

Just Add Consciousness: A Guide to Social Activism

Activist strategies for:

- Making your voice heard
- Mobilizing people to take action
- Educating your community
- Influencing key decision makers
- Changing local and national politics
- Making our world a better place



CREATED BY



Oxfam
America

Oxfam America seeks lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and social injustice around the world.



Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) seeks to educate and empower college students to strengthen our nation through community service.



Bread for the World
Seeking Justice. Ending Hunger.

Bread for the World is a grassroots movement that seeks justice for hungry people by lobbying our nation's decision makers.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Letter Writing Campaign	2
Meet with Your Member of Congress	5
Phone Calling Campaign	6
Time Your Message	7
Use the Media	8
Organize a Teach-In	10
Organize a Demonstration	11
Creative Action	13
Cyber Activism	15
Finance Your Activist Projects	16
Publicity	17
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Just Add Consciousness: A Guide to Social Activism provides some basic strategies for activism. Before using any of these strategies, be sure that your group/organization has already done some groundwork, including researching and educating yourselves on the issue; identifying key people and institutions you are aiming to influence; setting clear, focused, and realistic goals and objectives; and creating strategic alliances. If your group needs help with these initial stages, check out Alliance for Justice's (afj.org) training and action guide *Co/Motion Guide to Youth-Led Social Change*.

Once you decide which activist strategies you will use to realize your goals, we suggest that you evaluate your progress as you proceed. Continuous evaluation will allow you to be more

open to changing your strategies if you realize they are not working. (For more information, see *Advocacy Campaigns: Influencing Organizational Decision Making*, Oxfam America.)

Just Add Consciousness: A Guide to Social Activism was compiled by three activists: Liz Carty, Oxfam America (oxfamamerica.org); Jane Fleming, Campus Outreach Opportunity League (cool2serve.org); and Stephanie Seidel, Bread for the World (bread.org). They consulted the following organizations and thank each individual for believing and living this work every day:

“The activist movement isn’t about an issue for me. It isn’t about justice or peace or freedom or equality. It’s about our very survival. The challenge before us as a human race in ensuring our own continuation is the most difficult challenge that has ever faced anyone in the history of life on Earth. Want a challenge?”

—from *No More Prisons*, by William Upski Wimsatt

Action Without Borders (idealist.org), Alliance for Justice (afj.org), American Civil Liberties Union (aclu.org), American Jewish World Service (ajws.org), Break Away (alternativebreaks.com), Center of Concern (coc.org), Civic Direct, Inc. (civicdirect.com and grantsnetwork.com), Co-op America (coopamerica.org), Davey D/FNV (daveyd.com), Direct Action Network (directactionnetwork.org), Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (fair.org), Foundation Center (foundationcenter.org), Global Exchange (globalexchange.org), Hillel (hillel.org), Independent Media Sector (indymedia.org), International Development Exchange (idex.org), JustAct (justact.org), National Coalition for the Homeless (nch.ari.net), National Peace Corps Association (rpcv.org), National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness (nscabb.org), NETWORK (networklobby.org), PAX (paxusa.org), No More Prisons (nomoreprisons.net), Power to the Youth (youthpower.net), Project Vote-Smart (vote-smart.org), Protest (protest.net), Rosenberg Fund for Children (rfc.org), Ruckus (ruckus.org), Self-Education Foundation (selfeducation.org), Student Alliance to Reform Corporations/STARC (corpreform.org), Students United for a Responsible Global Environment /SURGE (unc.edu/~dmarkato/surge.html), United for a Fair Economy (ufenet.org), United Students Against Sweat Shops (usasnet.org), Voter.com (voter.com), War Resisters League (nonviolence.org/wrl), Wise Fool Community Arts (zeitgeist.net/wfca/wisefool.htm), Youth for Environmental Sanity (yesworld.org), Youth

In Action Campaign (youthlink.org), and Youth Service America (ysa.org).

Letter Writing Campaign

It only takes a piece of paper and a pen to be an effective advocate. People often ask, “Will my letter make a difference?” Yes, it will! Congressional staff members say all it takes are 10-20 handwritten letters to draw their attention to an issue.

Since writing a letter only takes a few minutes and requires limited supplies, it is the perfect advocacy tool to take anywhere on campus or in your community. Write letters at a group meeting, after class, or at a related event. National, state, and local organizations that follow the issues you care about can provide helpful information such as sample letters and fact sheets. Also, check out the *Cyber Activism* section of this guide for information on how to effectively use email to communicate with legislators.

As an active young person, you can write to the representatives of your school’s district and state, or of your hometown. Check out the web sites listed in the reference section below to find your members of Congress by zip code. At a campus-wide letter writing table, do not worry about knowing the address of each member of Congress. Students can always write to the representative and senators from their school’s district and state.

For more targeted letters, write to your representatives who are on key committees. Web sites—including the ones listed on the reference section below—and congressional guides in public libraries list on which committee each member of Congress serves as well as explain what the committees represent. Do not be tempted to write to a key representative to whom you have no connections. Many congressional offices disregard mail that is not from a student or constituent in the district or state.

Most congressional offices respond to hand-written letters with information about their positions on the issue. If your elected official is not supportive, find answers to his/her concerns. If your representative takes your recommended action, write a thank you note. It shows you care enough to watch how your representative responds. Be sure to stay in touch with them throughout the year, track the progress of your issue in Congress, and let them know you voted on election day!

Important contact information:

Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Capitol Switchboard: 202/224-3121

President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

White House Comment Line: 202/456-1111



On election day,
vote!

The Honorable Robert Smith
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith (1):

Thank you for supporting the recent House legislation to increase the minimum wage by \$1 over two years (2). As you know, the debate is not over yet (3). In this critical time,

I urge you to continue to push for passage of an increase in the minimum wage of at least \$1 over the next two years (4).

One in ten households in the U.S. cannot afford the food their families need. In my work at Shepherd's Table in southwest Houston, I have met many hard working families whose full time job does not make ends meet (5). A higher minimum wage would help these families make work pay and put food on their tables.

