



Friends of the Earth

PULL-OUT

Action stations

Ben Rogers/FOE



Joanna Watson

Continuing the regular series of pull-out features in *Change Your World*: Four pull-out pages about how to plan successful events by Joanna Watson, Friends of the Earth's Promotion and Activities Manager.

What kind of event?

Events and actions can make a big contribution to the success of your campaign. This pull-out covers two main types: small events such as actions or photo stunts, where the main objective is to gain media coverage, and mass events such as demonstrations and rallies, which provide a focus for lots of people to get involved. You may feel you lack either the opportunity or the resources to organise big events, but in fact the planning steps are much the same as a smaller action. It is only the time frame and the numbers of people involved that will change.

Why run an event?

Groups hold events for a variety of reasons:

- To build profile.
- To communicate campaign messages or demands.
- To give people the opportunity to participate and so increase support for your group or your campaign.
- To build pressure on a particular target.
- To draw attention to a campaign issue.
- To demonstrate numbers.
- To raise money.

Holding a successful event can say a lot about you, your group, what you stand for and what your demands are – so the better planned it is, the more effective you are likely to be.

The 5 Ws checklist

It is really important to create a basic planning framework at the start. It is surprising how often people get carried away by a big idea and rush into planning it, without thinking through who the message is aimed at, what kind of effect it will have on its audience or even what the objectives for it are. If you do not agree objectives early on, you will not be able to judge whether you are going to get the results you hope for.

So, think through the answers to the following questions:

The '5 Ws' – why? who? what? where? when? – may seem blindingly obvious, but the answers will help keep your planning on course:

WHY

Why do we want to hold the event/action? What's the nature of the opportunity?

WHO

Who will do it? Who are our potential allies? Who are our partners?

Who is our target? Who do we want to influence? Who is our audience?

Who will participate? Who is going to do all the work?

WHAT

What kind of event do we want to run? Outdoor? Indoor? Site-based? A meeting?

A demo? A high street action?

WHERE

Where do we want to do it? Venue? Site?

WHEN

When do we want to do it? Is it time critical? Is there an external agenda driving this?

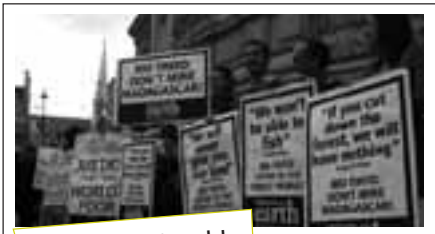
Is it weather-dependent?

Finally there is one other vital question, and that is

HOW MUCH?

How much is the event going to cost and where will the money come from?

useful checklist



Jenny Bates/FOE

The power of placards!

Planning an action

Have you got a good story?

Design your action according to your resources. If you can only rely on four people to turn up, do not plan something dependent on large numbers. Let's assume you are thinking about an action outside your local supermarket, which will give you a chance to interact with the public, and get coverage in your local media. You need to think about what will make journalists want to cover your story. Does it have a strong news hook? Is it a timely issue that is already on the local or national news agenda? Does it have strong local relevance? Does the action have clear demands and an obvious target? Are there any high-profile local celebrities that sympathise with your campaign who might be willing to support your action?

Creative actions

Get your group together and spend ten minutes coming up with ideas. Be creative. Let your imagination run riot. When you have lots of ideas, test them against your checklist. Will they work? Will they fulfill your objectives? Are they practical, given your resources? It is important to avoid trying to communicate too many messages or making the action overly complicated. Think captions. Will it make a good picture without a two page explanation? Think branding. How will people know who you are? Think banners, placards, props, costumes.

Remember, if you want to influence the public directly, it is important not to be too confrontational. You are far more likely to get your message across if you make people think. Be entertaining, witty, challenging, creative, informative. Chanting or singing is OK, but abuse is not. You should never intimidate people. If you can involve kids or celebrities, all the better.

