



Campaigning Guide

Running a campaign as a society can be one of the most rewarding things your society does and can gain you a lot more members. If you 'win' your campaign you get the satisfaction of knowing you've challenged injustice and made a difference. Remember you don't need to be a society to run a campaign, but it does make it easier in terms of having the people power to make a change. There are a number of things that you'll need to think about in order to make a campaign successful.

Campaigns can be fantastic fun and truly rewarding experiences. Make sure to decide things as a team, plan ahead and utilise every avenue available to you.

Deciding the issue

Think carefully about what you want issues you want to campaign on. The most successful campaigns are almost always the ones that have a single aim. If your aim is too complicated it won't capture the imagination of the people you need to make change happen.

We suggest you ballot your members on what campaign to run, in fact, some students' unions will actually require you to have majority approval before you can undertake a campaign. Make sure you don't push through something that only a few of you are passionate about as that's a surefire way for you to end up doing all of the work or to run out of steam.

Choosing a local issue is preferable, you'll already have more knowledge and won't have to rely on national policy, plus it's easier to get other people who aren't in your society involved as the issue may directly affect them. Talk to other societies and your students union, many societies are set up for the sole purpose of campaigning and most larger students' unions will have a staff member or elected student who leads on campaigning. Combining resources with other groups will boost the reach and impact of your campaign.

Basic tools for building a campaign

With a focus in place, it's time to get to work. The first thing you need to do here is make sure you know what you're talking about, and what exactly you want the outcomes of your campaign to be: what are the issues and how are you going to solve them? What research do you need to gain a better understanding of the issue?

Research

Try to keep your research simple. Use the following as a checklist of research:



- What is the issue you want to change?
- How do you know it is a problem?
- What is the outcome you want to see as a result of your campaign?
- How successful have similar campaigns been at other universities?
- How flexible and responsive have the targets of your campaign been in the past?
- What resources can you devote to your campaign?

Honestly answering these questions will inform the specific aims of your campaign, which in turn will influence which tactics you employ.

If you encounter any difficulty getting the information you need, you might want to consider a Freedom of Information Request. These aren't as complicated as they sound, simply detailing exactly what information it is you require from the organisation and sending it in an email to a member of staff, stating that it is an FOI request is all you need. If the request is denied make sure they have given a clear reason why it was denied, and speak to Humanists UK as we can help you challenge the denial.

Theories of change

Theories of change are used extensively in the charity sector and in campaigning organisations. They're a tool for campaigners to think about the logical and practical steps needed to take to achieve their final campaign outcome. Campaigners create theories of change in different ways. Some of the easiest ways to do this are visual methods like 'problem trees' and 'so that chains'. See an example from NCVO [here](#).

Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder mapping is simply looking who is likely to be involved in your campaign and whether they are likely to be allies or hostile to your cause. As a tool it will help you to think about the people you'll need to influence and how they currently think about your campaign or issue. In turn you'll be able to craft more effective messages and arguments for different audiences as well as targeting the best actions to make people listen. See an example of this [here](#).

Social Media

There's lots of ways you can use social media to boost your campaign. Hashtags are always great on Twitter, having a campaign-specific one and being strict in always using it on posts can help get your campaign trending online and more people talking about it.

You could also use other-party apps like 'Twibbons' (really easy to set up, click [here](#)) that add a little banner at the bottom of your social media profile pictures, displaying a message of support. Encouraging your members to display these on their personal accounts can be a really easy way of spreading the word about the campaign.



[Thunderclap](#) is another great tool, get supporters to sign up and it will make it so that they all have a tweet (you can choose the wording) going out at exactly the same time on a given day, helping get the hashtag/issue trending. This could also be useful by targeting it at a certain account, say, your university or Vice Chancellor or local MP. Imagine getting a hundred people tweet you about the same issue at the exact same time?

Consider using other platforms too: Vine, Instagram, Snapchat and Youtube can be great for additional engagements, linking them up to Facebook and Twitter: videos and photos get a lot more shares, likes and retweets than other content. Make a short video as a society explaining your campaign, film any protest actions you take, make infographics that break down really simply the issues at stake: in short, get creative to get attention.

