



**Seeds for  
Change**  
Short guide

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# **Door-knocking and stalls for campaigns**

**A guide to effective face to face conversations with  
members of the public**

# Door-knocking and stalls

Having face to face conversations with members of the public can be one of the best ways of connecting with people who don't already know about your campaign or your group. One to one chats can build trust in a way that is rarely possible using social media or the press - which opens the door to more genuine communication. Talking in person breaks down barriers. It helps people to imagine themselves being powerful by joining together with others - instead of feeling separate from 'campaigners'.

This guide covers any activity that enables you to communicate with people outside your social 'bubble' - for example, door-knocking, running a stall in town or chatting to people who've turned up at a public meeting. These methods are powerful. They are also time-consuming! It is worth thinking together as a group about how to make the most of them:

## Top Tips



**Choose three key messages**, and put them across in lots of different ways. Use stories and examples to help people engage and repeat the same points using different words. Pick these messages by thinking what you want people to do differently after the conversation, and how best to achieve that.

**Listen as well as talking.** Hearing what the other person has to say is essential to build a relationship and show respect. Your communication will be much more effective if you respond to the other person's concerns and questions.

**Be real!** The strength of one to one conversations is that you get to build a mini relationship, which allows you to communicate much better. This generally works best when the other person feels you are being genuine and sincere!

# Your goals and message

**What do you want to achieve?** Concretely, what do you want to happen as a result of your outreach? For example, more people turning up to a big demonstration, new active members in your group?

**Who do you want to speak to?** Are you targeting the people most likely to take action? Often these are people who are affected by the issue, or already sympathetic to your views. Or do you want to speak to everyone in a particular community, e.g. to assess public opinion on a topic.

**What methods will you use?** Your methods need to match the people you are trying to reach. For example, a stall to attract people who already have some interest in the campaign, and door-knocking for wider reach.

**What's the best moment?** Get ready as a group with a clear shared understanding of your campaign so you can put it across consistently. Choose a moment when you have a follow-up action so that anyone who seems keen has something to turn up to, e.g. a public meeting or a demo.

## Your key messages

These are the most important things you want people to believe as a result of their conversation with you. They should be very simple. Choose no more than three, plus a call to action. For example : "XXX is unjust, our vision of XXX would be better for everyone, together we have the power to make change, do XXX today. "

To work out your key message, think about what you want people to do, and what beliefs would enable them to do those things if they wanted to. Campaigners often assume people need more knowledge about the issue. This is important, but other things are equally important – like believing that change is possible and they can be part of it.

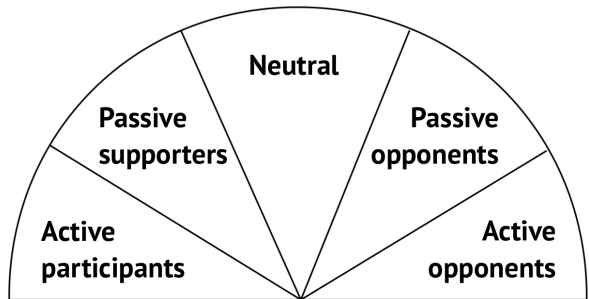
Also think what feelings and values you want people to tap into. How can you motivate people to get involved and stay involved long term? It's best not to rely entirely on feelings like fear and guilt – which can lead people

to shut down, or get involved then burn out. If someone supports your campaign, aim for them to go away empowered and inspired!

## Fitting your goals to different people

Exactly what you are trying to achieve in a conversation may vary from person to person. We find the following tool extremely useful in working out appropriate goals for each person you talk to:

This 'Spectrum of Support' shows the spread of public views and activity levels in a campaign. Work out what position someone is in at the start of the conversation, and then encourage them to shift towards the left.



**Passive supporters:** Enable them to get actively involved if they want to. Offer concrete, practical things they can do soon – including things where they can make connections with others like coming to a protest or event.

**Neutral people:** If someone is unsure or uninformed, help them to see your perspective, and encourage them to take a low key supportive action like putting a poster in their window.

