

Your complete guide to activism...

How to set up a new group

If you want to set up a new group make sure you let us know. We will then allocate a member of the team as your point of contact for the Group. They will be able to provide advice, support and materials.

It is useful to decide who in the group will take on which roles and responsibilities, for example for example; group co-ordinator, who will look after group finances, Newsletter Editor etc

You should avoid relying on people to do the same tasks year on year. By sharing the responsibilities, you avoid people feeling overly relied upon. You will also develop the skills of your members by giving them experience of different types of activity.

All members of the Group should act in accordance Oxfam's culture and beliefs – respecting alternative points of view and valuing diversity.

Participative meetings for effective action

Meetings are a good way to share ideas and organise effective action. They should be accessible, friendly, effective, organised, motivating and action focused

An agenda can help you to ensure that everything you need to cover gets discussed.

Write down action points and key decisions for reference at the next meeting, and to help people who weren't present, but are interested in staying involved.

There are many different things you can do: Invite a speaker, organise a skill-sharing session, a social event.

Communicating with your members

Clear lines of communication are important in making your Group a success. Some of the options are Newsletters, Minutes of meetings, Phone calls, email groups and websites. Do check that people are happy to share their details with other group members/Oxfam.

In addition to your own written communications, there are professionally produced publications available from Oxfam. Bear in mind that if your members receive information directly from us.

Attracting new members and keeping existing members interested.

- Ask yourself what the Group wants to do more of. What new skills are needed to achieve this?

- Think about why a potential new recruit might want to join the Group. What sorts of activities might they want to take part in? What might they want to achieve?
- Materials – a general leaflet describing the Group's activities might be the right answer; or perhaps a sign-up sheet at your events. Consider Where you will advertise, and to whom? What is likely to appeal to your chosen audience? What is the effect of the language you use in your materials?

You could invite new members to a Group meeting, campaigning activity, or social event.

Try to ensure people will feel positive about what they can achieve, and know what action they can take next.

Finances

It is Oxfam's policy that volunteers may claim expenses reasonably incurred in the course of their activities on Oxfam's behalf. What expenses may be claimed is set out in Oxfam's *Volunteering Policy*.

www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/volunteer/policy

Your Group may raise funds as well as campaigning. It is not legitimate simply to use the money you raise from the public to fund your campaigning activities, although a proportion of the funds you raise may be used to cover expenses. This is because Oxfam has a duty to account to the public for all the funds raised, and to explain how they are used. Oxfam's auditors require us to provide information on all our financial activities, including the activities of Oxfam Groups. Further details of how to deal with legitimate expenses are contained in the Financial Guidelines for Groups. Your Treasurer should already have a copy of these.

Suggestions for fundraising activities can be found in the *Oxfam fundraising kit*.

www.oxfam.org.uk/fundraise

How to Plan a Campaign

By putting sufficient time and thought into the planning stages of an event, action or campaign, you can improve your chances of success. A lot about effective planning is simply common sense. But it is always helpful to look at the tasks you'll need to perform in a systematic way. And failure to spend sufficient time analysing and co-ordinating your activity can lead to problems.

The most important thing is to clarify what your aims are. You should ask yourselves:

- What is the thing that we want to do something about? *E.g. the rules of world trade are unfair and cause poverty and suffering.*
- What task (event, stunt, or other activity) will you undertake to address that concern? *E.g. a public meeting with your local MP to discuss world trade issues.*
- How will performing that task meet the concern that you have identified? *E.g. to persuade MPs to lobby the relevant government ministers to argue for the reform of trade rules at a forthcoming WTO summit.*

The Activist Team will be able to provide advice on Oxfam's current campaigns priorities.

Planning ...

- Hold a brainstorm to come up with as many ideas as possible
- Decide what individual pieces of work will need to be done.
- Create a timeline – when do individual tasks need to be done by?
- Estimate time and cost – will you have the necessary resources?
- Prioritise – some tasks will be more crucial (and time-dependent) than others.
- Assess possible risks and take action, e.g. health and safety, insurance.
- Keep going back to your initial aims: are you on track to meet them?