Your leadership on these issues is very important. I look forward to working with you to help end hunger in our world.

Sincerely,

Ann McCurry
123 Stella Link

Tips:

1. Always start with the proper title: Honorable or Representative/Senator.
2. Be brief and courteous. Many effective letters are only 4 to 5 sentences long. If you can, begin your letter by thanking your representative for a recent vote or speech that you appreciated. Check out voting records to find out about votes you favor and how elected officials have voted.
3. Time your message to be most effective. The legislative process chart on page 7 shows at what key times to write your letters to have the most impact.
4. Be specific. Identify the particular legislative proposal you are writing about and briefly explain why you want your representative to support or oppose it.
5. Write your own letter and personally sign it. Think about what makes you change your mind on an issue. It is not always the fact-filled argument, but a concerned person who shared his/her own experiences and observations.
6. Put your return address on the letter as well as on the envelope. Most congressional offices respond to constituent mail with a letter. Your address shows your member of Congress that you are a constituent, as either a student in the congressional district or state, or a registered voter there.

Do you have other
web links that can help
your fellow activists?
Email them to
action@oxfamamerica.org.

References:

voter.com provides voting records of candidates and current political information/research.

vote-smart.org is a non-partisan organization that tracks voting records and contact information.

thomas.loc.gov supplies research on specific legislation. It is a service of the Library of Congress.

networklobby.org includes tools for lobbying Congress and local elected officials, as well as the steps to a bill becoming a law.

rpcv.org is the web site of the National Peace Corps Association. It has tools and contacts for elected officials.

bread.org is the web site for Bread for the World, a grassroots advocacy organization that tracks hunger-related legislation and shows how members of Congress are voting on key issues.

paxusa.org is a site on ending gun violence. It includes tools for advocacy.

After educating ourselves as a group on the issue, we plan our letter-writing campaign about a month in advance. We set up our letter writing table for three consecutive days, usually Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the same week. We set the table outside, or just inside, a different building each day for about four hours during a popular time.

At the table, we are always sure to have plenty of paper, pens, envelopes, sample letters (which should only be about a paragraph or two), clipboards, and several lists of representatives and senators by state. We make posters with facts and a sample letter around the table to attract attention to it. Making sure no one can pass the table without looking at it is key.

We always have two volunteers behind the table coordinating and distributing the materials and answering questions. The volunteers behind the table make the letter writing campaign run smoothly and without confusion.

We also have at least two to three volunteers in front of the table, with clipboards and paper in hand, actively approaching people. The volunteers in front of the table are crucial to getting a high number of letters. If people aren't asked to write, they will most likely not ask what is going on. An effective way to confront people is to approach confidently, with a friendly smile, and to first explain the issue in one to two sentences, and then ask if they could take the minute to write a letter. We continuously emphasize to everyone that their letter can make a difference in the lives of hungry people because young people are unfortunately the ones who don't vote because they feel that they cannot make a difference.

One last piece of advice for your letter writing campaign: Never sit! Those working the campaign are supposed to be the ones most committed to the campaign, and most excited to be a part of it.

Terry Mambu
Villanova University

Meet with Your Member of Congress

Few actions can match the effectiveness of meeting with your member of Congress face-to-face, whether in their Washington office, district office, or at a community forum. Elected officials are strongly affected by the opinions of constituents who are committed enough to a specific concern to arrange a visit.

Tips:

- Call your representative's appointment secretary to schedule a meeting time. Tell the scheduler what topic(s) you want to cover and be sure to mention how many people you are expecting to attend the visit. Some congressional offices are small. If you are bringing a large group, the office staff may need to prepare an alternative meeting space. Small groups are okay; you do not need to promise a crowd.
- Organize a diverse group from your campus' congressional district to attend. Consider what may help persuade your representative. For example, if your member of Congress has a particular religious persuasion, invite prominent community leaders from that faith tradition to accompany you on the visit.
- You do not have to be a policy expert, but you do have to be well prepared. You should be conversant with the main points of the legislation you are addressing without engaging congressional staff in a heated debate. Prepare main talking points that are key to your position.
- Ask for your member of Congress to take a specific action. As an active citizen, you may be tempted to bring many issues into your visit, but you will be more effective in your visit if you focus on one or two main issues.
- You may meet with a legislative aide instead of your representative. Aides are usually well-informed and offer critical advice that will help shape the congressperson's position on a range of issues.
- You may only have a few minutes with the member of Congress or aide, so keep it short and stick to your talking points. If you have more time, you can discuss additional points about the issue and hear his/her views and opinions.
- After your visit, stay in touch with the office by sending a thank-you note. This is your opportunity to build a relationship with your member of Congress. Follow-up in a timely manner with any requested materials and information. If the member of Congress commits to take a specific action, keep an eye on it.



On election day,
vote!

Representative Richard Neal (D-MA) cosponsored important hunger-fighting legislation after a visit from a small group of students from Mt. Holyoke College. While many students serve in emergency relief agencies during alternative spring breaks, these students decided to add to their valuable community service a day to help create the political will to address hunger through targeted political action.

After the visit, Anita Magovern, Coordinator of Community Service at Mt. Holyoke College, said, A lobbyist is somebody with a message to share who is organized to share it. Everyone has the right to speak out. The experience made her realize that any group can lobby.

Though Rep. Neal was aware of the legislation, he had not taken action on the bill. The group asked Rep. Neal to show his support for the legislation by becoming a cosponsor. A long list of bipartisan cosponsors demonstrates support for legislation before it comes up for a vote and can help move the legislation forward. At the end of the visit, Rep. Neal committed to being a cosponsor.

This effective visit did not happen by accident. Careful preparation helped the group educate Rep. Neal about the legislation and effectively persuade him to support the bill. Prior to their visit, the group met with Bread for the World (a grassroots anti-hunger movement) to learn the details of the legislation, like current cosponsors and bill numbers. They also role-played the visit to plan who would make each important point.