**Passive opponents:** Try putting your ideas across so they at least experience some doubt, and give your active opponents less support.

**Active opponents:** These people are very committed so you may just walk away! Realistic goals if you have a conversation might be to weaken their commitment a little, so they do less to oppose you.

Sometimes, you will make a strategic choice not to give energy to people who disagree with you. Your time may be much better spent helping your passive supporters get involved. Most campaigns win when people do effective things against your target, not when they change their mind.

Increasing numbers of active participants can also be an effective way of influencing the other segments, and so changing public opinion. Instead of trying to persuade strangers with opposing views yourself, encourage supporters to talk to the people in their own lives. Most people are more open to change when they are talking to someone they know and trust!

# Practice, practice, practice

Stalls and door-knocking take up a lot of energy. Practising in advance can help you develop your skills and use that energy most effectively. Get familiar with the essential campaign information and practise explaining it clearly. Try out different ways of putting across your key messages. Consider things like your body language and tone of voice – how can you come across as friendly and confident?

**Roleplay:** This is one of the best ways to practise. It allows you to try out things you aren't confident about in a safe environment. You can learn from each other, and get feedback on things you weren't aware of. It can also help you understand the perspectives of members of the public. Try role-playing chatting to people who are in different places on the spectrum of support. Practise assertiveness skills and disengaging from people who are hostile, as well as engaging with supporters.

**Reflection on experience:** Think of an occasion when you had a conversation with someone where you changed your mind. What did they do and say? How did they relate to you? What can you learn from that?

**Solo practice:** Use a mirror/camera and/or voice-recording in order to practise on your own. As with role-play – try out different scenarios with people at different places on the spectrum of support. Or practise on friends and family and ask them to give your feedback.

**Evaluation:** Try going out to talk to the public in pairs, and giving each other feedback afterwards. Or have a debrief in small groups, where each person shares an example of a conversation they were pleased about, and one which they would do differently next time.

# Practicalities

## Stalls

A stall is a great way to make your campaign more visible, and reach people who already have some degree of interest in the issue. Make yourself as eye-catching as possible to increase the chances that people come up to you – but also be prepared to proactively approach people.

**Where?** If you have a target group, go to a location/event that will help you reach them. (For example, a green fair for an environmental campaign or the school gates at pick up time if you want to reach other parents). Otherwise, choose a spot where lots of people pass, where you will be conspicuous but not in the way (e.g. town-centre on market day).

**Visibility:** Have a banner to make it obvious what you are about. Props like a huge model or costumes could make you even more eye-catching. Visuals are a powerful way to put your message across – so make sure they ‘say’ what you want them to. That’s not just about having the right slogan on your banner. For example, some costumes might attract someone’s attention, but make it harder for them to relate.

**Action:** Set up something people can do straight away – sign a petition, join your union, add their picture to your giant communal banner. And of course have something more substantial they can do in the near future, like coming to an organising meeting or joining you on a community walk.

**Splitting up roles:** Let everyone play to their strengths. Someone who carries a lot of information in their head can wait at the stall to give detailed answers to more complicated questions. People who are confident approaching strangers can circulate with leaflets.



## Door-knocking

Door-knocking is one of the best ways to reach people who aren't already engaged, and who don't have the time, energy or desire to seek you out! For some issues it is the only way to systematically contact everyone who is affected – e.g. people living on a bus route that's about to be cut.

**Where?** Unless you are part of something huge like a referendum campaign, it makes sense to pick a small target area. If your campaign is focused on a particular site, (e.g. a proposed waste incinerator) you can choose the addresses that are nearest. For other issues it can be most effective to pick an area with a high density of people affected by your issue, e.g. renters in poorly maintained housing.

**When?** There is no one time of day when everyone is available to chat! If you want to reach everyone in an area, be prepared to go multiple times at different times of day to get the best chance of catching everyone in.