Making it happen

Having decided on the tasks, when, how and by whom they will be done, and considered the resources you'll need, you can get on with putting the plan into action. You may well need to meet more than once to check you are on track.

A few tips to help you do this successfully:

- Plan in enough time for meetings: work back from the proposed date of the action.
- Use your agenda effectively: be concise; use action points; set a date for your next meeting.
- Allocate tasks widely. Delegation is important! By involving people, you will make them feel they have a stake in the event's success.
- Consider whether there is a need for someone to take on a "project manager" role.
- Don't forget to conduct an evaluation after the event: it will help you do even better next time!

How to design effective materials

Before starting to design any materials such as posters and leaflets, whether it be to advertise your Group, or publicise an event or meeting, it is important to begin by thinking creatively about what it is exactly that you want to achieve.

Start with a "brainstorming" session, to come up with as many ideas as possible. Once you have run out of ideas, you can then spend a further session working out which ideas are realistic proposals to be developed.

Make sure you can answer these questions before going ahead with designing any piece of material, big or small:

1. What is the objective of this piece of communication?

- What do you want to advertise or promote using this material?
- What do you want your audience to know or do as a result of seeing it?
- Will it be used in conjunction with any other materials?

2. Who are your audience(s)?

- Who exactly is your target audience?
- How much do they know?
- What are their behaviours/characteristics/interests?
- Where and how will they see the materials?

3. What is your key message(s)?

- How will these messages be expressed?
- Are they visual or written?
- What is the appropriate style and "tone of voice"? *E.g. fun, engaging, businesslike, etc.*

4. What information do you need to include?

- For example, the date and location of an event, contact details, an explanation of your event or Group.
- The Oxfam logo, Oxfam registered charity number (202918)
- Particular colours, typefaces, pictures, etc.

Drafting your materials

When you're clear what you want to achieve and how you'll do it, you can get on with drafting your materials. You may want to come up with a number of different rough versions and share them with others for comment, before you put a lot of effort into the finished product. As you go along, keep checking that the designs you create match the criteria you discussed previously.

- It doesn't matter whether your materials are hand-made or produced on a computer, although using a word processor or design package will help you create a more professional-looking result.
- Contact the Activist Team for advice on use of the Oxfam logo, or access to an electronic version.

- Make sure that the materials are proof-read by a fresh pair of eyes. There's nothing worse than discovering errors when you've already produced multiple copies!
- Ask if any local printers will print your materials free or at reduced cost, as a contribution to Oxfam. Sometimes they will do this in return for advertising their name on the materials.

Above all, keep your materials bold, simple and to the point, for maximum impact.

How to gain public support

Stalls

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Stalls are a good way of talking face-to-face with members of the public, and introduce new people to development issues. You can use stalls for distributing action cards or signing a petition, as well as merely giving information. Whatever you are campaigning about, it is important to consider how you will offer people the chance to get involved further. While most people will be content to hear the basic outline of the campaign and perhaps take a simple, one-off action, a few will be more interested, perhaps in getting active locally. A stall is probably the easiest campaigning activity to plan, requiring the minimum of resources (usually just campaigns materials from Oxfam, plus a table and helpers). Think about:

- The venue: could be a town centre, or a stall at a local event or festival.
- Particularly if you are going to have to pay for a venue, consider whether the people who come are likely to support the campaign.
- Find out whether you need to obtain permission to site your stall at your chosen location – the council or landowner usually. A stall outside an Oxfam shop can be a good option, especially if the shop staff are keen campaigners.
- Whilst you need to attract “punters”, too busy a location can be problematic. Make sure you don't create an obstruction, and if the police move you on, obey their instructions.
- Think hard about the words you'll use to attract people to the stall. You only have a very few seconds to get the attention of passers-by.
- Be prepared to answer more general questions about the issues or Oxfam's work – not everyone will be interested in hearing details of the campaign, but they might well be interested in related matters.
- You need at least two people on a stall at any one time. If you have enough support, dividing the day into two-hour shifts limits the time commitment people need to give.

