

How to: win friends and influence people



**Friends of
the Earth**

This year our main priority is to ramp up the pressure for a strong climate change law. To do that we need lots of people from across society to support the campaign. One great way of doing this is by persuading other community groups to get on board. Local Activism Co-ordinator **Jenny Thatcher** reports on how you can reach beyond the usual suspects, and what resources are available to help you

Know who and know-how

Effective networking is a key campaigning skill, and it's something that can really give a boost to your group. Having community actors that don't usually campaign on the environment lobbying MPs with our arguments will help show politicians that their constituents, and not just the local Friends of the Earth group, want a tough climate change law.

By trying to engage community groups you will gain useful contacts and build relationships with other local organisations.

- You'll develop a bank of contacts in your area that you can call on for help with your local climate work.
- You'll raise your local profile by getting to know other people in your community.
- Your campaign will be more credible because you'll represent a more diverse cross-section of society.

Although there's no guarantee of an influx of new members for your group, you'll certainly be creating a good base of support in your community. You'll learn transferable skills, such as public speaking and facilitation, and you might broaden your own horizons by listening to someone else's perspective on the issues you care about.

Resources: We're asking community groups to sign a paper pledge to show their support. They get to keep part of this pledge to show their climate-friendly status; we receive a tear-off section so that we can record their contact details and keep them up to date through a Big Ask newsletter; and a section goes to their local MP to let them know that support for a strong Climate Change Act is growing.

We're also planning to compile an online gallery of photos and quotes from groups that have pledged their support, which we'll be able to use to lobby MPs and Ministers at key times.

Through The Big Ask newsletter we'll also be able to call on these community groups to support us in taking action when we need them – whether it's supporting a local event or lobbying their MP before an important debate.



Where to start?

Your 10-step plan to reaching new groups

It's all very well telling you to get out and talk to new groups, but these people are busy, they have other priorities, and they might not be easy to contact. And why on earth would they want to listen to you bending their ear about climate change? Here's a step-by-step guide to get started, and some top tips to remember. See page 22 for more pointers.

Step 1: Research community contacts and think about your personal networks – do you know someone who knows someone else who could help? Start by mapping out any personal contacts who might be able to put you in touch with other community groups in your area. Think laterally – if your mum's friend's brother is involved with the local darts club, maybe he could introduce you to the group. Homework pays off: find a named contact for any group you want to get in touch with; find out how often they meet; if they have guest speakers; and the best way to reach them. A good place to start might be your local authority or library, which will have a list of community organisations. You could also check the "meet the neighbours" section in past issues of *Change your world*.

Step 2: Get your message right. Different groups and individuals have different interests – think about adapting the message to appeal to them. For example, if you're contacting the governors of a local school, it might help to talk about the impact of climate change on future generations and link your message to Citizenship, Geography or Science and practical activities the school could get involved in. Faith-based groups might be more interested in the social justice elements of the climate message than statistics about melting ice-caps. Again, do the research, chat to any contacts you make along the way and aim to make it relevant to where people are at, not where you'd like them to be.

Step 3: Approach a community organisation offering a workshop or presentation. Use your contacts and tailor your message. Is a phone call, email, letter or personal meeting the best approach? Be honest about what you'd like to get out of the meeting, and point out what they could gain.

Step 4: Once you've secured a date, make sure you're prepared: how many people will attend, what's their background, what facilities are available? Do you have a recruitment leaflet they can take away?

Step 5: Put together your workshop or presentation. The more interactive you can make this, the more likely your audience is to respond actively and do what you want it to. A presentation on its own, even with time for questions afterwards, doesn't actively engage people in thinking about an issue. Getting them to supply some of the answers will not only activate their interest, it'll also help to ensure that the issue is being discussed at a level and in terms that they understand. We've produced a modular workshop to help you plan sessions with community groups on The Big Ask. See page 22 for details.

