

Planning a local campaign

Change that benefits the whole community

As an advice agency, you are constantly working with people to resolve the problems they face, and will be painfully aware of policies and practices that lead to injustice and deprivation. By campaigning to influence these policies and practices you can benefit the wider community as well as individual service users.

A campaign can absorb a lot of time and energy, so think it through before you start. It's important to have a written campaign plan. This will enable you to co-ordinate the tasks involved, use people and resources effectively and evaluate the outcome.

Key questions to address:

- What exactly are we trying to achieve?
- Who are we trying to influence?
- What sort of campaign is most appropriate?
- Who will be involved?
- What is the timescale?
- What resources are needed?
- How will the campaign be evaluated?

What exactly are we trying to achieve?

The first stage of planning the campaign is to decide what you are trying to achieve. Are you clear what the problem is and what you want to change? Do you want to influence policy, improve service delivery, change public opinion or behaviour? Deciding on this will later inform other key decisions; who to target, key arguments, type of campaign and so on.

Your objectives must be both specific and realistic. They need to identify who should take action, when and why. An awareness of the costs associated with your ideas is crucial as many proposals can be rejected out of hand by policy makers simply because they are too expensive to consider seriously. If you are thinking of a campaign to change public attitudes, be aware that this can be very difficult, both to achieve and to measure.

Local campaigns may relate to local or national issues, or both. While national policies can only be changed at a national level, a groundswell of public interest at a local level will certainly help the cause. If your agency is a member of a wider network, you may need to work with the national organisation to avoid your campaign objectives being in conflict, which could undermine both your work and theirs.

Who are we trying to influence?

Be clear who your campaign is aimed at: you must target the person/ people that have the power to change what needs changing.

- If you want to change national policy at UK level, it may be Government: ministers, MPs and civil servants.
- In Wales it may be the Welsh Assembly Government.
- Locally, it could be councillors and local authority officers.
- If you want to change the employment practices of a local firm, you may need to target the owner or manager director.
- Your audience may be much wider if you want to enrol large scale public support or change the behaviour of a large group of people. This might require a sustained media campaign.

Who you need to target will, in turn, affect the type of campaign you run.

What sort of campaign is most appropriate?

How will you make the case? As an advice agency you will constantly hear about the problematic experiences of people who use your services. Can you turn this into evidence that has the power to persuade people? (See 'Convincing campaigns: using hard evidence' in this series). Remember, if you are aiming to change policy you must be absolutely clear on what the current situation is.

Research

You may need to do some additional research to substantiate your case and report this (see 'Producing a local social policy report'). However, it's unlikely that producing a report in itself will achieve the changes you are seeking. You will need to ensure that it is sent to the people it is aimed at and then followed up. That might include meetings, correspondence with relevant organisations and individuals, getting the issue discussed in local networks, and trade media work (see 'Writing a press release that stands out' and 'How to pitch to journalists').

Engaging the public

Any campaign designed to raise public awareness of an issue or a service will need to engage people's interest. This means using scenarios or stories that they can identify with and here, again, the media may have a crucial role.

Using resources efficiently

A well constructed letter to, for example, a lead local authority member or head of department might be more effective than a weighty report or time consuming and possibly expensive public campaign. Ask yourself whether you really need a high profile campaign to get your case across? Sometimes it makes more sense to start with a low profile approach, so as to avoid antagonising people unnecessarily. If possible, you don't want them to become entrenched in adversarial positions. If this doesn't succeed, however, you may need to consider a more public campaign, perhaps on a larger scale.

Who will be involved?

A range of skills is needed to run a successful campaign, and having more people involved also helps to spread the workload. However, more people generally require more managing, so appointing a dedicated project coordinator is essential. Their role is to ensure that everything gets done on time and that the campaign messages are always consistent.

When thinking about who to involve, consider the following:

- 1) Remember the value of involving people from right across your agency – volunteers, paid staff and trustees. Their participation can raise the profile of the campaign as well as the level of resources allocated to it.