- If you plan to sell things from the stall, the council may have stricter regulations you'll need to comply with.

Exhibitions

These are a good way of presenting information without having to provide people to be there all the time.

However, this doesn't mean it needs any less preparation; in fact, getting an exhibition ready can require more planning, preparation of materials and design skills.

Oxfam can provide material on our current campaigns, and there is a lot of information available about our international programme. The Oxfam website is the best place to start if you have access: www.oxfam.org.uk. Otherwise, the Activist Team can help you find the best place to start. There are sometimes pre-prepared display materials, which can be lent out, but mostly you would need to prepare your own displays.

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The venue and speakers

Choose a venue, which is big enough, has disabled access, and is central and well known. Decide how many speakers you want, what they should talk about, and for how long. Make sure they have been told well in advance what is required of them, your campaign's goals, and what the other speakers are going to say.

Publicity

Mail/e-mail all your members and contacts well in advance with the date, time, venue, and names of speakers. Make sure you advertise the meeting to the public, alliances, and other local organisations well in advance in order to ensure a good turn out.

Chairing

The Chair of the meeting is in charge of the way it will be run. Choose someone with experience and authority. The Chair's job is to ensure the meeting starts and finishes on time, to make sure the speakers keep to time, and to invite questions from the floor.

Making a presentation or speech

There are no rules to giving a good presentation – present in a way that makes you feel comfortable! Be passionate about your subject – if you are passionate your audience will be.

Every speaker develops his or her own style, but there are some tips, which can help you, communicate with your audience more effectively:

- Introduce yourself and say what you intend to talk about.
- Take a few moments to look at all the audience before you start speaking.
- In smaller groups, make eye-contact with everybody. In large groups, slowly scan the room. Also smile.
- Relax – take deep breaths or even yawn before going on stage.
- Do something else to gain your audience's attention at the start. Experienced speakers will often use jokes, anecdotes, analogies or questions at the start.
- Avoid jargon, clichés, technical language and confusing figures or statistics.
- The pause can be very powerful. Pausing helps to highlight a point and gain attention. Pause regularly throughout your presentation.
- Emphasise key words or phrases with your voice.
- Avoid repeating words (e.g. OK, you know, isn't it) constantly.
- If you can, try not to use notes. If you have to use them, keep to a few short prompts, rather than writing down every word.
- Be prepared for questions and be honest. Don't try to bluff if you don't know the answer – you can't know everything!

Building effective local alliances

Why build alliances?

- You might not have the capacity to do it alone.
- You can have a far greater influence.
- You can reach a different audience – not just preaching to the converted.
- It can be more fun!

What alliances can be formed?

The alliances you form depend on what possibilities are available in your area and what your aims are. The following groups and individuals might provide you with ideas for local partnerships.

Groups: For example, Amnesty International, Trade Justice Movement, Greenpeace, People and Planet groups, church groups, other volunteer groups.

Institutions: Local library or gallery, colleges, local companies, local councils, Government offices, Regional Development Agencies, local branches of national unions, for example Unison, GMB, TGWU.

Individuals: MP/MEP, Councillor, or a celebrity – a local sports star or radio personality perhaps.

You can research local alliances on the web or over the phone. Use your town website (e.g. www.brighton.co.uk) or local green/development or volunteer directories – libraries are a great place to start.

What can you do as part of an alliance?

It is up to you. Sometimes it is good to approach an ally with a really easy thing to do and go from there. Or you can offer a few options, including some bigger things to do. Ideas include:

- A joint press release on an issue, or a joint letter to the Editor of your local newspaper.
- Writing a piece for a newsletter or journal.
- A joint media stunt.
- An event, talk or fundraising activity.
- A stall on a shared issue in a town centre, fair or carnival.
- Getting more signatures, even high profile ones, on a letter to a local influential person, for example, an MP or the Chief Executive of a local company.
- Produce joint materials.

