

Duncan Kerr's



Tips for Active Citizens

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Information compiled from

Centre for Australian Studies, *Teaching Young Australians to be Australian Citizens*, www.arts.monash.edu.au/ncas/teach/resources/austudies/tyoz.html

Charles Dobson, Vancouver Citizens Committee, *The Citizens Handbook, A guide to building the community*, <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/welcome.html>

Greenpeace, *Get Active*, www.greenpeace.org.au/getactive

Contents

Beyond Formal Politics - Civil Society	3
Ten Commandments for Changing the World	4
Guide to organising and running a community group	7- 20
Public Speaking	22
Letter Writing	23
Writing Submissions	24
Lobbying Politicians	26
Using the Media	27
Using the World Wide Web	30
Further Information	32
Guide to Community Groups in Tasmania	33

Beyond Formal Politics

“The formal political system is only part of the life of politics. To concentrate on it exclusively ignores the great area where citizens can best participate- in the civil society. Most of the big changes in Australian life have not begun in the political system. They have begun in the wider civil society. Sometimes it can take the professional politicians years to carry into effect new approaches that have already been articulated in the civil society, in a range of ways, from writing books to holding meetings and demonstrations.

'Civil society' refers to the political space outside the government-all the other places where decisions are made and opinions formed, some of them at times influencing governments. It includes the whole range of private business activities, from great monopolies to corner stores, along with the trades unions and the many other special interest bodies, including protest movements. (So it includes both the tobacco industry and the anti-smoking lobby.) It includes the churches, all the social and sporting organisations, all the leisure and cultural industries and the mass media. It also includes you and me. Thus it incorporates all forms of discussion, from the highest rating television program to talking to your neighbour over the back fence. What is held in common in all of these activities is that, even when governments impinge on them, they also lead a life of their own. It is in the civil society that many or most of the country's decisions are made and its range of opinions is formed”.

Ten Commandments for Changing the World

1 You Have to Believe

Have hope, passion and confidence that valuable change can and does happen because individuals take bold initiative.

2 Challenge Authority

Don't be afraid to question authority. Authority should be earned, not appointed. The "experts" are often proven wrong — they used to believe that the earth was flat!. You don't have to be an expert to have a valuable opinion or to speak out on an issue.

3 Know the System

Use the tools you have — the telephone is the most underrated. The internet can be of great value for research as well. Learn how decisions are made. How is the bureaucracy structured? Who are the key players? What do they look like? Where do they eat lunch? Go there and talk with them. Get to know their executive assistants. Attend public meetings.

4 Take Action

Do something — anything is better than nothing. Bounce your idea around with friends, and then act. Start small, but think big. Organize public events. Distribute pamphlets. Think laterally.

5 Use the media

Letters to the Editor of your local newspaper are read by thousands. Stage a dramatic event and invite the media — they love an event that gives them an interesting angle or a good photo. Bypass the mainstream media and use the world wide web to inform people about your issue.

6 Build Alliances

Seek out your common allies such as other community organisations, youth groups, political parties, businesses and establish their support. The system wins through Divide and Conquer, so do the opposite! Network ideas, expertise and issues through email lists. Celebrate your successes with others.

7 Apply Constant Pressure

Persevere! Use the media, phone your politicians, send letters and faxes with graphics and images. Be concise. Ask specific questions, and give a deadline for when you expect a response. Don't give up.

8 Teach Alternatives

Propose and articulate intelligent alternatives to the status quo. Inspire people with well thought out, attractive visions of how things can be better. Use actual examples, what's been tried, where and how it works. Be positive and hopeful.

9 Learn From your Mistakes

We all make mistakes. Reflect on them. What works, and why? What isn't working? What do people really enjoy doing, and do more of that.

10 Take Care of Yourself and Each Other

Maintain balance. Avoid burn-out by delegating tasks, sharing responsibility, and maintaining an open process. Be sensitive to your colleagues. Have fun. As much as possible, surround yourself with others (both at work and at play) who share your vision so you can build camaraderie, solidarity and support. Enjoy yourself, and nourish your sense of humour. Remember: you're not alone!

*Adapted from Angela Bischoff and Tooker Gomberg, *The Citizens Handbook, A guide to building the community*, <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/welcome.html>*

The following information has been taken from

*The Citizen's Handbook, A Guide to Building
Community*

by Charles Dobson, Vancouver Citizens Committee.

Visit [http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-
handbook/welcome.html](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/welcome.html)

Before You Begin

Adapt to available resources

With little or no financial resources you usually need to

- reduce the amount of time devoted to what seems like work,
- keep the group size small,
- weave actions into everyday life,
- make sure everyone enjoys one another's company, and
- focus on a single short project with concrete results, or on a single long project with good potential for concrete results "along the way."

Beginning

Where do you begin if you want to become more involved in your community? Here are some options.

Begin with research

Although professionals often start with research, you don't have to start here. However, you might be wise to begin with research if you intend to tackle an issue you do not fully understand.

Begin by joining an existing group

Linking up with an existing group can be an easy way to get involved in your community. Ask your neighbours, friends, teachers and family about possible groups to get involved in. Ask your Member of Parliament for advice. Check out community noticeboards.