The students from Mt. Holyoke College played a crucial role in pushing legislation forward that can help thousands of families put food on their tables and end hunger in their homes.

Phone Calling Campaign

Sometimes legislation moves so quickly on Capitol Hill that there is no time to write letters or arrange a visit; in that case, telephone calls are a fast and personal way to express your concerns.

Tips:

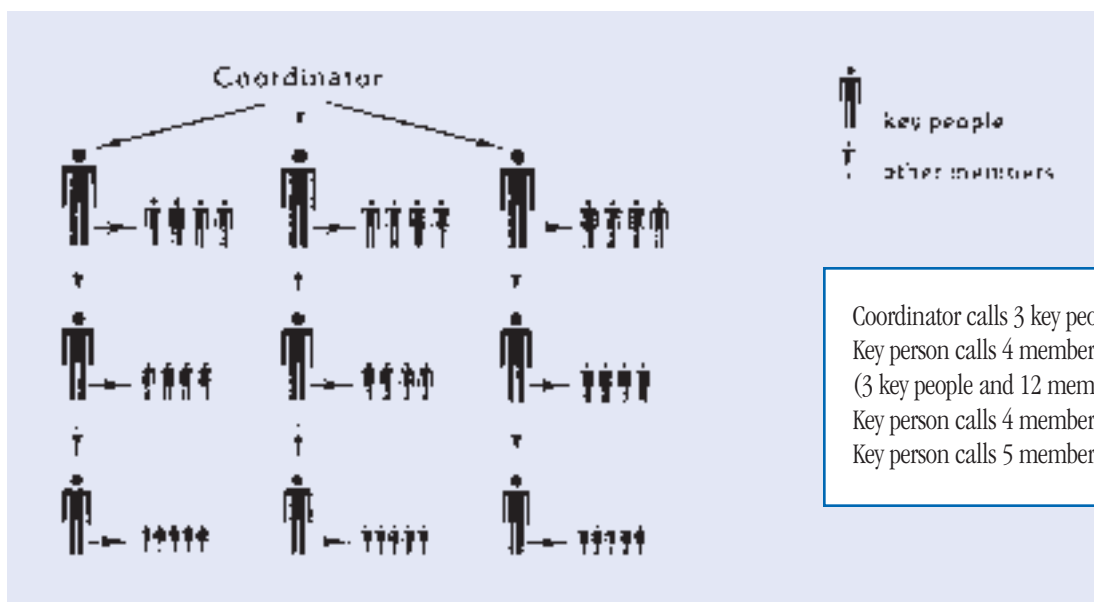
- Call your member of Congress at his/her Washington, DC, office.
- Identify yourself and your affiliation (your school, group name, or your hometown.)
- Ask to speak with the member of Congress or the legislative aide handling the issue. If neither person is available, leave a message with your name, address, and phone number with the receptionist.
- If you are generating numerous calls, ask callers to leave a message with the receptionist. Since you are trying to make a positive relationship with the staff, you don't want to overload the legislative aide with too many calls. A few callers can contact the aide to let him/her know that there are many messages with the receptionist about the issue.
- Keep your message brief. Like an effective letter, be sure to make a specific request of your representative.
- Be prepared to have background information on your issue available to send to the office if there are any questions. Contact organizations like Bread for the World and Oxfam America that follow the issues you care about for helpful resources.

To generate a persuasive number of calls, form a telephone-tree network of activists to pass a message along to the member of Congress at crucial times in the legislative process. Every person on the network delivers a suggested message to the congressional office. This flood of calls can sway an undecided vote or convince a legislator who wonders where the public stands on the issue.

Setting up a Phone Tree:

1. Choose a coordinator to maintain and activate the phone tree. This person will pass along the message to several key people, who will continue to pass the message on to other members.
2. Make a list of the current phone numbers of your members.
3. Select a few key people to be responsible for calling up to 10 people.
4. Give these key people the names and phone numbers of members to be called.
5. Be sure to pass along a short and concise message. Since the message will go through the tree, it needs to be clear enough for everyone to write it down and repeat it to the congressional office.
6. Keep your phone tree current and working. After the phone tree has been activated, the last person on the tree should call the coordinator to verify the message made it through the network.

Do you have other web links that can help your fellow activists? Email them to action@oxfamamerica.org.