Getting things started

Are there any events or conferences locally where potential allies are likely to be present? Bring along contact details that you can give to potential allies. Or you could invite people along to a group meeting or an event that has already been organised.

It can be extremely rewarding to work with other people with different approaches and ideas – and, of course, more hands make lighter work. Investing time and effort usually pays dividends, particularly if you have a long-term approach. Building up a range of local networks and contacts will put you in a strong position.

How to spread your message in the media

Whatever activity you are planning, it helps to have the local media on your side. They can help you spread your message and engage support. The greater the publicity, the greater the chance there is of more people becoming involved, or hearing the message. There are many potential opportunities: news stories; features and in-depth interviews; letters to the editor; phone-ins; photo stories and filming opportunities.

Producing a compelling press release

The main tool for working with the media is the press release. By preparing a clear, professional press release, you greatly increase your chances of getting journalists to pick up on your story. A well-written press release will make it easier for them to understand exactly what you are doing and why. If you provide a local emphasis to the story, it will be more likely to attract their attention, even though it may be an international issue.

On Mondays, non-Parliamentary days, or days after Bank Holidays, news is thinly spread and you are likely to get greater attention. Don't send a press release out on a Friday! Decide on a day and check the deadlines of different media outlets. Many magazines have three-month lead times, whereas newspapers and radio/TV stations can be contacted at very short notice. Use an embargo if necessary to ensure all your coverage appears at the same time and to give journalists a deadline to work to.

Dos

- Use headed notepaper; give it a date and a snappy headline.
- Type it but keep it short, simple and preferably on a single sheet. Use approximately three sentences per paragraph.
- Number the pages; end the first with "more follows"; start the second with a new paragraph; on the final page finish off with "ends".
- Try to get all the crucial information in the opening paragraph, including who, what, when, where, why/how.
- Include a sensible, hard-hitting quote from an identified spokesperson, maybe a celebrity. Journalists may edit a release, but they won't change a quote. Quotes can be emotional, whereas the text of press release must be factual.
- Where you have them, include telling statistics – but not too many. The focus should be on human interest.
- Provide contact name(s) and phone number(s) – make sure all your key people have a copy, and that at least one person is available outside office hours (with a copy of the release and any useful background information).
- If the story is photogenic, give details of what, when and where photographs can be taken.
- Add brief extra background information in a "Note for Editors" section.
- Check deadlines in advance: make sure your release arrives in time for journalists to follow it up.
- Fax it if you can. Follow up with a phone call: if it hasn't been received, e-mail, fax or deliver another copy at once.

Don'ts

- Never assume the reader will know anything about your concerns.
- Rambling prose and irrelevant details detract from the impact.
- If you use both sides of a sheet of paper, the second side is likely to be ignored.
- Avoid repetition, clichés, jargon and abbreviations.

- Never make claims you cannot prove, and avoid exaggeration: overstating your case is more likely to wreck than to win your argument.
- Sloppy presentation, mistakes and bad grammar damage credibility: get someone else to check for sense, accuracy and spelling.
- Ignore media interest in your press release at your peril: you sought their attention, so return their calls.
- Wit may win a smile, but irony seldom works, especially on strangers.
- Never assume your release has been received until you've spoken to someone in the newsroom who has seen it.

Pro-forma press release

For immediate release or Embargoed until...

An embargo allows you to keep control over when your story is publicised and gives journalists a date to work to.

NEWS RELEASE

Heading

The heading should be typed in bold and centred. Keep it short, snappy and to the point.

First paragraph

Start with a bang. Get the five 'W's in straight away – Who, When, What, Where, Why.

Following paragraphs

Make your points in order of importance. The second paragraph should elaborate on the first.