Begin by starting a new group

If working with an existing group looks difficult, you might have to start a new group. Consider these questions:

- What are we trying to do?
- What size of area are we going to organize?
(The smaller the area, the easier the task.)
- Who will support our efforts?
- What is a good idea for our first action?
(It should be simple, local, and increase the group's visibility.)
- How are we going to reach out to others?
(Should we organize a general meeting and invite the community?)

Make a special effort to remain friendly with other local groups that have similar goals. Friendliness can replace the common tendency toward competition with the potential of cooperation. Inter-group cooperation is the engine of real progress at the grassroots level.

Planning

Planning is necessary if you want to avoid wasted activity, and make your collective efforts count. It should move from the general to the specific, from the big picture to the small, from the long term to the short, from "what" to "how". Planning entails:

- Setting a goal
- Devising strategies to achieve the goal

Look beyond the obvious

In trying to deal with a problem like growing juvenile crime your group might decide on the obvious objective of getting more police. If you looked beyond symptoms, at causes, you might decide to try to open local schools during evenings. Research can help you look beyond the obvious.

How do your objectives score?

Generate ideas that will lead to your goal, and then decide which to pursue. Test alternative objectives by asking:

- ~ Will it improve people's lives or confer a public good?
- ~ Is it easy to understand?
- ~ Is it specific? Will you know when you've reached your objective?
- ~ Will it have an immediate impact?
- ~ Will it contribute to reaching long-term goals?

- ~ Will other citizens want to help?
- ~ Will it establish healthy connections between people?
- ~ Is it attainable?
- ~ Is it attainable with available resources?

For projects that face opposition, add the following questions:

- ~ Is there a clear decision maker who can deliver the goods?
- ~ Is it attractive enough to raise money?
- ~ Is it deeply felt?
- ~ Will it help to build organizing skills?
- ~ Will it give citizens a sense of their own power?
- ~ Is there a basic principle involved?

One objective at a time

To be effective, your group should pursue only one objective at a time. New groups should begin with small projects that have a high probability of success over the short term. One good way to identify a group's priorities is to ask people to write their own view of what the priorities are. Each person writes his or her priorities on large post-it notes, one priority per note, and then sticks them to a board or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them. A facilitator helps the group arrange the notes into clusters with similar characteristics. The top priority soon becomes apparent.

Map the landscape of support and opposition

One of the most important decisions for any group is what their strategy will be in the face of opposition. Given the situation at hand, what is going to be most effective: cooperation, negotiation, or confrontation? Smart groups do not have a single style; they constantly respond to shifting circumstances by deciding what is most appropriate at the moment. Generally they make every attempt to succeed through cooperation and negotiation, reserving confrontation for clear and continuing intransigence.

As you think about strategy, you will need to answer the following questions:

- Where can you find the resources you need?
- Who will support your initiative?
- What concerns will they have? How can you take advantage of their support?
- Who will oppose your initiative? What concerns will they have? What form will their opposition take?

To be effective, your group should pursue no more than one or two objectives at any time.

Plan the action

Generate ideas that will lead to your objective, then decide which to carry forward. Once your group agrees on an action, create an action plan. It should include:

- a time-frame;
- an ordered list of tasks to complete;
- persons responsible for each task;
- a list of resources required including materials; facilities and funds.

Keep action plans flexible so you can respond to the unexpected. One good way to identify a group's priorities is to ask people to write their views with thick markers on large post-it notes. Each person sticks their notes to a board or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them. A facilitator then helps the group arrange the notes into clusters with similar characteristics.

Acting

Once you've completed the necessary groundwork, you need to act. Surprisingly, many groups never get around to acting.

While many interest groups get together just for discussion, community groups tend to work best when acting accompanies talking. Otherwise, they tend to shrink to a few diehards for whom meeting attendance has become a way of life.

Getting Noticed

If you want to expand the number of people who know what you are doing, you need to get noticed. And that usually means working with the media. Publicity has the added power of buoying up participants, bringing in more volunteers, nudging bureaucrats, unhinging politicians, and adding momentum to a grassroots initiative.

Find the media professionals in your community. Seek help from the people in your community who work for newspapers, radio, and television stations. They can provide advice on what is newsworthy, how to get attention, and who to call. Most will not want to appear in the foreground, but in the background they will be invaluable.

Define your message

Don't rush off to the media without a clear idea of what you want to accomplish. Create one or two messages — this is what you want people to remember. If you intend to air a problem, one of your messages should be a reasonable solution. Once you have your messages figured out, you need to turn them into quotable quotes.

Make actions newsworthy

To get media attention you need to tell a good story, with a human focus, about something that is happening now. The more creative, colourful, and humorous the story, the better coverage will be. Getting noticed is largely a matter of dramatizing issues.

Importance of timing

Try to link your issue to breaking news or to a government report, an anniversary, or a special holiday. Linking helps to make old issues current. Good timing is the key to getting access to the media.