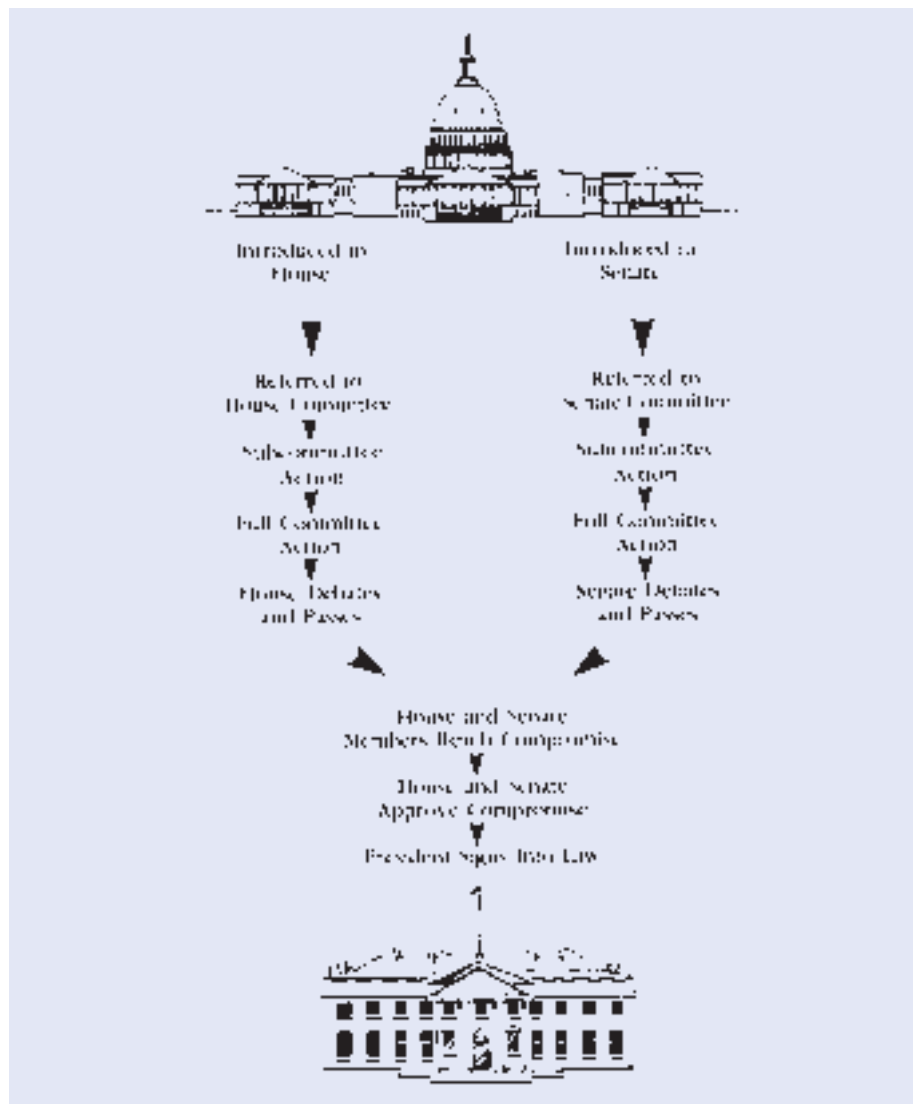
Time Your Message

Whether you are doing a letter writing campaign, activating a phone tree, or visiting with your member of Congress, be sure to time your action to have the most impact. You can exert the most influence by taking action at these key points in the legislative process:

- Before a bill is introduced, you can help generate support for the legislation and urge your member of Congress to be a sponsor of the bill.
- When a bill is introduced, urge your representative to cosponsor. As a cosponsor, your member of Congress can show his/her support for the bill before it comes up for a vote. A long list of both Republicans and Democrats shows broad and unified support for a bill.
- A key stage in the legislative process is when a committee or subcommittee is marking up the bill, which means they are considering the individual provisions and making requested changes. If your member of Congress is on the committee or subcommittee, be sure to voice your opinion about provisions you would like to have removed or changed.
- When the bill goes to the House or Senate floor for a final vote, urge your members of Congress to support it or oppose it.
- For the status of the bill you are following, check out vote-smart.com, voter.com, thomas.loc.gov, and organizational web sites that track the issue you care about like bread.org, nomoreprisons.net, and justact.org.



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vote!



Use the Media

Op-Ed Pieces are a highly effective way of expressing your opinion in the newspaper. Op-Eds are opinion pieces that appear opposite editorial pages. They are persuasive, well thought-out, well-written, short in length (usually about 800 words) but longer than a letter to the editor, and authored by a high-profile person or someone who has experience with the issue. The published op-ed should be timely, and present a strong, well-informed position, supported by facts.

Basic Tips for Working with the Media

- Develop and maintain a “press list” (which consists of the reporter’s name, title, address, phone number, email, fax number, deadlines). Be sure to include: wire service (Independent Media, United Press International, Reuters), local and regional newspapers/magazines, local “zines,” local TV news and talk shows, local cable stations, special interest publications (ethnic, college, high-school, religious, punk, trade, professional).
- Meet with reporters, DJs, talk show hosts, and editors personally—develop the relationship and establish rapport. See where their interests lie. Follow-up with phone calls to give them story ideas or to give them an update on your program.
- Read reporters’ stories. Give them feedback—make them aware you are reading, watching, and listening to them. By reading their stories you will know whom to contact for your media outreach.
- Be prepared to give reporters facts, accurate information, quotes, historical background information, and if possible an “exclusive,” meaning they are the reporter breaking the news.
- Return reporters’ calls as soon as possible.
- Use all the “free” resources the media offers, such as the calendar column, letters to the editor, Op-Ed articles, and Public Service Announcements.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor represent your perspective in the local newspaper and can be a counter argument for articles that you do not agree with. They also:

- reach a large audience;
- are monitored by elected officials and other decision-makers; and
- create an impression of widespread support for or against an issue.

Be Direct

Make one point (or at most two) in your letter. Because letters are often edited, state the point clearly in the first paragraph. Start with a catchy opening and use the active tense.

Be Timely

Address a specific article, editorial, or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to or a recent event. Refer to the title, date, and author of the piece you are agreeing with or disputing.

Support Your Facts

If the topic you address is controversial, consider sending documentation along with your letter—but do not overload the editors with too much information. Refute or support specific statements, address relevant facts that are ignored, and avoid attacking the reporter or the newspaper.

Local Angle

To explain the issue’s local or personal impact, look at the letters that appear in your paper—is a certain type of letter usually printed?

Know Your Audience

Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper. Be professional—this is not a letter to a friend. Write for the community who reads the paper (do not try to discuss technical terms if the audience will not know the technicalities of the issue).

Maximize Use of the Letter

Send the letter to neighborhood, alternative, high school, and college papers—the smaller the publication the more likely it will get published. Get others to write letters—if your letter does not get published, perhaps someone else’s letter on the same topic will.

Logistics

Check and adhere to the newspaper’s letter specifications, especially regarding word limits. Write in short paragraphs (3 sentences long), find out the editor’s name, include your contact information (name, address, phone number, email), type or email the letter.

Sample PSA Script on “Driving While Black”

Guy #1: Aw, man!

Guy #2: What?

Guy #1: The police are following us.

Guy #2: You sure?

Guy #1: Everywhere I go, they re there, I m telling you.

Guy #2: Alright, be cool. Hold on . . . why are we scared? We didn t do anything wrong.

