

How to... gain public support

Stalls

Running a stall is a basic but effective way of getting issues out into your community, and giving people the chance to get involved.

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.

Public meetings

Public meetings provide an open-access forum to air your campaign’s messages. As well as reaching the people who attend, public meetings offer a great way of generating media attention. They are also an opportunity to gather supporters in a single place, creating a sense of momentum and common cause. Some public meetings can be charged with excitement and emotion, spurring your supporters and volunteers to greater efforts, and winning over doubters to your side.

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!