Write letters to the editor

Writing letters to the editors of community newspapers is an easy way to get publicity. Small papers will publish any reasonable letter that does not require a lot of fact checking. Draft and redraft letters so they are punchy and short. Check the length so your letter is at least as short as the average published letter. Common Cause, the largest citizens group in the US, did a study which showed that a letter to the editor was one of the most effective ways of influencing politicians.

Issue media advisories

Send out a media advisory on your group's letterhead if you have an upcoming event you wish to publicize.

At the top left put "Media Advisory" and the date. Next, create a strong newspaper-style headline that will interest an editor who has to shuffle through hundreds of media advisories and news releases every day. The first sentence of the copy should contain the most important or most interesting fact in your story.

The rest of the advisory should cover the essentials of who, what, where, when, and why. At the bottom put "For more information" and a contact name and phone number. Keep it to one page in length. You can also email media advisories, but avoid attachments ; emails with attachments may be junked automatically to avoid viruses.

For big events, send out a media advisory two days prior. Direct fax the assignment desk for TV, to the city desk for newspapers, and to the newsroom for radio. But be aware that faxes usually end up in the garbage. Faxing an advisory without any personal contact is usually a waste of time, unless you are sending it to small community papers. The best way to get the press to an event is to phone assignment editors, producers, and

reporters one or two days in advance. If no one comes to cover your event, phone around and offer an interview after it is over.

Practice your blurb

TV and radio news editors often cut quotes so they take only 10 seconds. Make sure you have one or two short sentences ready for reporters that carry your message. Don't say anything that would misrepresent your message if it was taken out of context. Practice what you want to say before the event. Your statement or a minor variation can be used in response to any question asked. No one will know the difference.

Reframe stories on live radio

If you can get on a live radio show, you can actually shape the news because you won't be edited as you would be on TV or in the newspaper. To sound good, prepare a collection of quotable quotes that convey your message, and write them out to take with you to the interview.

Don't rely on the media to educate

The mass media are good at entertaining and good at raising issues, but poor at providing detailed information that would help people understand issues. If you want to circulate detailed information, you will probably have to do it through newsletters, op-ed page features, projects with schools, conferences, workshops, and websites.

Consider other media

Promote your event or issue in a leaflet delivered by volunteers by ad mail, or by direct mail. Leafleting can be combined with fundraising that will pay for the leaflet, the distribution, and project administration. You can also display messages on printed T-shirts, window signs, roof-rack car signs, stick-on car signs, posters,, notices in apartment building laundries, or church orders of service, email newsletters linked to web pages and the print or email newsletters of other groups.

Try the direct approach first

Before going to the media, consider phoning or writing those who have the power to put things right. Drop in to your local MP's office for advice.

Getting People

One of the main on-going activities of any grassroots organization is getting more people involved. This is not easy; most people don't like the idea of being "roped into" doing community work in their spare time.

Ask members to invite others

Eighty per cent of volunteers doing community work said they began

because they were asked by a friend, a family member, or a neighbour.

Go to where people are

Instead of trying to get people to come to you, try going to them. Go to the meetings of other groups, and to places and events where people gather. This is particularly important for involving ethnic groups, youth groups, seniors, and others who may not come to you.

Look for ways to collect names, addresses, phone numbers

Have sign-in sheets at your meetings and events. At events organized by others, ask people to add their name, address, email address and phone number to petitions and requests-for-information. In return, hand out an issue sheet, or an explanation of how your group is attempting to address an issue.

Try to include those who are under-represented

Minority language groups, low-income residents, the disabled, the elderly and youth all tend to be under-represented in neighbourhood groups. In some cases not participating is a matter of choice - most transient youth choose not to take part. In other cases, English language competence poses a formidable barrier to participation. In still other cases, people get overlooked. This can happen to the disabled and the elderly, even though they have proven invaluable as active citizens. Here are some ways to include the under-represented:

- Go to people in the group you are trying to reach and ask how they would like to be approached.
- Address their issues.
- Think about who you know who knows someone in the group you are trying to reach. Use your connections.
- Identify a group as people you want to work with, not as a target group you want to bring "on side". Treat people as people first.
- Organize projects that focus on kids. Parents of different ethnic backgrounds, and income levels will meet one another while accompanying their children.

Keeping People

People join community groups to meet people, to have fun, to learn new skills, to pursue an interest, and to link their lives to some higher purpose. They leave if they don't find what they are looking for. Citizens groups need to ask themselves more often: What benefits do we provide? At what cost to members? How can we increase the benefits and decrease the costs? Here

are a some ideas on where to begin.

Stay in touch with one another

Regular contact is vital. Face to face is best. If you have to meet, getting together in someone's house is better than meeting in a hall.

Welcome newcomers

Introduce them to members of your group. Help people find a place in the organization. The most appealing approach is to say, "Tell us the things you like to do and do well and we will find a way to use those talents." The next most appealing is to say: "Here are the jobs we have, but how you get them done is up to you." Invite newcomers to assume leadership roles. If the same people run everything, newcomers feel excluded.

Act more, meet less

The great majority of people detest meetings; too many are the Black Death of community groups. By comparison, activities like tree-planting draw large numbers of people of all ages.