**Record-keeping:** Keeping a note of the addresses where you've already spoken to someone helps avoid knocking on the same doors multiple times. Not only does this save your group time but crucially it avoids annoying people that have already been visited about the campaign. Create a recording system that is easy to maintain consistently – spreadsheets can be great for this. It can also be useful to record details such as who is happy to be contacted again – though consider data protection laws before gathering personal information.

**Accessing flats:** You can often get inside flats by speaking to someone over the intercom and asking to be let into the building. It is well worth the effort – one block of flats can house a lot of people!

**Keep each other in sight:** Make sure no-one is left on their own. If someone is caught in a long conversation and the rest of the group is ready to move on, leave someone to wait for them.

## Leaflets

Leaflets are great for backing up the conversations you have at a stall or when door-knocking. Wait to hand it over until the conversation is

finished – otherwise you might cut it short!

Your leaflet should put across your key messages with minimal text and a few images. You may be able to re-use a leaflet, e.g. from a national campaign on the same issue. However, it is often better to design something simple of your own which helps you meet your aims, and doesn't overload people with extra information. Always include basic details about your group and how people can get involved.

## Relating to people

*How* we talk to people is a very important part of how we put our messages across. You might *say* 'Join our group, and we'll have the power to make change together.' If you want people to really believe it, try to relate to them in such a way they *feel* your group will be welcoming and their contributions will be valued.

### Be real, be respectful

Most of us respond best to people who we see as genuine. Rather than trying to be someone you're not, work out how to play to your own strengths. What parts of your personality help you connect with people, and put across your messages? For example: enthusiasm, conviction, humour, empathy, openness, a strong understanding of the issues?

That said, it's usually good to treat everyone with basic respect – even if you don't always really feel it! When approaching people, give them the chance to consent (or not consent) to the conversation. The principle of consent applies to you too – if the other person says things that are offensive and hurtful, you have every right to walk away. Or if they specifically attack a marginalised group you are part of, you might prioritise challenging them in a way that is empowering for you over being polite to them!



## Body language and tone of voice

What people pick up from a conversation is massively influenced by things like your body language and tone of voice. For many people non-verbal cues have a much bigger impact than the actual words they hear.

There is no 'right' way to talk or move, but getting feedback can help you become more aware of how people are responding to your voice and gestures. Remember that body language can give important clues to how you are actually feeling. For example, if someone says you sound stressed, you could try talking more slowly – but it might be even better to just give yourself a break so you genuinely feel more relaxed!

**Stance:** Based on how you sit/stand, how do people read you? Do you look friendly and confident? Or defensive and tired? Notice where you are holding tension in your body, and try to ease it out – otherwise you may pass it on to the person you're talking to. Common advice is to keep your hands in sight and your arms unfolded.

**Tone of voice:** Do you sound like you are interested in people and what they have to say? Do you sound confident in your own message?

**Eye contact:** Do you come across as open and friendly but not invasive?

**Distance and speed of movement:** Come close enough to look friendly, but leave people with plenty of personal space! If you are approaching people in the street, notice how fast you come towards them. Aim for fast enough to seem confident, without rushing towards them in a way that they feel threatened.

### Try this



Try role-playing a stance that is as tense and defensive as possible, then one that is so laid back you look like you can't be bothered. This may help you use your body more flexibly, to find a place in between where you look both relaxed and energised.

# Techniques

## Opening lines

Know how you will start the conversation. Your opening line should usually include these elements:

1. **Introducing yourself.** For example, "Hi, I'm Sarah from the [village] anti-fracking group."
2. **Explaining why you're there.** For example, "We're chatting to everyone in the village to find out what people know about the proposed fracking site and the impacts it will have."
3. **Consent.** Give them the choice about whether to engage. For example, "Are you up for a quick chat?" "Is this a good moment?"
4. **An open question** to invite them into the conversation. Open questions invite a detailed response, and usually start with words like 'What' and 'How', for example "How do you feel about fracking?" or "What things have you heard about the new site?" (By contrast, closed questions invite a simple one word answer, usually yes or no, e.g. "Are you anti-fracking?")