An advice agency in Kent had been lobbying the local council for improvements to Housing Benefit for months when the issue came up at a meeting of the trustee board. A member of the board who was also a local councillor immediately took action and real changes resulted.

- 2) Would it strengthen the campaign to involve service users? This can add greatly to its legitimacy, but it needs to be done with care (see 'Convincing campaigns: placing service users centre stage').
- 3) As your ideas take shape it may be helpful to discuss them with neighbouring advice agencies or other organisations that share your concerns. Collaborative working can increase your chances of success by pooling resources and sharing expertise, though there are also potential disadvantages (see 'Finding and working with campaign partners').
- 4) Campaigns can be very demanding and energy levels can run down. You may need to bring on board new people from time to time.

What is the timescale?

It's important to get the timing right for the start and finish of your campaign. Are there external factors that will affect your timescale, for example a key council meeting, a consultation deadline or a holiday period? When do you want activity to peak?

You should agree target dates for the main campaign activities, make sure that they are recorded and that everyone who is involved in running the campaign is aware of them. Keep the overall timetable tight but make sure it is realistic.

What resources are needed?

It's important to allocate or obtain resources not just to run the campaign but to see through the recommendations afterwards. You will probably need:

- people with a range of skills, probably including research, speaking, writing, media relations, marketing, client involvement etc.
- money to pay for things like posters, questionnaires, report printing, postage costs and possibly staffing

- IT equipment or services – you may not need to buy this if you can get a partner or sympathetic contact to lend you facilities
- time
- passion – if you can't engage people's enthusiasm your campaign is unlikely to succeed.

It is worth trying to get donations, either of money or help in kind, to support the campaign. This might include, for example, asking someone to write the copy for a flyer, asking for a donation of paper for it to be printed on, and asking a local printer to produce it free of charge. Getting involved with a campaign provides an opportunity for people to develop existing or new skills. You may find them more willing to take on a task, though, if they feel reassured that they will receive clear instruction and support if they need it.

A group of advice agencies in Devon got funding from the local TUC to produce posters for a campaign. Another group of agencies got free room hire and refreshments from the local district council for a report launch event.

If you are a member of a national advice network, it is worth investigating whether there is any money available to support local campaigns.

How will the campaign be evaluated?

It's important to review your campaign regularly, to see how well it is progressing and make any necessary adjustments in the planned activities.

Make sure you keep people informed about the progress of the campaign – this applies to people inside your organisation such as trustees and volunteers as well as external partners and service users.

If you succeed in getting policy makers to agree to your proposals, it is unlikely that the job is finished. You will need to continue to monitor developments to ensure effective implementation, so you may need to revise the plan at this point.

After the campaign you need to evaluate it. To what extent did you achieve your aims and objectives? Were they, in fact, achievable? Did you target the right people and use the right approach? Have you gained any other benefits (e.g. higher profile, new partners)? Sometimes it can be helpful to get an independent person who hasn't been involved with the campaign to assess its effectiveness.

Influencing policy is often described in terms of a drip drip approach, gradually applying pressure and argument, and this requires determination and persistence. See what lessons can be learnt for next time.

Checklist for planning a local campaign

- Are our campaign aims and objectives clear and achievable?
- Who do we need to influence – what is our target audience?
- Do we need to involve a national network?
- Have we agreed on the most appropriate type of campaign?
- Do we need to collect evidence or undertake other research?
- Will we be producing a report?
- Will we need to involve the local media?
- Who will coordinate the campaign?
- Who else will be involved, and what are their roles?
- Are trustees and senior staff committed to the campaign?
- Should we be seeking partners or buying in expertise?
- Have we agreed the key dates and targets in the campaign plan?
- Is the overall timetable realistic?
- What resources do we need and how are we going to find them?
- How are we planning to monitor progress?
- How will we evaluate the campaign?

