Getting our message across to local people

When talking to people about campaigns it’s important to keep your message as short and simple as possible – otherwise they just forget most of what you say. In fact, it has been found that what is said influences only 7% of the impact of your message. The way it’s expressed influences 38% of the perception, and your tone and visual information influences 55% of the impact. In terms of how much is remembered – people forget 25% of information in 24 hours, 50% after 48 hours, and 80% within 4 days.

We need to work with these statistics to ensure that our messages are understood and remembered.

The standard way for campaigners to break their complicated message down into small and memorable chunks is to come up with a maximum of 3 “key messages” which they aim to get across in the course of a conversation. It’s also vital to make the messages relevant to them – about real people and places that they know.

**Key Messages**

As small groups we worked on “key messages” to convey to the general public about different aspects of the Regional Spatial Strategy public consultation. This is what got written up:

**Transport and Commuting**

1. No serious alternative to cars in the Sustainable Communities plan
2. East-West rail is ready to go – why isn’t it being funded?
3. The government gives more tax breaks to airlines in the South East (£6billion per annum) than it gives to Public Transport, walking and cycling put together.

**Key images and examples to employ:**

- Lorry congestion, accidents, gridlock
- Children in fumes
- Highlight number of road deaths per year – equal to number killed on 9/11
- Stress of driving vs. freedom of walking cycling
- Family impact of long commuting times
- Kesgrave school cycle success

**Climate Change**

1. Airports – no expansion
2. Housing: Construction and use = more CO2, Building Regulations + Innovation = less C02
3. Biodiversity – double whammy of loss through building and loss through climate change

**Green Belt**

1. Value to the community
2. Under threat
3. Can we protect it?

Images/examples:
- West of Stevenage – green lung, walking and leisure, wildlife, archaeology and history, flood prevention
  ⇒ use photos
- Traffic problems
- Lack of affordable housing
- Talk about need to change legislation, and for more local democracy – our powers are being eroded.

Housing

1. Scale of plans – 80000+ planned for Hertfordshire alone…why?
2. Need affordable housing for local people in areas where need is greatest
3. Quality of life

Delivering your messages
Refer back to perception stats from before – we’ve focussed mainly on the ‘what you say’ and ‘how you express it’ bits so far – now going to think a bit more about delivery – the way the message is expressed.

Your body language and general demeanour are probably the key to getting people to sign your petition, decide to join your group, etc. This means two important things:
1. We need to work a bit on these things
2. It doesn’t matter so much if you’re the world’s greatest expert on, for example, the science of climate change – if you come across well, people will be inclined to trust you. E.g. they’ll see your suggestions for where they could find out more detailed info as helpful rather than evasive, etc.

If you’re running a stall, how you should present yourself?

A few suggested “Dos”:
- Act confident, even if you’re not!
- Ask people the odd open question - good communication is a conversation (e.g. have you heard about this before? Do you live locally?)
- Be aware of their personal space, and don’t crowd it.
- Listen
- Brush your teeth!
- Make eye contact (though don’t overdo it!)
- Have an closure strategy for awkward customers
- Remember to get them to sign-up

The whole group split into pairs and did some role plays – firstly how to deal with someone who doesn’t know that much but is interested, and then how to deal with someone who has lots of questions and definitely disagrees with you.
People doing well made the person feel listened to, put across the key messages and got them to sign the petition; they also remained calm and extracted themselves from conversation in a friendly way.

Then people worked in pairs to consider the different people who might come up to a stall (young family, retired couple, student etc.). They thought through how to engage this person/people by asking themselves the following questions:
- Concerns and preoccupations - where are they coming from?
- What messages are they likely to respond to?
- What are your likely priorities/aims when speaking to them?
- What preparation/ materials/ strategies would help you?

Some of these will be different, depending on who you’re talking to and what they care most about, so remember it’s important not to have exactly the same conversation with everyone – instead, find out a bit about who you’re talking to, and adapt or choose the messages that would interest them.

Summary
- You do not have to offload the whole campaign message instantly, but simply make contact and get one idea across.
- There is no one right way to communicate a campaign message – you have to find the best way for you, and it depends where you are, what you are trying to achieve and who you’re aiming at.

This isn’t something you can either do or can’t do – it gets easier over time and with practice.