## Listening

If you want to give the message that you are interested in people then it is essential to listen and try to understand what they say. Listening is also vital to work out what you should say in response. Once someone starts chatting, try:

**Keeping quiet** until they've had a chance to have their say!

**Summarising** what they have said to check you understood them right. ('From what I'm hearing, your main concern is about jobs, did I understand you right?')

**Asking open questions** which encourage people to expand on what they

are saying. (“What’s your experience of....?” “You mentioned you had some concerns about.... What are they?”

**Asking clarifying questions** to better understand what they are saying. (‘What exactly do you mean by...?’, ‘Can you give me an example?’)

**Acknowledging things they’ve said** to show you were listening. You can do this even if you are changing the subject. (“You mentioned you were concerned about jobs in the area. Me too! For me, it’s really important people can make their living in a way that gives them a good quality of life long-term. That’s one reason I support...”)

## Packaging up your key messages

Work out a few short sentences that put across your key messages in a memorable way. This isn’t about creating a script – more about having some pre-prepared phrases that pop out of your mouth so you aren’t having to think on your feet. Ideally you would have a few different ways of saying the same things so it is easy to reinforce your messages.

Your phrases should be punchy, but simple - so you sound like someone having an ordinary conversation, not a politician on the radio! Try these techniques to give more emphasis to what you are saying:

**Groups of three:** Threes roll off the tongue and stick in the brain. For example “Fracking pollutes the air, the water and the soil.”

**Metaphor** is a great way to put across abstract concepts, by comparing them to something that people can already relate to. They allow you to say a lot in just a few words. For example, referring to ‘fat cats’ implies that a person or company is unjustly creaming off profits and living a luxury lifestyle at everyone else’s expense. Choose metaphors carefully because they have a big impact on how people perceive a situation.

**Repetition:** Repeating a sentence structure creates a pattern that links different points and gives them more emphasis. The sentence itself can be very simple: “Coal is bad for our health and bad for the planet.”

**‘Powerful’ words** to give your message more punch. Choose your words

carefully. For example 'wage theft' is not just stronger than 'non-payment of wages' - it tells a very different story about what the problem is!

## Story-telling

You might not get a chance to tell a very long story, but be ready with a few short anecdotes or examples that help people engage and connect with what you are saying. Stories tap into our emotions, and many people find them easier to remember than facts. Sharing your own experiences will help build a relationship with the person you are talking to.

Because stories have such an impact, it is extra important to choose carefully. What stories will put across the power of your campaign, and the people affected by your issue? For example, it may be more empowering to tell a story about the moment you realised things could change, rather than the worst experiences of people affected by the issue. Couple your story with suggesting something people can do, so that the person listening goes away feeling they can make a difference.

If the story is about you, will it be empowering to tell that story to strangers? If you are telling someone else's story, do you have their consent? Social justice campaigns often have deep personal traumas at their centre. It is important to recognise these traumas. It is also essential to recognise the right of the people concerned to make decisions that are right for them about how, when and whether to tell their stories.

## Everyday language

You may be an expert in the subject of your campaign, but the people you are talking to almost certainly won't be. Jargon, acronyms and academic terms are likely to be off-putting. Find ways of putting things across in straight-forward language and use examples to help people relate to what you're saying. Statistics can be powerful – *if* you provide a 'translation' to make them easier to grasp. For example "2% of the population – that's the equivalent of about 4 people on this street alone."

Of course, sometimes 'everyday' words are deeply offensive, and that is

why people in your campaign created a new alternative! If a word is important to you, but not easily understood by the average person, then find a simple way of explaining why you use the different term.

## **Dealing with challenges and misconceptions**

You are bound to come across people who disagree with you. Sometimes, it will be best to stop the conversation. That could be because you've decided as a group that you will only focus on potential supporters. It's also fine to move away to protect your own emotional energy. If you think the other person isn't open to a genuine conversation with you, then trying to win an argument with them is likely to be a waste of your time.

