

# Big Ask Socials

## Action Guide



### The idea in a nutshell

Invite some people to a climate change themed social or dinner. Use the opportunity to explore the issues, explain the campaign, and motivate them to take action. The event should work on any scale, from a few friends in your own dining room to hiring out at whole café or community centre. Whether it's a Big Ask dinner, a coffee morning or a cocktail party, this is a great way to get people talking about the key issues.

### How will it help us win the campaign?

We need to up the pressure in 2007 to ensure we get a Climate Bill with muscle. We need both to get a broader range of people behind the campaign, and to get some of those people more deeply involved in taking action and spreading the word.

Social events should attract people who wouldn't necessarily be attracted to a more 'activist' type of event like a public meeting or a demonstration. They should be a good way of drawing new people into your group and into the campaign.

A Big Ask dinner or social will give you quality time to engage people, certainly a lot more than you get stopping someone on the street to sign a postcard. They'll have a chance to discuss and explore what the key issues are, how they feel about them, and what more they could do to help. This should help in two ways:

- **Take action immediately:** A lot of the participants will be willing to take action there and then. You'll be able to encourage people to take high quality, high impact personalised action such as writing personal letters to MP, or short personal written responses to a government consultation.
- **In the longer term:** Lots of those that attend should become more committed to the campaign, and help out regularly. Some will get more involved with your group, some will take action more regularly through the Climate Online email list, and others will spread the word through their own social networks, perhaps even organising their own Big Ask social.

## How do I organise a Big Ask social?

**1. Read the online guide, at [www.foe.co.uk/dinners](http://www.foe.co.uk/dinners)** You'll find loads of ideas, downloadable props, tips, and info from other social organisers.

**2. Where and when?** A Big Ask social can be as big or as small a scale as you want. It should work equally well for six people in a dining/living room, or thirty in a community centre. Remember your group could run the event several times if you want to. It might work to start on a fairly small scale and work your way up.

**3. Who to invite?** This kind of event will work for people who aren't 'the usual suspects'. You'll probably want a mixture of keener campaigners and group members with people who are newer to The Big Ask and environmental issues. You could even try inviting a local celebrity, or your MP.

**4. Send your invite.** Use our printed invites, send an e-card or download a printable invitation from the web guide. It will be quite important you encourage people to RSVP so you've got an idea of how many people to expect.

**5. Plan the evening.** You'll need to ensure the climate change theme is subtly integrated throughout the event and ensure that participants leave inspired by the campaign. We're got loads of ideas on the web guide ([www.foe.co.uk/dinners](http://www.foe.co.uk/dinners)), including:

- **Celebrity chef recipes.** Celebrity chef Ross Burden, of *Ready, Steady, Cook* cooked up a storm for us at The Big Ask Live benefit concert in May 2006. His recipes will help you entice your guests to your table. We've also got ideas for climate-themed cocktails.
- **Shopping tips.** Suggestions on lower carbon food sources.
- **Menu and place cards ideas.** When you've decided what to cook and you've done your shopping, you can start thinking about embellishing your Do. If you're having a dinner, how about giving your guests a menu at the table to make them feel extra special on the night?
- **Mood music.** There's nothing like a little mood music to get set the right tone for the evening. We have a list of songs for this occasion.
- **Conversation starters, ice-breakers, and games.** We've come up with fun ways to bring the conversation back to the big issues, including climate-themed placemats and ideas for games.

**6. Get your guests active.**

- Explain the Climate Online email list and encourage them to join (if they aren't already a member) by filling in a postcard.
- Encourage participants to either write a short personal letter to their MP, or a short personal response to the government consultation. Make sure you have the pens, paper, and prompts as to things they could say.
- Have group membership forms available
- Make sure your group has a list or calendar of its upcoming activities
- Explain when your meetings take place and how they work.