Guy #1: Yeah. So why re they pulling us over?

Announcer: The sight of a police car shouldn t scare you. Driving while black or brown isn t against the law, but police officers stopping drivers because of the color of their skin. In one case it was found that minorities made up only 16 percent of drivers, but were 74 percent of those stopped and searched. Enough! Call the ACLU hotline and tell us your story at 877/6-PROFILE. Together we have the power to help end discrimination by the police. Let s arrest racism.

Do you have other web links that can help your fellow activists? Email them to action@oxfamamerica.org.

Press Releases

A press release is a full and succinct account of your story/event, usually one or two pages, and should be written as a news article. Press releases help editors write an article. In fact, some small community newspapers will actually print your press release “as is.”

- The first paragraph is the lead. It is one to three sentences long and answers “who, what, when, where, why, and how?” The lead must grab the editor’s attention.
- The second paragraph is the bridge. It provides the source and a transition for the more detailed information.
- The third paragraph is the body. The information given in the lead is explained in detail in the body. Add quotations, facts not included in the lead, and general information on the organization.
- Add a photograph to grab attention.
- Follow-up with a phone call and/or personal visit—it may increase their interest in the story.

Logistics

Type the release, double-spaced, on letterhead with wide margins. At the top include the name and phone numbers for the contact person, the date and time for the story’s release, and a short headline. When there is more than one page type “—more—” at the bottom except for the last page. On the last page type “###” or “—END—.” Fax the release to a reporter with whom you have a relationship or to the editor.

Public Service Announcements

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are short messages that radio and television stations air free of charge on behalf of community organizations. Contact your local public service directors at the television and radio stations serving your area for the exact requirements of placing a PSA. They may even be able to help you produce the PSA.

- PSAs are designed to be heard. It must be personal and have a sense of immediacy.
- Make the PSA catchy to grab the interest and attention of the target audience.
- Use active voice and present tense when possible.
- Inform listeners/viewers how they can contact your organization—include your phone number and web site. Be prepared for increased calls.
- Include accurate facts, dates, and names. Answer the questions “who, what, why, when, where, and how?”
- Read it aloud—does it read smoothly? Are the words too difficult to pronounce?
- Fit your message to the time slot: on average, 10 seconds = 25 words, 30 seconds = 75 words, 60 seconds = 150 words.
- Send a thank-you letter to the public service director and/or the DJ or TV host that airs the PSA—ask your friends to do the same. They like positive feedback!

Television Stories

Television stories are short and simple. Complex stories are usually reduced to 30 or 60 second segments.

- The assignment editor decides on the day’s coverage the day before or on the day itself (call before 4 pm).
- Hold events before 3 pm in order to be included in that day’s coverage.

References:

indymedia.org for connecting to the independent media outlets.

fair.org for media tips and lists of alternative media outlets—click on the “activism” button.

aclu.org for sample letters to the editor and media tips.

oxfamamerica.org for sample press releases and media tips.

Organize a Teach-In

Visualize young people gathering in a church or a community center in the 1960s to listen to Dr. Howard Thurman and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., teaching how to organize and describing the underlying issues of racism. They were doing teach-ins—probably the most successful teach-ins of the last century. It's your turn now!

1. Decide what you want to do. This will depend upon your audience and how ambitious you are. You can show a movie, invite a speaker, have a forum of students and professors, or do a workshop on a specific skill or topic. You can even do all of these over a few days and call it a conference. The student group, STARC (*corpreform.org*), likes to host a two part series—the first time they show a video and then they host an interactive workshop on direct action tactics.
2. Reserve a room, confirm the speakers (have a back-up plan in case they do not show), check to make sure you are not competing with a concert or other popular event, get a visual aid (video, flip charts), make (or order from a national organization) educational pamphlets, and get food and drinks.
3. Get the word out! Why bother organizing a teach-in if no one comes? Set an attendance goal. Put up posters or write the information with chalk on sidewalks or chalkboards. Gather up your friends. Go to other meetings where people might be interested in the topic and tell them about the teach-in. Ask professors to give extra credit for attending the teach-in and writing a paper for class.
4. Create your agenda. Make your teach-in fun and interactive. Do a fun icebreaker to get the teach-in started.
5. Do the teach-in! Get people's contact information to keep them informed on next steps. Have at least one way they can immediately take action. For example, send on-line faxes before they leave or check out the *Letter Writing* section.

Other Forms of Teach-Ins

Open Mikes and Speak-Outs

are great ways to maximize young people's voices on controversial issues and to encourage them to exercise their rights to free speech (find out if your campus has a free speech zone). Common areas like the cafeteria are the perfect setting. The downside to this activity is the lack of control. Having a clear message will help, but remember that you want people to express their views. Keep in mind the noise you will create and make sure you are not disruptive to others.

Debates & Panel Discussions

get both sides of the issue represented, so include young people from all walks of life. Make sure you truly have all points of view equally represented.

For both Open Mikes/Speak Outs and Debates/Discussions, be respectful of opposing views.

Agenda for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) Teach-In

Introductions: Have everyone tell their first name and one word that describes why they are at the teach-in. (10 minutes)

Checking Labels: Have people check the clothing label of their neighbor, looking for the country of origin. Have people describe the conditions under which they think the clothes were made. (10 minutes)

Educate: Review the notes on the flip chart about what "structural adjustment" is and how many countries are in debt. (20 minutes)

Video: Show the video *Deadly Embrace*. Contact STARC for a copy of the video. (25 minutes)

Small Groups: Break into groups of four and discuss what you thought about the video and the role of the IMF. (10 minutes)

Brainstorm: Regroup and list action steps the group can take to combat the problems created by the IMF. (15 minutes)

Next Steps: End the teach-in by having everyone write on a piece of paper one action step that they will take. Ask people to display their action steps at home to remind themselves of commitments made. (5 minutes)

References:

corpreform.org is STARC's web site for upcoming actions and research on corporations.

protest.net has background information on activism and international action updates.

directactionnetwork.org has a map of activist resources and networks in your community.