Keep time demands modest

Most people lead busy lives. Don't ask them to come to meetings if they don't need to be there. Keep expanding the number of active members to ensure everyone does a little, and no one does too much. Work out realistic time commitments for projects.

Do it in twos

Following a practice from Holland, we suggest working in pairs. It improves the quality of communication, makes work less lonely, and ensures tasks get done.

Provide social time and activities

Endless work drives people away. Schedule social time at the beginning and end of meetings. Turn routine tasks into social events; for example, stuff envelopes while sharing pizza. Some groups form a social committee to plan parties, dinners, and trips.

Leading

Good leaders are the key to large-scale community organizing. They do not tell other people what to do, but help others to take charge.

Lead by creating an example to follow

Some leaders are larger-than-life heroes. Some deliver inspirational speeches. Others are excellent organizers. But many leaders inspire others to follow by setting an example. When Rosa Parks refused to give up a bus

seat reserved for white people, others followed her example in such numbers that it blossomed into the civil rights movement.

Divide-up and delegate work

Divide tasks into bite-sized chunks, then discuss who will do each chunk. Make sure everyone has the ability to carry out their task, then let them carry it out in their own way. Have someone check on progress. People do not feel good about doing a job if nobody cares whether it gets done.

Appreciate all contributions, no matter how small

Recognize people's efforts in conversations, at meetings, in newsletters, and with tokens of appreciation: thank-you notes, certificates, and awards for special efforts.

Welcome criticism

Accepting criticism may be difficult for some leaders, but members need to feel they can be critical without being attacked.

Help people to believe in themselves

A leader builds people's confidence that they can accomplish what they have never accomplished before. The unflagging optimism of a good leader energizes everyone.

Inspire trust

People will not follow those they do not trust. Always maintain the highest standards of honesty. Good leaders reveal their potential conflicts of interest and air doubts about their own personal limitations.

Avoid doing most of the work

Don't try to run the whole show or do most of the work. Others will become less involved, and you will burn out.

Meeting

Meetings are necessary for planning, and decision making. How well they work influences whether people remain in a group. All meetings should be as lively and as much fun as possible.

The basics of meeting

Fix a convenient time, date and place to meet. You can find free meeting places in libraries, community centres, some churches, neighbourhood houses, and schools. Some groups meet in a favourite restaurant or cafe. To keep a group together, decide on a regular monthly meeting time, or think of another way of staying in touch. Agree on an agenda beforehand. A good agenda states meeting place; starting time, time for each item, ending

time; objectives of the meeting; and items to be discussed.

Start the meeting by choosing a facilitator, a recorder, and a timekeeper. Begin with a round of introductions if necessary. Next, review the agreements of the previous meeting. Ask for amendments or additions to the agenda, then begin working through the agenda. Record actions required, who will carry them out, and how much will be accomplished before the next meeting. Finally, set a time, place and an agenda for the next meeting.

Follow a set of discussion guidelines

Regular meetings work better if everyone agrees on a set of discussion guidelines. Some groups post their guidelines as a large sign:

- Listen to others
- Do not interrupt
- Ask clarifying questions
- Welcome new ideas
- Do not allow personal attacks
- Treat every contribution as valuable

Develop a friendly culture

Encourage humour. Allow for social time.

Facilitating

The facilitator's role is to help a group to its best thinking. A good facilitator is helpful when a group is trying to deal with new or difficult issues. In the main, a facilitator helps people persevere as they confront the inevitable confusion and frustration associated with trying to integrate different views and approaches with their own. The more people who learn to facilitate, the better. If you accept the role of facilitator you must be neutral. You should also use the following techniques.

Watch group vibes

If people seem bored or inattentive, you may have to speed up the pace of the meeting. If people seem tense because of unvoiced disagreements, you may have to bring concerns out into the open.

Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak

Invite quiet people to speak. If necessary, use the clock: "We have fifteen minutes left. I think we should hear from people who haven't spoken for a while." Another way to get quiet people to speak is to initiate a round, in which you move around the table, with everyone getting a few minutes to present their views.

Encourage open discussion

Try to encourage people to speak up if they seem reluctant to disagree with a speaker: "On difficult issues, people disagree. Does anyone have a different point of view?" Another way to encourage open discussion is to ask participants to avoid using critical language for a period of time.

Draw people out with open-ended questions

Open-ended questions require more than a yes / no answer. Some examples:

"We seem to be having trouble here. What do you think we should do?"

"Could you say more about that?"

"What do you mean when you say . . . ?"

Inject humour

Humour is one of the best ways of improving the tone of meetings. It makes meetings seem like friendly get-togethers.

Follow a procedure to reach closure

One procedure for large groups is to ask the group to vote. A better procedure for small groups is for the person in charge to —

1. close the discussion,
2. clarify the proposal,
3. poll the group, then
4. decide to a) make the decision or b) continue the discussion.

Suggest options when time runs out

Identify areas of partial consensus, suggest tabling the question, or create a small subcommittee to deal with the matter at its convenience.