You are essentially telling a story, so you must give the reader the full picture. Spell out the facts, give statistics, and quote names and numbers of people involved.

Quotes

Include a direct quote from the most relevant person involved: it will humanize the story. Keep the quote brief, providing an overview of the event. If writing a quote for somebody else, get their approval before using it. Remember to give the person's full name and job title.

More follows...

If the press release spreads to a second page, type "more follows" at the bottom right hand corner and "continued" at the top of the second page. Never split paragraphs or sentences.

ENDS

Make sure it is clear where your story ends.

Contact...

Give names and telephone numbers of people a journalist can contact for further information.

Notes to Editors

This is your last chance to give journalists details of how they can get copies of a report, photograph or any other information, including web links.

Organising a photocall or media stunt

How to set up a photocall

- Make sure you have an “angle”. As with a press release, you must have an “angle” – or reason for the media to take interest – before you start.
- Choose an outside location if possible, one that's easy to get to, where there's space for a group of people to gather without causing an obstruction.
- Write a press release to send to picture editors and TV stations. 11am is usually a good time, meeting the needs of both morning and evening papers. Give full details of the location.
- Phone picture desks a day or two beforehand, to make sure the event is in everyone's diaries.
- Make sure you have a spokesperson available at the event. Take your own photos in case the newspaper does not send a photographer. Keep a note of which journalists and photographers turn up.
- Have written details of the event ready to give to journalists, with names and titles of anyone appearing in the photograph. Have a contingency plan in case of last minute problems such as rain or illness.

Letters to the Editor

Another good way of getting an issue into the local paper is to use the letters page. You could either initiate a topic or react to a letter or article that has already appeared in the newspaper. Linking international issues in with local concerns will increase your chances of getting your letter published. Again, it is always worth following up with a phone call to ensure they have received your letter. Letters are one of the most widely read parts of the paper and can spark debate and generate wider coverage.

Your letter to the Editor should be –

- Opinionated, but conveying campaign messages and statistics
- Short and to the point – no more than 250 words in length
- Include a contact name and address
- Can be typed or hand written, delivered, faxed or e-mailed
- Can be in response to a previous letter (quote the letter writer and date) or on a new issue.

Broadcast media Opportunities

Local BBC stations, local television coverage and commercial radio stations all provide opportunities for working with the media

How to get a radio interview

- Highlight the interview potential on your press release, giving a number to call to set up interviews and

offering spokespeople/interviewees. Send releases to the producer/researcher for your chosen BBC programme or the newsdesk for commercial radio and follow up with a phone call.

- Have an articulate spokesperson available. Make it local, giving a local link and something that local people can do.

How to be the perfect interviewee

- Be prepared: re-read your press release – they will base questions on this. Why are you there? Be clear on what you want to achieve. Have three main points you want to get across, and take them with you if you're not sure.
- Talk about a real life example, using it to help explain the issue. Ask for examples from your staff contact.
- Be confident. Presenters are friendly: it's not Today or Newsnight!
- Talk about how local people can get involved or are affected. Quote telephone numbers, website addresses, local venues for more information.
- Don't use complicated language or jargon. See an interview as a chat with a friend and make eye contact with the presenter.
- Arrive at least ten minutes early.

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- If you can, try not to use notes. If you have to use them, keep to a few short prompts, rather than writing down every word.
- Be prepared for questions and be honest. Don't try to bluff if you don't know the answer – you can't know everything!

8. For reference

A. Campaigning and Charity Law

Oxfam GB is a registered charity under English law and as such is subject to regulation by the Charity Commission.

As a charity, Oxfam may not be politically biased. However, it can engage in broadly political activities to achieve its aims, as long as they will further Oxfam's charitable purposes, and are appropriate to a non-political organisation. The Charity Commission's guidelines state:

“A charity may advocate a change in the law or public policy which can reasonably be expected to help it achieve its charitable objectives... the charity can present government with a reasoned memorandum in support of its position. It may publish its views and may seek to influence public opinion in favour of its position by well-founded reasoned argument.”
(Charity Commission, *Political Activities and Campaigning by Charities*).