Step 6: Be prepared. 'Dummy run' your workshop, make sure you know what equipment you'll need and where to get it, and think through any unexpected problems. What will you do if the bus is late or if there are more/fewer people than you expected? If possible, plan to deliver your session with a partner – that way you'll have help with time keeping and facilitation, there are two of you to remember everything, and if one of you is held up or unwell on the day the other person can deliver the session anyway.

Step 7: Make sure you have Big Ask materials and publicity materials about your group to take with you. Order in good time, and think about tailoring the wording of your profile materials, like the recruitment leaflet for the audience you're visiting (see Step 2).

Step 8: Run your workshop. Arrive early enough to set up, decorate, and to cope with unexpected events.

Step 9: Evaluate your workshop. In a longer session you might want to give an evaluation form to participants, but even a quick 'de-brief' with your partner is a useful way of learning lessons for next time. Don't forget to let us know how it went.

Step 10: Follow up any outcomes or action points, and if the group has asked for more information make sure you send it. Tell your local media if the group has pledged to join your campaign (check with the group first).

Top tips for engaging community groups in campaigns

Do:

- Contact us for advice. We're keen to support people getting involved with this work, so please get in touch with Alex Phillips to talk through your ideas (see page 14 for details).
- Think laterally. Who do you know from work, college, non-Friends of the Earth interests, who might have other useful contacts themselves? Do you know someone involved in a local church group? If you're a keen gardener, who has an allotment near you?
- Research. What community organisations are there in your area? Find out what they're interested in and who the best contact person is. Could you link their interests to climate change? Also find out what their calendar is like – approaching a faith group in the run-up to a major religious festival, for example, might not be the best timing.
- Prepare. Make sure you've planned the workshop thoroughly and do a 'dummy run' before you go to check timings. It will boost your confidence.
- Follow up. Get their contact details and make sure they have yours. Make notes during the session and send them to the group as a reminder of what they've pledged to do. Send a thank you note for their interest and commitment. Invite them to your events. With a bit of work you could form a fruitful relationship with a whole new set of contacts.

Don't:

- Make assumptions. Listen to what people say. Part of the value of working with other groups is getting a broader perspective and learning in the process. People are passionate about different things, and if they're going to get active on your campaign it must be on their own terms. You can help but you're not there to dictate their point of view.
- Use jargon. If people are looking confused, think about the language you're using. Words like "lobbying", "carbon emissions" and even "climate change" are confusing to some people, and if you're talking about CO₂, CHP or SUVs then you're probably leaving people behind.
- Expect too much. You can't assume people new to an issue or to taking action will immediately be up for pitching in (though they might). Signing a petition or committing to receiving more information is a positive outcome and something to build on.

Further information and support

Big Ask guidance and materials

If you're planning to engage community groups in The Big Ask, there's a suite of resources to help. Your first stop should be the *Action guide* and *Facilitator's resource pack*, both of which are available from <http://community.foe.co.uk/campaigns/climate/materials.html#engaging> or by contacting Jill Andrews, Activist Information Officer on 020 7566 1677 or localgroups@foe.co.uk. On the website you'll also find downloadable materials to help you plan and carry out your meetings with community groups. Finally, contact alex.phillips@foe.co.uk or 020 7566 1673 for copies of the Community groups pledge for the Big Ask as described on page 13.

Profile resources

Make sure your group has ordered a new profile pack full of posters, leaflets and ideas to raise your group's profile. Order your one-off free pack from: pubs_despatch@foe.co.uk or call Sam Faulder on 020 7490 1555. See the *How to in Change your world* #63 for more information.

Training opportunities

These will be posted on the Events page on Community, but if you would like to request some training in engaging community groups please contact Alex Phillips (see above).

Discussion forum

This has been set up on Community for updates on resources, general discussion and answers to frequently asked questions about engaging community groups. Please use this forum to ask questions, offer answers to others' questions, provide feedback on what does and doesn't work, and as a first port of call for information: <http://www.foe.co.uk/forum/index.php/topic,3512.0.html>.

One-to-one support and feedback

If you have any questions or feedback, or would like information about training opportunities in engaging community groups, contact Alex Phillips (see above).