Consider a round at the end of the meeting

Going quickly around the whole group at the end of the meeting gives people a chance to bring up matters not on the agenda. You can also use a round to evaluate the meeting. With more than ten people, though, a round can become tedious.

Strategic Thinking

The smartest and most effective activists think, plan, and act strategically. Strategic action is necessary in situations where an opponent blocks the way to an objective. In such cases, smart activists use strategic thinking to identify where an opponent is vulnerable, and then try to figure out how to exploit that vulnerability. They also use strategic thinking to solve problems before they happen, coolly examining the pros and cons of various moves in order to identify the best course of action.

Creating a Strategy

Creating a strategy for a public interest campaign involves:

- ~ defining goals and intermediate and short-term objectives,
- ~ identifying opponents,
- carry out a SWOT analysis
- ~ imagining and playing scenarios,
- ~ identifying primary and secondary targets,
- ~ identifying allies,
- ~ deciding what resources are required (salaries, expenses, other),
- ~ devising tactics, and
- ~ drawing up an action timetable.

Because this is a problem-solving process it is a loopy. In other words, you might define an objective up-front, but realize later that resources are inadequate to achieve this goal or that there is no clear target. This will mean looping back to redefine the objective.

Defining goals and objectives

Your goals are the broad results you wish to achieve over the long term. Objectives are what you want to accomplish more immediately. Your objectives should follow naturally from your goals. They help you reach your goal. If the goal is winning the war, an objective might be winning a particular battle. If you lose sight of your goals and objectives, everything goes haywire. Consider a project to address the problems of global capitalism; it leads to a street protest, which brings about a police attack on protesters. A protracted inquiry into police brutality then sidetracks the whole project, obscuring the message of the protest and trumping its main objective.

Identifying opponents and obstacles

What stands in the way of reaching your objective? Who can make the necessary changes? Who specifically do you need to influence? In many cases you will be trying, in some way, to bring about changes to government policy or legislation. You will want to avoid making incorrect assumptions about how government works, who is responsible, or what is the most effective route for bringing about change.

Carrying out a SWOT analysis

It's easier to make choices after identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis can be applied to a position, an idea, an individual, or an organization. Do a SWOT analysis for your group as well as for your target.

Imagining and playing scenarios

Strategic thinking is often described as reflective dialogue about the future so that one can avoid pitfalls as well as take advantage of opportunities. One way to do this is by imagining how events will play out, then devising effective responses. Future scenarios may be framed as "what if" questions.

Let's say you are planning to hike up a mountain. The sun is shining, so you may prepare gear and clothing based on a default scenario that assumes an easy hike in fine weather. But your preparations will change if you consider "what if" questions. "What if fog makes it difficult to see?" "What if it snows?" "What if someone sprains their ankle?" Good scenarios require informed imagination. If it's not informed, you can waste energy on the improbable. If it's not fueled by imagination, you can be blindsided.

Identifying targets

If your group cannot itself deliver a public good, you must be able to identify a decision maker or primary target who can. Campaigns directed at getting a target to do something usually require negotiation, campaigning, and confrontation. These tactics work best on people who are elected. Hired bureaucrats and appointed officials are more resistant.

You should also identify one or more secondary targets. These are people who will cooperate with you, who have some power over the primary target. Secondary targets might be regulatory officials, important customers, or politicians from a more senior level of government.

Identifying allies

If you can't influence a decision maker on your own, are there others who can help? When groups with similar interests create strategic alliances, they are much more likely to achieve their goals. The tendency for groups to compete for funds and influence merely serves the opposition.

Allies may also be sympathetic insiders. Citizens need intelligence to make the right moves. The best intelligence comes from inside organizations that can influence the success of your project. Let's suppose your goal is to change government policy. Reading government reports will provide some useful information. But talking to bureaucrats will provide additional, up-to-date information and a quick rundown on attitudes inside government. A sympathetic senior bureaucrat who understands your project can provide the most help. Finding such a person will help you make all the right moves.

Devising tactics

Tactics are the action part of a strategy. Generating good tactical alternatives requires creative thinking. Choosing which ones to use requires a knowledge of what works in a particular context. It also requires some consideration of what will be good, interesting, or exciting for the group.

Tactics differ in what they try to accomplish. They can aim to —

- win an objective by giving the other side something it wants (credit, votes, support),
- win an objective by depriving or threatening to deprive the other side of something it wants (credibility, respect, money, labor, employment),
- build public support in the media, or build the support of allies or secondary targets

- show a target the size and concern of your constituency,
or
- build the morale of your group.

Drawing up a detailed action timetable

Your timetable should be a multilevel chart with start and completion dates for everything you want to do.

The following information has been taken from
the Greenpeace website

*Get Active - Guide to organising a community
group*

Visit <http://www.greenpeace.org.au/getactive/>

Public Speaking

Public speaking is a great way to get your campaign message across to a broad range of people.

To engage the local community in your campaign, establishing a speaker's bureau, a team of strong communicators who are willing to give presentations and who are well versed in your campaign messages.