Points of law

Important

The location of your event will dictate its contents and tone. In general, if it is a generic, non confrontational message, or the event takes time to set up, you can probably do it in a public place – shopping areas, the high street or public squares. But if your action is aimed at a specific target, like a supermarket, garage or other business, do not be too elaborate and plan a stunt that takes time to set-up. Get in quick and do it, before anyone has time to wonder what you are doing there.

Stay safe

Think about safety – for example, could your action pose a potential danger by making people walk into the road to avoid you? Avoid obstruction – blocking the pavement may prompt police involvement, so do not give them that excuse. The public has a right to pass and re-pass on a public highway – so long as they can do that, you should be on the right side of the law.

Recces

Always do a recce. Sometimes what seems like a good idea on paper falls down when you check the location. Think about sightlines, distance and perspective. Will there be room for a photographer or cameraman to get a good shot? Can a picture include you, your action, your banner and the name of your target (eg. a supermarket, garage or recognisable local landmark). Think about what it would look like on TV as well as the printed page, make it interactive rather than static. If you want to interact with the public, costumes can make actions more theatrical, less threatening and you can always take along fliers to hand out to ensure the public find out more about what you are doing.

Roles

Recruit people to help. Look for people with theatrical flair who do not mind drawing attention to themselves. But also find people who are highly creative or practical as prop or costume makers, banner makers, ideas' merchants and photographers. Sort out roles in advance. Agree who is going to "stage manage" the event, who is going to liaise with the media, the police and supermarket staff. Agree who is going to be press spokesperson. Agree who is going to participate in your action, street theatre or whatever. Do not try and do everything yourself!



Nick Cobbing

A nice piece of street theatre by Stevenage FOE

Informing the police

It is always worth informing the police if you are planning an action in a public place or a big event involving lots of people. If you are not breaking the law, there is no reason why you should not exercise your democratic right to protest. But if requested by the landowner, store manager or whoever, you must take notice of the police if they ask you to move on.

Public processions

If you are planning an action which involves a march or "public procession", you should provide six days' advance written notice with specified details (date, start time, route and organiser) to the police station in the area where the procession will start. You will need police co-operation for big events anyway and the police can be very helpful in directing traffic, or advising on good routes between different places, such as a station and rally site.

Trespass

What about trespass – will you have time to set up your stunt or carry out your action before being asked to leave private premises? If your action is on private property, you should try and negotiate to do your action before moving on. If you leave when asked, it is unlikely the police will interfere. Being removed from a supermarket, for example, during a peaceful protest, can make good photographs.

You should not prevent customers from using their local shop or garage, but there is nothing to stop you engaging with them, or handing them leaflets, if they are ready to listen. Doing your action outside a store is less provocative than inside, and it is easier to get a photo and branding. However, if you are thinking about a mass demo near a site, is there public access?

WARNING: The laws regarding obstruction, trespass and breach of the peace are complex and these notes are for guidance only. In general, if you are planning a mass action, it is important to check out your legal position in more detail according to the specifics of what you are planning.

Practical tips

Costumes

If your photo stunt requires costumes or masks, try novelty shops and party stores to find masks of politicians', horror figures and animal heads. You could also try theatrical costumiers, second-hand shops, local theatres and the school panto box. Or make your own.

Placards

Placards should be short and pithy, not wordy or over complex. Your message should be understood at a glance – people should not have to read reams of explanatory text. If you do not have talented signwriters in your group, but have access to a computer and a photocopier, prepare your placard message as text, print it out as A4 artwork and then enlarge it on a photocopier to A1 size. The way to do this is to use the multi-page enlarger which will give you four A3 sheets, each showing a quarter of an A1 sized artwork. These can then be glued down on to thick card or polyboard. Avoid hardboard – you have got to be able to hold up these placards, sometimes in windy conditions.