All of these tools help reach a wide audience, but tools like Facebook groups, Whatsapp and email lists can be really handy for organising too. Posting to remind members of the next meeting or action (using tools like [Doodle](#) to decide when these happen too). Make sure also to make incoming members aware of these, and get email addresses of people that sign any petitions too.

Petitions and Email campaigns

Petitions can be great for both raising awareness of the campaign and showing that there is strong public support for it. You should try and utilise both hard and online copies: having something people can sign can be useful for events and when you're leafleting, but an online one can be shared around social media and rapidly get lots of signatures too. Think carefully about how you word the petition too: who are you aiming the petition at and what exactly do you want the petition to achieve? Remember that a petition on its own is unlikely to have much impact. There's a lot of online petition sites: [38 Degrees](#) or [Change.org](#) for instance, or if it's a petition aimed at government, there's a [dedicated official site](#) for that.

If, through your research, you have identified some key individuals that you should be lobbying to try to achieve your campaign outcomes, then encourage individuals that want to support you to email one of these people. You could even provide a sample email for your supports to send out, saving them time and effort.

Media

You should try to get an article or two in your student newspaper, online blogs, local papers and, if you think the issue is a big enough one, even national media. Again, if possible, share these articles on social media as much as you can, utilising hashtags, tagging relevant individuals and encouraging your supporters to share and retweet as much as possible.



Is there a local academic, politician, or celebrity that agrees with your campaign aims? Even if you think it's a long shot, try to get in touch with them and ask for a public endorsement. This gives your team a real boost, helps attract media attention and piles on the pressure on your target. If you're doing any demonstrations or rallies, ask them to come along and do a speech too!

Speaker events, conferences, or festivals

These sorts of events can be helpful for longer-term campaigns both in attracting new campaigners and upskilling existing ones. Having speakers in to debate/discuss ideas related to the campaign, a campaign training event or events looking at creative campaigns will engage a slightly different audience are all great tools for a campaign to use.

Gaining support and financing your campaign

You've decided what your campaign is going to be about but now you need to think about how you can build support. Firstly, it's important to note that you don't always have to spend money to create a successful campaign, particularly if it's a local/campus issue. It's more important to build up allies who can help you to shift the narrative and put pressure on your targets to make the change you're seeking.

The following people and organisations are great places to start building your allies :

- **Your Students' Union:** Whilst every union does things differently, most will have some sort of system for financing societies. Some will have specific pots of money for various activities throughout the year. Some may even hold themed weeks or have a separate fund for student campaigning. Check this with your Societies Coordinator
- **NUS:** The National Union of Students runs campaigns on mostly student focused issues. Check out the [campaign section of their site](#) for advice, ideas and resources.
- **Other campaign groups:** There are a lot of established organisations and local campaign groups out there campaigning on every issue imaginable. Whatever you choose as your campaign, it's worth searching around a bit to see what other organisations are campaigning on it too, get in touch with them to see if they can help you out with money, advice, or resources. Some typical organisations that could help student groups would be [People and Planet](#), [Friends of the Earth](#) for environmental campaigns, [Amnesty International](#) for human rights issues and [Oxfam](#) for poverty-related issues. They may already have a society at your university so check that too.
- **Digital campaigners:** the rise in online campaigning has meant there are a number of organisations focus specifically on amplifying other people's campaigns. These include organisation like [38 Degrees](#), [Avaaz](#), [Citizens UK](#).

The logo for Humanist Students features a stylized, black line-art figure of a person with arms raised in a celebratory or humanist gesture, positioned to the left of the text. The text 'Humanist Students' is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font, with 'Humanist' on the top line and 'Students' on the bottom line.

Humanist Students

- **Training organisations:** lots of organisations now see their role as supporting campaigners to build their own teams and campaigns, for example [Sheila McKechnie Foundation](#) or [Campaign Bootcamp](#)