Take your message to:

- Business groups
- Service clubs
- Local councils
- Schools and universities
- Other non-government organisations

Preparing your talk

You don't have to be a performer to be a good speaker. The key is to be relaxed, speak clearly and with authority, and represent your cause in a professional manner.

To get bookings, contact the organisations concerned and ask for some time at their next meeting. Make sure when booking that you get all relevant details, including date, time and place.

Different speakers relate better to different audiences. Make sure you learn about your audience so you can feel as comfortable as possible when you're presenting.

The talk

It's handy to prepare some notes for your talk, especially if it's the first time you're giving it. But don't write an essay! People will get bored if you simply read from a sheet of paper. Prepare a list of points in the right order, including relevant statistics or quotes.

Think about the sorts of questions people might ask. Try to tell your story from a personal perspective, with anecdotes your audience can relate to.

Your notes might cover:

- An outline of the issue.
- How the problem/issue affects your audience.
- Who else the problem affects.
- What your audience can do to help.

Don't overdo it. Any longer than 20 minutes and people start to get restless. Keep it snappy, leaving plenty of time for questions.

Visual aids

Clear and understandable slides, posters and diagrams make good presentation aids. They help the audience "digest" your points.

If you're planning to use slides, video or overheads, arrange this well in advance and arrive early at the venue to ensure the room is set up with the appropriate equipment. Don't use too many slides; 10 to 30 slides is plenty for a 20-minute talk.

Campaign resources

Take plenty of campaign material along to the talk. This is an opportunity to get people to write letters or sign petitions. Members of your audience might also feel inclined to join your group or make a donation, so have all relevant paperwork with you.

After the talk

Write and thank the group for having you and make sure they have enough information and materials to continue spreading the word.

Letter Writing

Letter writing is a great way to have your say.

People you might want to write to about an issue of concern include

- Your local Member Of Parliament (MP).
- The Minister responsible (e.g. Minister For The Environment).
- An offending company.
- Your local newspaper.
- Your local council.

Don't be intimidated - one letter can represent 100 votes to a politician.

Handy Hints for Effective Letter Writing

- Put the date and address of the person you're writing to on the top left- hand side of the page.
- Keep to one issue per letter

- Do your homework - you don't want to be caught out with the wrong information.
- If writing to a newspaper, read a few other letters to the editor first, to get the style right.
- KISS - keep it short and simple (max. 200 words).
- Use short sentences - dot points are also useful.
- Define the problem.
- Offer solutions.
- Call for action.
- Ask questions that require specific answers.
- Suggest a meeting in person.
- Check your spelling and grammar before posting the letter.
- Always sign the letter and print your name and address below your signature.
- Keep responses to your letters in the same file as your letters.

Writing Submissions

Writing submissions is a good way to get your message across and spark public debate about an issue.

Submission writing skills can be useful for both fundraising and lobbying. You can prepare submissions for institutions including:

- State, local and federal government departments.
- Your local community.
- Independent bodies such as the United Nations.
- Business and industry bodies.
- Foundations and other grant-giving bodies.

Key Writing Tips

To write a good submission you'll need up-to-date and accurate information. The main categories you may decide to break this information into include

- Introduction and summary of what you are going to cover - key issues.
- What the submission is about.
- Why it's a good idea.
- The 'vital' facts.
- Why the audience you have chosen should be interested.
- What the problems/positives are.
- What you recommend.
- How you plan to go about it.
- What you want done.

- Who supports you - letters of support/quotes (try to have some supporters who are prominent in the community).
- What it might cost - budgets.
- How long you think it will take - timelines.
- Photos/maps/drawings.

Your submission can be as long as you like, however we recommend that you try to keep the 'key' information as succinct as possible and add any supporting documentation. Like writing a press release or giving a public presentation, you'll want your submission to be catchy, relevant, interesting and not too long and boring. There's no harm in using conversational language, and supporting it with the 'science and facts' - not everyone is an expert and you don't want to make the submission hard to understand.

Research

Your first step before writing your submission will be to research the topic and find as much relevant information as possible. Likely sources of information include:

- Speaking to people involved - interviews.
- Your local library for maps, acts of parliament, magazines.
- Parliament house for copies of recent legislation and other reports/submissions on the topic.
- Government departments.
- Your local council.
- Public companies - annual reports
- Australian Bureau Of Statistics - for a wealth of facts and figures.
- The Land Titles Office.
- Universities.
- Media resources - newspapers, radio, TV, the internet.

Accurate Information

You should keep a good record of what information you obtained from where and whom. This is both for copyright issues and for issues of liability and authenticity. Everyone will see an issue differently. You need to make sure your submission includes the biases of arguments and their sources.

Presentation

Presentation of your submission can effect how it is received. Once you've written your submission and collected supporting information, it's a good time to enlist the assistance of your friends with desktop design and artistic skills to make the submission look good.

You can consider making the submission into a book, a poster, building a model or making a map to accompany it - the options are limitless. A slick

presentation is a good way to spark media interest and demonstrate your passion for the issue.

