Chairs set up in rows to see the front easily.

**Information-sharing:** Short film about the impact of open-cast mining, speaker from the group talks about other successful campaigns and the group's achievements and plans.

**Action:** Join the group. Come along to consultation event by the coal company to ask awkward questions or demonstrate outside.

# Practicalities

## Date

Set the date well in advance to give yourself plenty of time for publicity and organising. If your meeting is well-attended people are more likely to go away with confidence in the campaign. Also consider how your date can fit in with key campaign events, e.g. to help publicise a big demo.

## Making and distributing publicity

Good publicity is eye catching and easy to read, with minimal text. Visual publicity should include the purpose of the meeting, the venue, date and time, who has organised it, how to contact you, and how to get more detailed information. For details about accessibility, the programme and transport, try double-sided fliers with more text on the back, a website or longer social media posts.

Prioritise your resources to reach the right people. If you have a small number of people you definitely want to contact, try face-to-face methods like door-knocking and stalls. 'Medium priority' people could be reached with fliers through doors. 'Wide-scatter' methods like posters and social media posts can be targeted in real or online 'locations' where people are most likely to be interested, e.g. bike shops for a cycling campaign.

## The venue

Choose somewhere as comfortable and accessible as possible, especially to the people most directly affected by the campaign issue – e.g. prioritise being near the relevant site. Invite people to get in touch in advance with their access requirements, and be prepared to devote time and resources to meeting them. See our guide to *Venues and Accessibility*.

## Costs

What do you need in order to achieve your aims? E.g.: a comfortable,

accessible venue, printed fliers and refreshments. Ask around to see what you can get for free. If your campaign isn't totally urgent, try starting with an application to a small funder like the Edge Fund. Or borrow from a more established group, and re-coup costs with a raffle, donations pot and fund-raisers. See our *Raising Cash and Writing Funding Bids* guide.

## **Roles**

The day of the meeting will involve a lot of tasks. Agree in advance what roles different people will play so that it goes as smoothly as possible. For example: introducing the event, organising refreshments, chatting to people who've come on their own, setting up the equipment, managing the microphone, collecting contacts.

## **Setting up the venue**

Book the room with spare time either side for setting up and clearing away. Consider whether it is highest priority for people to see each other (a circle) or to fit in maximum people and have everyone able to see the same film or speaker (rows of chairs). If you have everyone looking in the same direction, set it up away from the door so late arrivals cause minimum disruption.

## **Equipment**

Always test your equipment beforehand: do you have all the cables you need? Will the laptop 'speak' to the projector? Will everyone be able to see? Are the sound and visuals synchronised? Can you avoid trailing extension cables or tape them down to avoid trip hazards?

## **Food and refreshments**

Not always necessary, but they help make the meeting more welcoming. Even if all you are doing is tea and biscuits consider allergies and different diets (gluten free, vegan, halal etc.). If you aren't making a profit and you only occasionally provide food there's no legal requirement to have a food hygiene certificate, but it's still worth being extra careful.

# The programme

How will you use the short time you have so that people want to get involved in your group and take action for the campaign? A balanced 'programme' will usually include something from each of the following categories.

## Introductions

Start with a short clear introduction to the meeting and your group. Ideally this is done by someone who the participants can relate to. For example, if most organisers don't live near the site of the campaign, try to find someone local to introduce the meeting.

Also allow participants to introduce themselves. If there are more than 20 participants, this can happen in small groups so everyone gets a chance to speak, even if they aren't heard by everyone.

## Putting across information

Use stories, relevant examples and visuals to help people get to grips with new information. For example: short speeches, short films, visual displays, community walk with a talk, Q & A with knowledgeable people. Think about how you can make talks speeches engaging.

## Hearing from participants

Give people the chance to process information they have heard, and share their own relevant experiences and ideas. Examples: pair and small group chats, whole group discussion, quick 'surveys', e.g. a show of hands to see how much people use a public space that is under threat.

## Opportunity for action

People may have their own ideas about what to do in support of the campaign, but it usually helps if you offer suggestions which you think will

be particularly effective. Include a range of activities with different levels of commitment or risk, from signing a petition to taking part in a sit-in. Make sure some of the actions can be done immediately (making a donation, joining your mailing list, taking part in a banner-making session immediately after the meeting). Include dates for the diary, and actions they can take at home.

## Social time

People tend to get involved in things when they feel connected to other people involved. Try to create opportunities for people to get to know each other in a way that feels natural to them. For some people a structured exercise where people answer set questions in small groups will be perfect, others prefer something less formal.

One option is a shared meal or a trip to a cafe after the meeting, but this excludes people who can't spare extra time. Consider building in opportunities like a tea break or a chance to walk round your information displays and chatting with people nearby.

### Sample meeting agenda

**Objective:** Raise awareness among local residents that a bit of 'wasteland' that has been used as a public park is under threat from developers. Get a shared understanding of the impact that will have. Build empowerment to take action, and specifically gather statements in support of a town green application.

**When:** Saturday 2-4pm

**Venue:** Scout hut next to the land. Chairs set up in large semi-circle, each with a leaflet that includes group website and upcoming dates.

**Refreshments:** Hot drinks as people arrive. (10 mins)

**Intro:** Group member welcomes everyone, explains why they have called the meeting and outlines the programme. People chat to someone sitting near about why they came. (10 mins)

**Walk:** Local residents show people their favourite spot in the 'park' – two kids show earth ramps they have built for their bikes, a local herbalist shows a patch of wild flowers and a football coach from the youth club tells a story about how she learnt to play using the trees as goals. (Alternative if it rains/not everyone can walk – a video showing the same people telling their stories on the site.) (25 mins if walking)

**Groups of four or five:** People chat about how they use the land, and anything that has come up for them in relation to the walk. (10 mins)

**Talk:** Campaigner explains the threat from developers and likely timescales in more detail. They explain the things they are doing so far to stop the development, and why they think this will be effective. They back up their talk with a few key points on slides. The same information is displayed round the walls of the village hall. (15 mins)

**Pairs:** Share reactions, and work out if they have questions they want to ask. Those who can walk around and check the information on the walls if they wish, handouts also available. (10 mins)

**Q and A / discussion:** People ask questions to help understand the situation and the choices the group have made so far, and offer extra suggestions and offers. Donation bucket and email sign-up sheet are passed around the room while this happens. (20 mins)

**Action and Wrap-up:** Offer different ways people can get involved including key diary dates. Sign-post members of the groups standing around the room who can give more information about specific things. Table set up at the back for people to write evidence submissions about how they use the space for the town green application. Another table with stickers, badges and window posters to take away. (10 mins)

**As people leave:** Tea and biscuits for people who want to linger and chat. Members of the group are available as sign-posted. (10 mins)

**Follow up:** Send out an email to everyone who attended thanking them for coming, listing upcoming events including the next organising meeting, and inviting them to put forward evidence for the town green application.

# Organising public meetings

Public meetings can be a great boost to your campaign by helping you reach people who aren't already involved in your group. This guide will help you think through how to run a public meeting in such a way the people will leave feeling that your group is friendly, welcoming and well-organised; the campaign is important and winnable and they are empowered and motivated to take action on the issue.

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