

INFLUENCE POWER

Create Effective Public Campaigns & Actions

What are political action campaigns?

Political action campaigns motivate people to become involved in actions outside the usual political channels in order to achieve change. Campaigns aim to focus attention on a concern, capture significant interest, and demonstrate strong public support so decision-makers will pay attention.

OSSTF/FEESO has organized numerous campaigns in support of public education. Our members have also been part of many other campaigns on labour, social justice, and community issues.

Why should OSSTF/FEESO get involved?

A key role for all unions is to protect members at their places of work. But unions also strive to improve the lives of members and others by getting involved in issues affecting our communities and the larger world.

- **Activism protects and builds the kind of society we want.** Protecting public healthcare, ending poverty, ensuring a safe and clean environment, and securing equality and social justice are just a few of our goals.
- **Collective action increases the potential for success.** When unions reach out and work with others on issues of common concern, our ability to influence public attitudes and elected politicians increases greatly.
- **Unions are built on a basis of collective action and solidarity.** The ability of unions to organize their members provides a strong foundation for effective activism.
- **We all win.** OSSTF/FEESO's involvement in community and social activism will help win victories in our communities. It will also broaden the network we can draw on for support on public education issues.

Choosing tactics

Campaign tactics may include a wide range of activities, including public forums, lobbying, rallies, demonstrations, postcards, posters, and sit-ins. The important thing to remember is that tactics are simply a means to an end. Their purpose is to persuade people to support you and to put pressure on decision-makers to do what you want.

Two critical questions to ask when deciding which tactics to use in your campaign are:

- How will this tactic move us closer to reaching our goal?
- Do we have the resources to pull it off successfully?

Some other advice to consider:

- **Plan carefully:**
To be effective, actions must be planned and carried out carefully. Poor organizing will lead to poor results and undermine the campaign's credibility and support.
- **Use variety:**
Doing the same thing over and over makes a campaign stale. New and different actions will help keep supporters engaged and attract a wider audience.
- **Be creative:**
Grab attention by doing something unusual, unexpected, or fun.
- **Capture the news:**
News is about things that are happening — now. Campaigns need to keep doing something to stay in the limelight.
- **Act purposefully:**
Tactics should not be chosen randomly but be put together carefully as different "pieces" of an overall strategy.

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Create Effective Public Action and Campaigns

Characteristics of successful campaigns

Recognize from the outset that political action campaigns are more like marathons than sprints. It will take time to raise awareness, win support and gain momentum. As you develop your campaign strategy, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- **Get the right issue/get the issue right:**

People are moved into action by something they care strongly about. At the same time, a campaign issue must attract widespread support from enough people to have the effect you need.
- **Keep your eye on the prize:**

Define core goals clearly. Avoid getting side tracked by different agendas or piggybacking other objectives onto the campaign.
- **Work on the message:**

Find a way to “hook” your audience and motivate them to act. Focus on a simple and direct message that reaches people where they are and will resonate. Provide material that reinforces your message. Look for creative ways to get your message out.
- **Understand your opposition:**

Figure out what is preventing change from taking place. This includes people, organizations, and structures. Consider whether any of these forces can be moved over to your side or neutralized, and how.
- **Network, network, network:**

Look for allies you can work with. Cast your net widely. Seek support from others who share your concerns or whose goals overlap, but remember that everyone doesn't have to agree on everything to work together on a campaign.
- **Make things happen:**

Collecting information, circulating campaign materials, and talking about issues or strategies is not enough to create change. Campaigns are about action.
- **Build on your strengths:**

Recognize the skills that individuals bring and make use of them. But remember the campaign's biggest strength is its ability to mobilize people in collective action.
- **Make activism easy and rewarding:**

People will come back if they think they are making a difference. Give people simple ways to express their views and take action. Acknowledge contributions and commitment. Don't make participation an “all or nothing” choice. And don't forget to have some fun.
- **Celebrate your successes:**

It can be a long haul. Claim your victories and enjoy the smaller wins along the way.
- **Evaluate your work:**

A campaign needs to assess regularly what has worked well and what hasn't. Use this to move forward more effectively in the future. Evaluations must be honest, but remember the goal is to learn, not blame.

Resources:

- Canadian Labour Congress: *Campaign Organizing in your Community: A Handbook*. Ottawa: 1991
- OSSTF. *Lobbying 101: Lobbying Resource Binder*. Toronto: 2004
- OSSTF. *Public Relations Resource Binder*. Toronto: 2003
- *Modest suggestions for anyone trying to save the world*. www.campaignstrategy.org
- *Maude Barlow's 10 steps to generating change*. www.tradeobservatory.org. February 2007