**Listen:** Stay open to the idea that someone may be bringing perspectives you are missing, even if you strongly disagree with some of the things they are saying. Ask questions and check you've understood their main points in order to really work out where they are coming from.

**Put your views across, rather than telling them theirs are wrong.**

Some research suggests that repeating an idea can reinforce it – even if you are saying it is inaccurate. So instead of saying 'A lack of public housing is nothing to do with migration', just say 'The reasons that we don't have enough public housing are...'. This approach also helps you focus on what you want to say, rather than reacting to their points.

**Look for the things they say that you do agree with,** or can relate to.

You can do this in combination with introducing different ideas. For example, if someone says the local weapons manufacturer is essential to provide local jobs, then validate their concerns about employment, before suggesting alternative solutions. "Of course people need to make a living. The same factory could provide three times more jobs by ..."

**Challenge their opinions, not them as people.** Instead of 'You're wrong', or even 'I disagree with you', try 'I disagree with what you're saying' or 'The part of that I disagree with is...'. If it is true, you could even try 'I used to think that, and then...'. A personal story about the experiences or information that changed your mind is likely to be more persuasive than 'I know better than you, and I always have'.

**If you just don't know the answer to their question, say so.** Making things up will undermine trust. Ideally, ask for their contact details to get back to them, or bring over someone else who can answer the question.

**Be ready to move away politely** rather than wasting precious time and emotional energy in a conversation where you aren't being heard.

## Ending the conversation

**Thank them for their time.** They probably had other things to do with the minutes they spent chatting to you – recognising that shows respect!

**Reinforce your key messages or call to action** in a short, wrap-up sentence as you walk away. ("I hope to see you at the public meeting – Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> at 8pm in the Town Hall.")

# Look after yourselves

Self-care and group-care are vital for effective campaigning. On a good day, you will come away from your door-knocking session inspired and energised by the new connections you've made. There will also be bad days! You might experience hostility and aggression – or you may just feel frustrated or upset by how the conversations went. If you are going to keep coming back with positive energy to pass on to the people you talk to, it is essential to look after yourselves and each other.

**Group planning:** Pair up new people with someone more experienced to build up confidence. Always keep each other in sight in case someone gets in a sticky situation. Be prepared to abandon the whole exercise if you feel it is unsafe. Split up the tasks into different roles so everyone can play to their strengths. For example, the person who remembers most information can go back to anyone who has a really detailed question.

**Respect different comfort zones:** Some people thrive on connecting with strangers. For others, it will be way out of their comfort zone. Encountering aggression will have very different impacts on different

people depending on their life experiences. Let each person decide for themselves what risks they can manage, and what support they need.

**Practise assertiveness:** If you think aggression and hostility are likely, roleplay different scenarios, and practise de-escalating tension, and ending the conversation. Notice your tone of voice and body language – in a high adrenaline situation these things are more important than ever.

**Debrief together.** Instead of all scattering back to your lives after a door-knocking session, take a bit of time to talk about how it went. Appoint a facilitator to make sure there's space to hear about all the different experiences. Encourage everyone to think of some things they were pleased about, as well as being honest about difficult emotions.

## Relax!

It is much easier to be real, and to respond to what the other person is saying if you feel a bit relaxed. That's not always easy! We often cram campaigning into spare time that doesn't really exist. On top of that, we may well feel nervous about talking to strangers.

Manage the time you have available to factor in self-care. Set aside some time beforehand to get into the right headspace. You may also need time afterwards to deal with things that came up – whether that's looking up more information on a question you couldn't answer, phoning a friend to debrief or rewarding yourself with a hot bath!

This is time well-spent for the campaign as well as for you – it increases the chances you come back next time with positive energy to connect with people.

# Door-knocking and stalls

Having face to face conversations with members of the public is one of the most powerful ways you can reach outside your 'bubble' and build a stronger base for your campaign. This guide covers how you can use these techniques strategically, and develop the skills to be really effective.

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