## Top Tips for a successful Big Ask Social

- Be creative. Feel free to adapt the idea to design a social event which works for you .
- Let people know what they're in for before they come to your Do.
- Use our pack to liven things up and start conversations.
- Relax. Remember that climate change is a hot topic right now, lots of people *want* to do something about it. Talking about it is the first step.
- Don't worry if the conversations stray. If this happens, just try to get your guests to put pen to paper at the end of the night by doing an action.
- Add something on top: try combining your Do up with another activity, like watching *The Inconvenient Truth* on DVD.
- Don't forget to thank your guests at the end of the night for participating in something big and making a difference.
- Most of all – have fun. If your guests aren't keen on taking action, leave it at that and focus on having a good time.

## Resources to help this event go well

To help you make the evening a success and as enjoyable as possible, we'll be providing you with some extra resources to help get people involved. These are:

- **The Big Ask Social web guide:** online and downloadable resources including invitations, recipes, menus, games, conversation starters, and placemats. [www.foe.co.uk/dinners](http://www.foe.co.uk/dinners)
- **Printed Big Ask Social invite cards** to really get your guests interested.
- **Big Ask beer mats** for contestants to rest their beverage of choice on while pondering their winning answers.
- **A photo prop** for your guests to pose with, while pledging their support for the campaign. You'll be able to upload these to a web-based photo gallery of pledged individuals and groups, to form a petition, which we'll be able to use to lobby MPs and Ministers at key times during the passage of the Bill.
- **Big Ask postcards** for guests to sign and send to their MP.
- **Copies of a Big Ask "Friend"** – Free copies of a special Big Ask edition of our supporter magazine "Friend", containing lots of further info for interested people to take away and share [ready from late February].
- **Big Ask badges** for guests to wear/ take away with them.
- **Climate Online monthly email** – inform [alex.phillips@foe.co.uk](mailto:alex.phillips@foe.co.uk) and we can promote the event to Big Ask supporters in your area.

To order materials email [alex.phillips@foe.co.uk](mailto:alex.phillips@foe.co.uk) or phone 020 7566 1673.

## The political context: getting a climate change bill with muscle

This Action Guide is part of a series of guides produced for Friends of the Earth local groups to help you take action on The Big Ask Campaign in 2007. An amazing campaigning effort from local groups managed to get a Climate Change Bill included in the Queen's Speech in November 2006. Our job for 2007 is to make sure that we get the *right* Climate Change Bill, with annual targets and an enforcement mechanism to bring UK emissions down.

We won't be certain about the exact content of the Government's bill, and the timing of its progress through parliament, until short notice. This means it's crucial that we continue to build momentum continuously over the coming months to ensure as many people as possible are ready to take action with us at crunch times. We need to spread the word, get more people involved, build up even bigger pressure to ensure we get a climate change law which really does the job.

Currently we expect there to be two key focusses for the campaigning pressure in 2007:

- 1. Responding to a government consultation on a Draft Bill.** We think this is most likely to take place from mid-March to mid-June. We'll need to encourage as many different people and groups to respond as possible to put pressure on the government to make their version of the bill as good as possible.
- 2. Keeping the pressure up on MPs.** We need to keep the pressure up on MPs so that they keep their word and continue to back the strong law they signed up to by signing EDM178 last year. We'll need to make sure that a majority vote for key amendments to improve the government bill. We currently think these crunch votes are likely to take place in late 2007/early 2008.

The Action Guides in this series, and the accompanying materials, are designed to give your group a flexible menu of different ways you can raise the profile of the campaign in your area and involve lots of new people. This should help keep the pressure on your local MPs, and increase the number and diversity of people in your local communities who add their weight to our campaign. You'll be able to draw on all these people to pile on ever more political pressure at the crunch points.

It's up to you as a local group which of these ideas you decide to put into action. You're not expected to do everything we suggest, just to choose the ideas which you think will suit your group and work in your local area. Feel free to improvise and adapt ideas as much as you like, and please let us know if you think of improvements so we can share them with other groups.