Do you have other web links that can help your fellow activists? Email them to action@oxfamamerica.org.

Young people, like those pictured below, take an active role in planning and participating in large scale demonstrations, like the Millennium March. Smaller demonstrations happen daily on campuses and in local communities. The book *The Future is Ours* by John W. Bartlett (netspace.org/future/) suggests keeping the following in mind when deciding on what type of demonstration to hold: you rally for something you support and you protest against something you oppose.

Vigil: Typically a quiet event at night with candles to honor and remember lost lives or victims. Example: Take Back the Night.

Sit-In: Occupying a public or private space, typically a decision maker's office. The protesters make a demand and do not leave until the demand is met or negotiated. Example: holding a sit-in at your university's president's office because of sweat-shop labor being used to make your school's apparel.

March: A group of people, holding signs and chanting, walk from a designated point to a communal destination in order for a message to be conveyed to the public and decision makers. Example: Million Man March.

Picket Line: People, holding signs and chanting, march outside a building or office. Example: Union workers on strike.

Protesting Sweatshop Labor

Putting pressure on the university administration to ban sweatshop labor from being used to produce campus products at Georgetown University really gained momentum when a student from the university visited a factory in Latin America and saw a cap with the Georgetown logo. Student activist Michael Levinson said, "The sit-in at the president's office that we organized came after months of educating ourselves, the campus, and the administration about the issues. We won full public disclosure, meaning that we know the locations of the factories that are making Georgetown apparel. We also created a code of conduct that all of our vendors must agree to follow. To date, more than 80 campuses have had similar success."



All types of demonstrations require *planning*. A demonstration needs to be part of an overall strategy.

Keep these tips in mind:

Core group of organizers: Assign specific roles to people, such as media, outreach, permit coordinator, and publicity manager.

Turnout: Numbers are important because the public and the media look to the number of people you can mobilize and equate that to the level of support you have for your issue. Develop a specific strategy, including a goal for the number of people you will recruit to attend the demonstration. Check out the *Publicity* section for ideas on recruiting people.

Permits and Officials: Know your rights regarding use of space on campus or in the community. Gather all necessary permits so the protest is not shut down for a logistical reason. Talk to the campus or community police about the demonstration. If you are planning to risk arrest, have trained legal observers at the event to take notes. The ACLU (*aclu.org*) is extremely helpful in clarifying your rights and responsibilities.

Equipment: Make sure you have everything you need (megaphones, poster board, first aid kit, tarps for rain, information flyers) and that the electrical and sound equipment works.

Press Packets: Prepare folders for the press with detailed fact sheets, letters to the editor your group wrote, press releases, and recommendations for a solution to the issue for which you are rallying. Make sure you include a one-pager with major points for those reporters that need a quick reference. See the *Media* section for more tips.

Slogans and Chanting: Come up with catchy slogans the group can quickly learn and chant loudly. You do not want to sound belligerent. Keep in mind that people passing by are people you want to educate, not alienate.

Signs: Make signs that have bold letters and a clear message. Most passersby do not have the time or inclination to stop and chat with demonstrators, so it is important that your signs catch their attention and send a clear message. Once you catch someone's attention, they are more likely to listen to the facts or receive a fact sheet.

Puppets: Life-size puppets dramatize your issue and serves as a great visual for the media while the demonstration is happening. See the resource section for more information.

Speakers: Gather a diverse group of people to speak, including those who are directly affected by the issue, young and old people, as well as people of color, all levels of education, or varying physical abilities (make sure they have accessibility). *Give short time slots for each speaker*—this is a demonstration, not a teach-in.

Timing: Hold your demonstration around a time when decision makers will be near you, for example, at a convention.

Weather: Consider a back-up plan if your demonstration is scheduled to be outside. Assign a rain date on all your flyers and promotional materials.

Visibility: Hold the demonstration where there is lots of traffic (cars or pedestrians).

References:

igc.org for connecting to various issue areas and advocacy tips.

usasnet.org for ideas on demonstrating on campuses.

zeitgeist.net/wfca/wisefool.htm is the web site for Wise Fool Community Arts. They use art and theater as vehicles for community building and social change. The *Wise Fool Handbook* is full of ideas on how to make puppets and resources for street theater.

nonviolence.org/wrl is the War Resisters League web site.

interlog.com/~ksimons/198.htm for methods of nonviolent action.

Civil Disobedience

The basic definition of civil disobedience is the refusal to obey civil laws regarded as unjust, usually by employing methods of passive resistance. The ACLU describes civil disobedience as the vigorous public expression of controversial views. It is a cherished and vital part of American democracy, protected by the First Amendment to our Constitution. Non-violent protest even if unlawful should always be met by a non-violent response by police. Check out the *Handbook for Nonviolence* by the War Resisters League.

Do you have other web links that can help your fellow activists? Email them to action@oxfamamerica.org.

Creative Action

In today's busy world, how do you get people to stop and take notice? Creative action can be a great way to get attention and help to educate others about an issue.

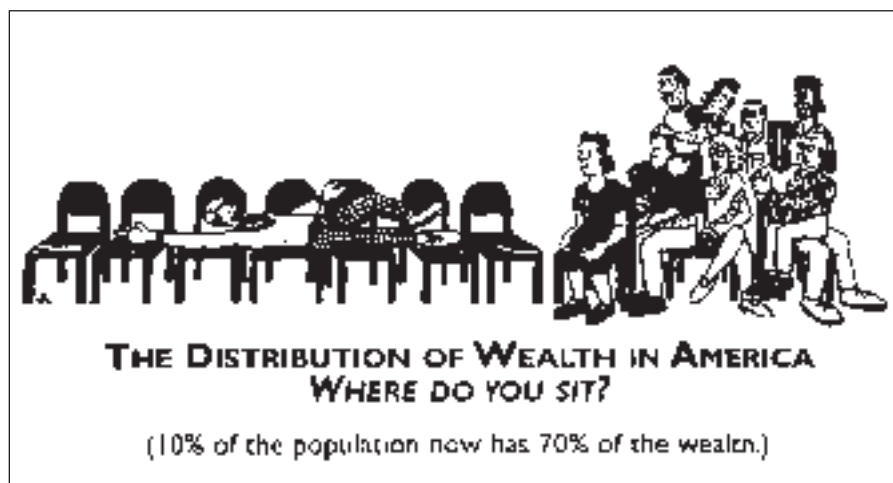
Tips:

- Focus your creative action on a specific target and message.
- Creative actions do not have to be theatrical; you can make a banner, billboard, or anything visual.
- Research history—the civil rights movement (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), non-violent actions (Gandhi), apartheid (South Africa)—to learn more about direct action techniques already taken, including challenges and successes.