For Oxfam Groups and individual campaigners, as representatives of Oxfam, the main points to be aware of are:

- You may not participate in political demonstrations or express support for a particular party, although you may comment on a party's position on a matter of legitimate concern to Oxfam.
- You should exercise caution when appearing on a platform with political organisations or groups in situations in which our participation may imply to the public that we support their position, if that position goes beyond Oxfam's charitable remit.
- There will normally be Oxfam policy statements on controversial or current political situations affecting Oxfam's work. You must not go beyond these statements when speaking on Oxfam's behalf.
- You should normally check with the Activist Support Team before publishing information which summarises an Oxfam policy statement, as these will have been precisely worded to ensure they accurately reflect our position.
- You must provide people with reasoned arguments for the positions we advocate. Therefore you must supply them with sufficient information to allow them to choose whether to support our position, e.g. before they sign a petition.
- If you are in any doubt at all, check with a member of staff first! The Activist Support Team can seek specialist advice if necessary.

More detailed guidelines can be found in the Charity Commission booklet CC9, *Political Activities and Campaigning by Charities*, available online at www.charity-commission.gov.uk, or phone the Commission on 0845 3000 218.

B. Data Protection

Any person or organisation holding information about other people is obliged to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, which gives individuals the right to see personal data held on them, and gives “data controllers” duties regarding the holding of personal data.

Oxfam is registered as a data controller under the Act. This includes Oxfam Groups, which do not therefore have to register separately. The Act covers data held in any form, including both paper records and computer files. Groups may hold personal data about Group members and other individuals (“data subjects”) only if it is done in compliance with the Act.

These rules are mostly common sense, and are unlikely to cause difficulties if you are already managing personal data in a reasonable way. Some basic principles:

- You must try to ensure that any personal data the Group holds, including names, addresses, and phone numbers, is accurate and up-to-date.
- For the avoidance of problems later, you should make it clear when collecting personal data what you intend to do with it. That way, the data subject will have had the chance to choose not to give it to you, and you will have covered yourself if they change their mind later.
- Personal data may only be used for the purposes for which it was provided. So if you have said you will only contact people on a list for a particular purpose, you may not later use the list for other purposes without the permission of the people on it. However, if names are clearly collected for the purpose of informing people about Oxfam’s work generally, including local activities and events, more detailed permission is unlikely to be needed.

Principles on disclosure of information:

- No personal data may be held against the wishes of any person. You must show and/or delete any information relating to them if they ask you to.
- No personal data held by the Group may be passed on to anyone outside Oxfam without permission from the data subject, even where you think they would not mind, or if the organisation or person to whom you want to give the information to has similar aims to Oxfam. Such permission may be implied, but caution needs to be exercised, as this is where mistakes are most often made. It is acceptable to pass personal data to other people within Oxfam where appropriate.
- All personal data must be held securely. If it is inadvertently given out, the data subject should be informed and apologised to wherever possible. What amounts to adequate security is a matter of common sense; no specific precautions are prescribed.

Electronic media

When circulating information electronically, explicit permission must be obtained before any personal data (including contact details) may be held about anyone who replies. An “opt-out” option not to receive further information from you is not sufficient.

- You should not send out unsolicited e-mails that are not directed at specific, known individuals (“spamming”). Care should be taken not to give out e-mail addresses accidentally on circular e-mails.

Members’ lists

- In theory, Groups should have permission to hold contact details of each of its members, e.g. for sending out mailings or phoning around for help at events. This permission may be implied, however, and you would not normally need to ask for permission retrospectively to keep contact details you already hold.

Petitions

- Petitions should only be passed on to the person to whom the petition is addressed. Other use of the names – such as sending information about the Group or asking them to join – requires permission. If you say you will present the petition to someone, then you should make sure you actually do so.
- Unless done by e-mail (see above), it is acceptable to have a statement on the petition saying that you may contact them about Oxfam events unless they opt out (e.g. using a “tick box”).