Lobbying Politicians

Lobbying Members of Parliament (MPs) can be valuable if you want to:

- Influence a decision that is about to be made by Parliament.
- Gain the support of policy makers and force consultation on an issue, by establishing the dialogue.
- Force MPs to make a powerful stand about a particular campaign.

Lobbying your MP effectively requires careful thought, preparation and follow-up. Meeting with an MP in person is an effective way to demonstrate how strongly you feel about a particular issue. It's also a good way to find out how your local politician feels about the issue at hand.

Duties Of MPs

Your local MP has certain duties towards you as a voter in their electorate. You can ask your local MP for help:

- In dealing with government departments.
- In approaching local businesses.

You can also ask them to present a petition to Parliament and they are obliged to carry this out. If you ask an MP to take up an issue that falls in the responsibility of a Minister, your MP must pass on the information to that Minister.

Meeting With MPs

If you plan to meet with an MP, it helps to write first. Letters demonstrate the amount of interest you have for the issue. They also give the MP something to refer to in your meeting.

Try to maximise your credibility by:

- Making your argument clear and reasonable.
- Being specific about your objections, aims and ideas for solutions.
- Providing evidence of local support for your issue.
- Showing them relevant press clippings or a briefing paper on the issue.

The Meeting

Once you've written to an MP requesting a meeting, phone to make an appointment.

Make sure you prepare for the meeting and have at hand all the information you need. It's useful to leave some information with the MP so they have something to refer to and pass on to relevant people.

If you're going to the meeting in a group, ensure:

- You all have a good understanding of the issue.
- You've worked out in advance what you're going to say and who will talk about what.
- One person is responsible for taking notes during the meeting.

Always take advantage of 'looking respectable'.

Before you leave the meeting, try to get a clear commitment of the sorts of assistance the MP will provide. Don't settle for vague promises.

The Follow-up

After the meeting, make sure you write back to the MP thanking them for the meeting and outlining what you discussed - particularly reminding them of any promises they may have made. Don't let them forget!

Get the Message Right

'Keep it simple, stupid!'

- old journalism maxim

Know Your Stuff

The most important thing in dealing with the media is the message. What is the story? Just what are you trying to tell the public?

You have to make your message very easy to understand - and interesting. Do this, and you're more than half way there. The rest of media wrangling is just getting reporters to hear what you're saying. The easier you make it for them, the better your chances.

What The Media Wants

If you want to get the media to pick up on your story, you have to know what they are looking for. It's not necessarily the importance of your issue, or the passion you feel for it. The issue has to be newsworthy and this

means - in cold, hard terms - that it needs at least one or two of the following qualities.

- It effects people - anything that has a big impact on people's lives is news - the way we live, think, work, dress, eat, raise our children. The more people effected, the higher the news value. This is the relevance factor.
- It's happening now - news is today - and tomorrow.
- It's here - one person hurt in a car crash in your town is more newsworthy than three killed 500km away or 150 killed on the other side of the world.
- It's different - the novelty factor is a big draw-card. The first time something happens it's news (see the 'ST' factor below).
- It inspires an emotional response - bad news sells, but so does extremely good news. The media loves a hero story as much as a disaster. This is why conflicts, whether wars or brawls between neighbours or councils, end up as news.
- It's got a name - something or someone that is already famous attracts the media. Sad but true.
- The 'ST' factor (as identified by the JT Group) - the biggest, newest, fastest, tallest, first, worst, most expensive. Make it a 'ST' (even oldest, worst, ugliest) and it's more interesting.

Remember these qualities when talking to journalists, writing press releases and planning events. Journalists get swamped with stories every day, so you have to be hard-nosed about selling your story.

Source: Murray Masterton (academic).

The Big Picture

Good images will increase the chances of your story being picked up by media and are essential for getting TV coverage. Think visually when arranging an event such as a demonstration, press conference or protest. This may mean some set dressing, such as activists all wearing gags, children carrying flowers, black arm bands, or it could be as simple as having banners with your message.

Let the media know what they'll 'see' when they come to your event. Record your event wherever possible - whether on digital video or camera, or on conventional film (but do this only if you can afford it). The media will generally prefer to use images they take themselves, but if you have the only visual of something newsworthy, the media will use a less than perfect tape or photo.

Liaising With the Media

It's worth remembering that while social change activism does not always get good media, and our concerns are sometimes trivialized, the journalists aren't bastards out to get you.

Their job is to tell stories. You have a story that you want people to hear. Keep it professional, make it as easy as possible for them to get the story and your chances of getting coverage are vastly improved.

There are lots of things you can do to make it easy for journalists to do their job, from providing a press release which explains the issue, to providing your own photos or videos. But the MOST IMPORTANT thing you can do is to be good media 'talent'. Know your issue inside out, speak clearly, succinctly and plainly on your issue, be up to date with your issue, and explain it in a way that the average person in the street will understand and be interested.

It's also worth remembering that a journalist may have a different idea about the story to you. Don't be distracted by their questions - stick to your point. Have a few 'grabs' (key quotes) ready to say and make sure you say them. Make them short - an average radio 'grab' can be as short as five seconds!