Here are some examples:

100 Chairs

To demonstrate the growing wealth divide in the U.S., line up 100 chairs in a high-traffic place on campus. Ten people spread out over 70 chairs (lying down, stretching out) while 90 people have to fit on the remaining 30 chairs. This shows that 10 percent have 70 percent of the wealth, while all the rest (90 percent) have only 30 percent of the wealth. You can modify this using 10 chairs and 10 people or use this concept to demonstrate other statistics. *Source: United for a Fair Economy*



Source: United for a Fair Economy

Human Bar Graph

One hundred students line up to represent the president's salary, while one person represents a janitor's salary. A sign or spokesperson explains what is represented.

Source: United for a Fair Economy: The Campus Living Wage Campaign

Interactive Theatre

Create a short (5 minute) skit on some issue (for example, hunger, homelessness, racism, sexism). Make the skit controversial. Go through the whole skit once for your audience. Then repeat the skit, allowing the people in the audience to say "stop" at any point. The person stopping the skit then replaces a character they choose and changes the play. Hold a discussion at the end.

Guerrilla Theatre

Create a dramatization that highlights your issue. For example, when Georgetown University students were protesting sweatshop labor in the production of campus wear, they staged a fashion show in a high-traffic area of campus. Students donned clothes with the university logo, and as

they strutted down the walkway, the emcee talked about the sub-standard wages paid to workers who assembled the clothes. Guerrilla Theatre was used in the 1980s to dramatize death squad abductions in Central America. Students would stage an “abduction” in the cafeteria; this creative action engaged many students to join in Central American solidarity work.

Invisible Theatre

Create a situation that will draw on-lookers into a discussion about an important issue. Example: Two people go into a clothing store where sweatshop labor is being used to manufacture the clothes. The cell phone of one person rings. “Hello. Yeah, I’m here shopping at the (Name of Store). What? You’re kidding! They use sweatshop labor to produce their clothes? Hey (to other person, in a loud voice so that others can hear), did you know that (Name of Store) uses sweatshop labor to make their clothes?” Draw the other shoppers and staff people into a discussion on living wages as a human right (see Global Exchange, *global exchange.org*, for current campaigns on living wages and other issues).

Demonstrating Inadequate Shelter

Build shantytown housing on campus to demonstrate how people not earning a decent wage are forced to live in many countries. Sleep out in your quad to demonstrate homelessness in the U.S.

References:

ruckus.org for on-line training manuals (media, scouting, climbing).

directionnetwork.org for information on direct actions like World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund protests.

ufenet.org for information on campus living wage campaign.

globalexchange.org for updates on boycotts and demonstrations.

coopamerica.org for listings of ethical companies and boycotts

youthpower.net for ideas on actions to take charge of your school, life and world.

Do you have other
web links that can help
your fellow activists?
Email them to
action@oxfamamerica.org.

Cyber Activism

Creating connections among the local activists in your city/town can be an important way to sustain you in your work. Check out *idealist.org* to search for the activists near you. Get together and support each other in your work. This can be a great social network as well!

Do you have other web links that can help your fellow activists? Email them to action@oxfamamerica.org.

Rallying a Large Group of People for an Event (Virtual Organizing)

As the November 1999 Seattle WTO and the April 2000 IMF/World Bank protests showed, the Internet can be an extremely powerful organizing tool.

Tips:

- Create a web page to go with your event. Make your emails short and direct people to a hyperlink to the web for more details. Make sure your page is always up to date.
- Find a service provider that will allow people to easily subscribe to your listserv (try *listbot.com* or *egroups.com*)

Listservs/Electronic Mailing List

This is a single email address that actually contains your “list” of email addresses. Listservs are a way to discuss issues, organize, and share ideas and resources with a group of people. You can create your own (for your particular event/cause) and join existing ones to keep up on the issues. Make sure to actively collect email addresses at all your events, and use your listserv to keep activists informed and connected. Here are two listservs to check out:

- SURGE (Students United for a Responsible Global Environment) is for young activists who see the connections between all of our social, environmental, and economic justice campaigns and efforts. Subscribe at dmarkato@email.unc.edu.
- Davey D created a listserv that connects people interested in hip-hop and politics. He recently was an important source of information on the Proposition 21 in California. You can subscribe to his listserv by going to his web site daveyd.com/rapstation and clicking on “subscribe to FNV.” Davey D’s email is kingdave@sirius.com.

Find out more by looking at these cyber-activist web sites with resources for virtual organizing

- netaction.org/training/
- unc.edu/~dmarkato/surge.html for information on student activism (SURGE web site).
- afj.org (Alliance for Justice: E-advocacy for Nonprofits)
- intranets.com for information about creating “virtual offices.”
- nation1.net
- risingsun.org/tech.html for advice on creating a virtual community, doing it at no cost, and much more.
- organizenow.net
- ruckus.org
- cco.org

Lobbying your Representative On-line:

- Even though most representatives have email addresses and even web pages, legislators usually respond better to the traditional lobbying tactics of visits, letters, phone calls, faxes, and postcards. It is best to experiment with a variety of tactics to see which works with your representative(s).
- When you send an email to your representative, always include your mailing address in your email. Many emails will only be taken seriously if you include your address, because that is the only way a legislator knows you are in his or her district.
- Take a look at the *Letter Writing* tips. An effective email letter should follow the same guidelines.
- Use these web sites for information on how to contact your federal, state, and local representatives:

U.S. Senate: senate.gov

U.S House of Representatives: hous.gov

Library of Congress: thomas.loc.gov

Find your state and local representatives: congress.nw.dc.us/voxcap/states.html

vote-smart.org is a non-partisan organization that tracks voting records, campaign finance information, issue positions, performance evaluations, and contact information.

voter.com gives you voting records of candidates and current political information/research.