Notes of meetings, etc.

- Groups should take care when keeping any documents, including meeting notes, etc., which record opinions about people or describe their activities. The person concerned has a right to see all such documents and would be entitled to challenge the accuracy of any reports about them. In extreme circumstances they could take legal action over statements they believed to be inaccurate and misleading.

This is not a comprehensive statement of all the provisions of the Data Protection Act. If in any doubt about your obligations as a data controller, contact the Activist Team for further information. Detailed information about data protection can be obtained from the Information Commission, www.dataprotection.gov.uk

How to Influence the political process

Oxfam’s campaigns target the people who decide on the policies that affect the lives of poor people. Typically these will be governments, international institutions (e.g. the World Trade Organisation), or multinational

companies. Local campaigners rarely have direct access to these decision-makers, but you do have ways to influence them.

You can be that change...

Local campaigners often have access to influential people, such as MPs and MEPs, as well as local members of political parties, local councillors, trades unionists and local managers of national or multinational companies. Depending on the particular issue, any of these could help to influence the way policies are shaped at national or even international level.

A few things to consider before plunging into the actual campaigning:

- Think about who is most likely to support the campaign, who may be persuaded to support the campaign, and who will almost certainly not support the campaign?

Working with MPs

The most obvious way to persuade an MP to support a campaign is to meet or write to them, explaining calmly and rationally why you believe a particular policy is necessary to combat poverty.

Local media coverage will always be useful in persuading an MP that an issue is worth bothering about.

Ideally, you are trying to build a partnership with MPs and other influential people. Do not alienate them by being confrontational or over-demanding.

Example of working with an uncommitted MP

A local Oxfam campaigner got her MP to attend a joint event: the opening of a book department in an Oxfam shop and local lobby for the Trade Justice Movement. The MP was happy to be associated with both the shop and the campaign, and **had his picture taken with campaigners** outside the shop. The MP found it easy to support the campaign because the event was positive and locally significant.

MPs are always keen to get positive media coverage, but rarely have much time to spare, so it is best to find a way for them to express their support publicly without having to spend a long time doing it.

Regional Oxfam campaigns staff often already have good relationships with supportive MPs, in which case,

media contact should be co-ordinated with them, to avoid MPs receiving mixed messages.

Example of working with a supportive MP

An Oxfam Group Co-ordinator arranged to publicly interview a local and supportive MP about the failure of the G8 to tackle poverty. The event was a success and, crucially, local media were persuaded to come along. Television, radio and newspapers covered the interview. This greatly increased the number of people that the message reached, thus making it **an event other influential politicians would take note of**. Because the MP gained plenty of good media coverage, it strengthened her relationship with Oxfam.

Insider campaigning in action

An Oxfam group member who is also a Labour Party member proposed a motion to his local party that called for funding to Iraq not to be taken from the DfID budget. He reports: "I was not optimistic but was delighted that it passed by 13 votes to 1. **It will now go probably to the Prime Minister...**" In cases like this, pressure is put upon policy-makers, regardless of the MP's position on the issue.

Visiting your MP

Your MP may run surgeries on an informal "drop-in" basis (first-come-first-served), or may expect you to make an appointment. For the informal surgeries, we advise you to turn up as early as possible. Details of surgeries are often advertised in the local press.

You can also contact your MP's office directly. The office will advise you on how and when you can meet your MP.

The visit

If you haven't met your MP before, introduce yourself as a constituent who has a deep concern about the issue – a concern shown by your support of organisations such as Oxfam.

Your MP will not expect you to have the same level of understanding and knowledge as a policy specialist. You simply need to convey your concern about the issue, and the need for the MP to take action.

It is a good idea to write a follow-up letter to thank your MP for his or her time, state what you understood to be the outcomes of the meeting, and remind the MP of the actions which he or she agreed to take on your behalf.