Tell The World

Media Is Changing

The days of relying solely on commercial TV networks, wires and newspapers to get your message out is over. New media is appearing faster than fashions, whether it's video, audio or text based. Keeping up with it can be difficult but the good news is it's easier to reach your target audience with new and improving technology that is relatively low cost.

Tried and True

TV news, wires, papers and radio are still the mainstay of Australian media so don't ignore them. The basic tools are media advisories and press releases (as fax or emails). Follow up with a telephone call to ensure the message got through. It's surprising how much falls between the gaps. Remember to send advisories, releases and make phone calls in plenty of time. Find out deadlines of your target media well in advance and ensure you don't miss them.

Letters to The Editor

These are a quick and easy way to get an issue aired in print. Keep it short and sweet. Letters to the editor are designed to express your opinion, so give it. Newspapers publish details of how to send in letters to the editor, word length and contact details required. Stick to these guidelines (it's amazing how many people don't).

Non-news Media

There's so much more to media than news. Think about other sections of the paper, TV or radio programming. Free community service announcements are run on most radio and TV stations and in many papers. Investigate what they need from you (maybe a 20-second tape or a ready-made graphic or ad). Try to get in the features section as well as the main news. In TV this translates as programs such as lifestyle shows, current affairs or specialist programs. Brainstorm angles that will appeal to your target media outlet and get in contact with them. Community radio stations will often allow local interest groups a lot of air time and sometimes even your own show.

Publishing On The Web

The joy of the web is that anyone can publish his or her own material. If you don't have your own website, there are plenty of websites that are happy to publish your material, host live chat or show your video. Remember, short is sweet in cyberspace.

Starting a Website

A website is a communication tool. Having a website can strengthen your local group by:

- Providing the public with up-to-date information about your activities, goals and ways people can assist your work.
- Providing a virtual meeting room.
- Acting as a bulletin board.
- Displaying latest news and campaign. developments.
- Acting as a library for old documents.

Before constructing your website, make sure you've worked out what you want to say to the community and the sort of image you want to display.

Site Considerations

To communicate effectively your website will need a consistent navigation system. Because the web is image based, you need to use continuity. Make sure headings and links look the same.

Your navigation system will need:

- A link back to the home page from every other page.
- A site map (a thorough and up-to-date index of everything on the site).
- A search function (you can download these for free off the web).
- Return options so that a user can return to the last page they were on.
- A global navigation bar (that pops up on every screen).
- Simple headings and images.

Content Considerations

Defining your audience will allow you to write content targetted at them. Your website should be concise and easy to read; aim for a reading age of about 14 years (the standard for most newspapers). Make sure you include:

- Campaign information.
- Your mission statement.
- Contact postal address and phone number.
- A donations section.
- Cyber petitions and other ways for users to take action on behalf of your campaign.

Keep information current. There's nothing worse than visiting out-of-date websites. You may want to separate your information into static, unchanging information and dynamic, newsworthy information.

Things to Avoid

- Text on a colour background. It's too hard to read.
- Confusing navigation. Try to make it intuitive for the first time visitor.
- Any images over 30k. These are too big for most people to download. The same goes for big files.
- The endlessly scrolling page. Either cut your content or add deeper layers of text.
- Broken links.
- Spinning logos.
- Gimmicks.
- A page wider than 500 pixels. It might not print out properly.

Cyberactivism Works

Every email message received by a politician counts for 10 votes. You can successfully use the web to motivate people.

Further Information

Useful Information can be found at the following websites:

Our Community

www.ourcommunity.com.au/finance

Despite the valuable work performed by community organisations, a common criticism directed at them is that they need to be more financially accountable and transparent. In order to assist community groups with this task, 'Our Community' and Westpac have produced the booklet 'Guide for Community Treasurers' which covers book-keeping, tracking cash, record-keeping, budgeting, financial reporting, auditing etc. You can download the guide by visiting the above website.

Citizen Science Toolbox

www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/index.asp

The Citizen Science Toolbox offers a range of strategies for people keen to become involved in decision-making in their communities. It contains over 60 community involvement 'tools' and case studies outlining how they have been used and how successful they were. Examples include citizens juries, deliberative opinion polls and focus groups.

Community Organisations in Hobart

Community Information Line

The Community Information Line, a Glenorchy City Council programme, provides comprehensive advice on community organisations and their contact details as well as details of local community events. Freecall 1800 635 488 for information, or visit <http://www.infoline.tas.gov.au/> for a list of organisations and groups.

Community Net

Another option is to visit Tasmania's Community Net, a website run by the State Library and Tasmanian Communities Online. The address is www.tas.gov.au/tasmaniaonline/community/. The website offers a map to help you track down local organisations.

Youth Network of Tasmania

For a comprehensive list of youth organisations, visit the Youth Network Of Tasmania (YNOT), the peak body for non-government youth organisations in Tasmania. Their website is <http://www.ynot.org.au/>, email ynot@ynot.org.au or write to

Youth Network of Tasmania
45 Sandy Bay Road
Hobart Tasmania 7004

My Office

Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you would like any other information. Phone 6234 5255 or visit 188 Collins Street, Hobart 7000