Finance Your Activist Projects

Money—we all need it for the activities we want to organize. Often activists are called the “out of pocket” sector because we use our own money to fund our projects. However there are other ways to be an activist while not going broke!

- Check with activist organizations in your community and national and international nonprofits and businesses. Often they have funds to support a specific issue. They can at least send you free educational materials to distribute at your event.
- Look up foundations on the web—there are many that support young people and activists. For example, check out *foundationcenter.org* and the Rosenberg Fund for Children, *rfc.org*.
- A new resource for grants is on *grantsnetwork.com*. This web site links grant seekers and grant providers in a dynamic on-line environment.
- The Self-Education Foundation intends to strategically fund inspired, community based efforts, organizations and individuals who support information sharing, self-advocacy, networking, visionary thinking, and being adaptable and prepared for the changes of the future. Visit them at *selfeducation.org*.
- Try to get funds from your campus- student activities, student government, or political science or other departments. Make a pitch to the committee that plans speakers and alumni events.
- Hold a fund-raiser. Make it fun. Have a theme party, cook-out, house party, rave, talent show, or a car wash. Check out *alternativebreaks.com* for other great ideas.
- Once you complete your project, you can apply for the Youth In Action Award for \$1,000. They recognize young people for producing results in their community. Visit them at *youthblink.org*.



Publicity

Publicity is a key element in the success of any campaign. Build a movement by educating people about your issue and then mobilizing them to join your events. Be consistent, frequent, and creative with your marketing tactics.

Create a core concept that can be expressed in seven words and put it on *everything* you publish. For example, a group of young people working on body image and eating disorders came up with “mobilizing young people to eliminate eating disorders.”

- Make up baseball cards with the “villains” or “heroes” of the movement and put statistics, facts, and interesting information about the people on the cards.
- Write personal letters to people inviting them to participate telling them the specific skills they possess and how they can be used in the project.
- Use chalk on sidewalks, streets, and chalkboards to advertise an event or message.
- Run a classified advertisement with the heading, “Looking for Activists.”
- Create a controversial billboard ad.
- Post your flyers on community billboards, corporate bulletin boards, or nonprofit bulletin boards.
- Ask professors and teachers if you can speak for 2 minutes before or after a class.
- Get a magazine to run an ad for you—this requires relationship building.
- Ask the campus and community radio and TV stations to run a PSA.
- Run your campaign in waves—the first week you put up posters with one line or symbol. The next week you add on to the line or symbol. The next week you add on to the previous week. By the fourth week the flyer should convey a complete message.
- Create a symbol that represents your movement—make stickers and post them everywhere.
- Ask restaurants and bars if you can post flyers.
- Make up buttons and bumper stickers.
- Produce T-shirts with your message and web site—make them funny or controversial.
- Give away floppy disks with a label that has your message and web site.
- Use the Internet—emails, banner ads, pop-up messages.
- Hand out flyers, t-shirts, bumper stickers, or posters—all with your message and web site—at a concert.
- Ask a store if you can use their window for a display on your issue and event.
- You know those free post card stands at restaurants and coffee shops? Get one printed for your issue—it’s not expensive.
- For protests, get rain parkas made up with your message on the back.
- Get fortune cookies made with your message or facts about your issue inside.
- When you are making t-shirts, stickers, business cards, or any promotional material, consider having it union made to ensure the articles are not made using sweat-shop labor. Check out uniteunion.org (click on “buy union”) for a resource in your community.



Frequency, Consistency, and Creativity!

Flyers are expected and necessary tools of publicity. They can be used creatively, consistently, and frequently. In preparation for the Oxfam Hunger Banquet, our campus hung colorful flyers with simple, catchy phrases that conveyed our most immediate message in order to gain the attention of lots of casual passers-by. Doors and walls along stairwells are excellent spots because it's hard to dismiss flyers when they're hung at eye-level. To really explain our organization's purpose and our event, we also hung informative flyers in bathroom stalls, on bulletin boards, near drinking fountains, in the library lobby, and near tables at the student union. These flyers had pictures, tables, graphs, copied articles, and a collage of facts that were chosen to really move the reader. Flyers are a great chance to inform and convince people of the importance of your issue with thoughtful and creative art and words.

Consistency and use of your campus' unique resources will help ensure that you've reached many people. Plan ahead and follow-through. Three weeks before the Oxfam Hunger Banquet, our organization announced the date, time, and place of its upcoming event. We had a representative attend student government's weekly meetings to publicize. We also advertised through the Residence Life Office, which often requires their student RAs and hall counselors to decorate bulletin boards or plan educational and service hall programs. Asking these students, and other organizations like fraternities, sororities, and health- and gender-related student groups to post information or promote our event really helped us increase participation. Also co-sponsoring events and pooling funds with other student organizations to bring a high profile guest speaker to our campus have resulted in successful events and memorable experiences.

Effective publicity usually means attracting the optimal number of participants. To do this, creative advertising that draws a diverse and large crowd is recommended. To gain attention for an upcoming international festival on campus, the hosting organization obtained school permission to borrow golf carts and played music as they safely drove around campus passing out flyers between scheduled class-times. This creative approach grabbed the attention of many. Have fun planning and get inspired as you advertise your event, and others will undoubtedly catch your fever!

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