

What is Public Campaigning?

We must distinguish between campaigns in general, and advocacy campaigns in particular:

- Campaigns are discrete projects designed to produce specific results from external target audiences - for example, fundraising campaigns, advertising campaigns, election campaigns and advocacy campaigns
- Advocacy Campaigns aim to achieve changes in institutional practice or public behaviour in order to directly benefit the poor and disadvantaged (or other beneficiary group)
- Public Campaigning is the process of creating and mobilising public pressure in order to achieve the goals of the advocacy campaign.

Public Campaigning is therefore one of the ways of promoting an advocacy message, alongside lobbying and other techniques. The choice of whether a public campaign is needed and what its goals are should come from the advocacy analysis and strategy.

Public Campaigning has other benefits. It can:

- Gain publicity and increase the profile of the organisation, and so
- Help recruit and retain supporters, and
- Assist fundraising

However, these benefits should be seen as subsidiary to the main aim and not overshadow the advocacy purpose and benefits.

Because public campaigning is seeking specific changes, it can be distinguished from protest, awareness raising and public education (although if necessary, these may be tools of campaigning).

Where does it happen?

Public campaigning can take place at any level – in a particular community, district, country, region or globally.

What form does public pressure take?

Public pressure arises from detectable and demonstrable public concern.

Demonstrable Public Concern (DPC) is an attitude to an issue that can be expressed in certain behaviours. For example:

- As a **consumer**: buying fair-trade coffee or boycotting Esso, etc.
- As a **citizen**: writing to MPs and government, changing voting intentions, etc.
- As a **community member**: writing to the media, wearing badges, talking to friends, etc.

For that public concern to influence decision makers, it needs to satisfy a number of requirements:

- It needs to be widespread (covering a significant part of the population that the decision maker is influenced by)
- It needs to be deeply held (so that the population will potentially adopt a negative attitude towards the decision maker, despite positively held views about the decision maker's other policies)

However, even if the concern is widespread and deeply held, it will only influence the decision maker if they know about it. At the very least the concern needs to be detectable (through, for example, market research or consumer behaviour). More profitably, the concern should be demonstrated directly by the public taking public or private action.

- Private action by concerned individuals can include signing petitions, writing letters, lobbying their Members of Parliament, and boycotting products.
- Public action by concerned individuals can include wearing a badge, displaying a poster, contributing to phone-in programmes on the radio, and taking part in demonstrations and vigils.

Although public actions generally require greater levels of commitment, they have the added benefit of generating publicity and influencing other members of the public to join them, creating a snowball effect.

How much demonstrable public concern is needed?

This is very difficult to predict, as it varies from case to case. It will depend on how much other influence is being pressed on the decision maker (including hidden pressure) and how resistant they are to changing their views.

Sometimes, only a small level of concern is needed. This may be because the decision maker feels that the concern is likely to grow unchecked if a response is not made. This is an aspect of what is sometimes called "anticipatory democracy", and is reflected in one of Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*: "The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself".

In other cases, even seemingly overwhelming public concern produces no apparent results (for example, public opposition in the UK to the invasion of Iraq in 2003). However, there may still be some hidden results, such as in the way that a decision is implemented or the impact on future decisions.