Banners

Buy cheap bed sheets from your local market and treat them with a mixture of PVA glue and water to stiffen and protect them. When dry, trace your message on to the sheet and paint in the letters with acrylic paint or kids' paint mixed with PVA glue. You can either use stencils for the lettering or prepare artwork on a computer. If you want a more permanent banner, use ripstop (kite making material) and emulsion paint. You could also consider appliqué – tracing letters on to material and then cutting them out and sewing them on to heavy cloth. This is a time intensive method, but it does mean that you can wash grubby banners.



Useful props: White paper protective suits, pollution masks, warning symbols (e.g., poison, radiation or No Entry), animal costumes and FOE-branded T-shirts all work well.

Events kit: Rope, string, staple gun, gaffer tape, strong card, wooden battens or poles for banners, paint, sheets, tracing paper, masking tape, hammer/mallet, Stanley knife.

Workshop: Access to photocopier, power tools, computer and printer, work space for banner painting – studio or school art room are ideal.

Jenny Bates/FOE



Masks R Us!

Publicity

NOTE

This is essential for your event to be a success. If you are publicising a meeting, rally or march try to put up fliers and posters in as many local outlets as possible, such as shops, libraries, social and sports clubs, pubs, wine bars and offices. You could also leaflet near the site or on the high street. If you can afford it, book an advert in the local paper and if you have a good relationship with the media, try and get publicity about your event in advance. Promote the event through all your own and sister organisations' newsletters and literature and try and get a mention on local radio. If there are local celebrities supporting you, use them to publicise your event too.

If you are doing an action, send out an advance notice to both the broadcast and print media, with time, date, place and if necessary, a map, and a "taster" about the planned action. Always chase up the press release with a phone call. Take along your own photographer and if the local media does not cover it, send your own pictures with a press release. You never know – they may have some space to fill.

Make sure you leave enough time. Potentially successful events can be ignored by the media because someone ran out of time to publicise the action effectively.

Mass events

Planning an external event with big numbers, such as a march or rally, will involve many of the same steps as planning a small action on the high street. Do not try and do everything yourself. Set up an organising group and make sure members are sure of their roles and take responsibility for whatever they have been designated to do.

Make early decisions about the nature and size of the event, identify speakers and check their availability, set the date and book venue, agree which organisations will participate and agree branding, check your group's public liability insurance.

Build the following into your planning checklist :

Indoor

Booking a venue for public meeting or indoor rally:

- Check capacity, accessibility, cost.
- Check if venue has a PA system and any other audio visual equipment.
- Is there room for stalls or exhibitions?
- Catering arrangements.

Outdoor

Choosing a site for a rally, march or walk. Check:

- Public access and rights of way.
- Permissions may be needed from the landowner or Council. You should also contact any local people who might be inconvenienced.
- Police liaison about access routes to and from site.
- Distance and what kind of terrain to expect.
- Dress code and whether it's suitable for kids.
- Start and how to get there.
- Finish if route is not circular.
- Map.

Other stuff to think about:

- Signage and route markers.
- Refreshments and food concessions; water supply?
- Access to loos or whether you will need to hire portaloos.
- Hire staging and tent/marquee; or use a flatbed, open-sided truck; hire a PA system.
- Information stalls.
- Transport to help you set up, to ferry participants to the site or start of route, and car parking arrangements; availability of public transport and possibly arranging shuttle buses (e.g., from town centre to site).
- First aid provision – contact Red Cross or St John's Ambulance.
- Recruit stewards, who should wear high visibility jackets, tabards or armbands; identify a chief steward who will liaise with safety co-ordinator and event manager; prepare stewards' briefing.
- Something for people to do – petition signing, postcards etc.
- Entertainment such as kite flying; face painting.
- Cleaning up – organise a litter-pick and recycling points.



Mass trespass at Twyford Down

FOE

Useful reading

Organising Local Events, Sarah Passingham (Directory of Social Change, £9.95) ISBN 1873860889

Guide to Health, Safety and Welfare at Pop Concerts and Similar Events (HMSO, £13) ISBN 011341072 7