

Tip Sheet 1

Simple principles for effective campaigning on legislative or regulatory change

What is your aim?

It may sound obvious, but too often people start campaigning about something that they think is wrong, without any clear agreement about how it could be put right. Before you “go in with all guns blazing”, it's important to have a vision of what would be better and some options for how you might get there.

For example: too few people with HIV are getting diagnosed in your country because there is no targeting of the social groups with the highest prevalence. You can complain about social prejudices against these groups, or beat the Minister over their head with the unflattering data, but it is more likely to change things if you show the authorities how easily they could be reached and the benefits of doing so. You should always have an answer to the question “*Well, what do you want me to do about it?*” and it should always be something that the person really can do.

Who are you trying to influence?

Every campaign should know its target/s. There may well be more than one target, and probably people that you will need to influence along the way to convincing the person who can actually make the change that you want. For each of these targets, you need to know what will influence them, the language they will understand and the other people who will impress them – see Tip Sheet 9.

Who is with you?

You can't change the world without friends to help you. Although many of the most successful campaigns start with a few people around a kitchen table making the initial plans, they gather allies on the way from different places and across a spectrum of political beliefs.

To change your Government's mind about something to do with health and social care you will need the help of some, if not all, of the following: patients, doctors, nurses, public health, NGOs, policymakers and service planners, professional bodies, people within the Government and the Opposition parties, industry, researchers, allied health conditions or umbrella bodies, international and regional associations. And never forget, people with a bit of money. For how to go about this, see Tip Sheet 8 and several of the case studies.

What kind of campaign do you want to have?

Your campaign style should be dictated by your aims and by how difficult you think it will be to get there. If you need to exert public pressure on the Government, you need to either have a wide, strong coalition, get the public on your side or make a lot of noise and nuisance. If you think they are amenable to discussion, you may be better off issuing factual reports and using the most impressive and persuasive people in your coalition to negotiate quietly with officials.

Of course, a really good campaign may do both of these – see case study 3 on PrEP in France – but it is important to think through your strategic options in advance. Otherwise you may find that once you've thrown red paint on the Ministry doorstep, it's hard for the same people to walk through the door and negotiate with them.

Are petitions useful?

Sites such as Change.org and 38Degrees make it easy for you – and everyone else – to start a petition. Some Governments promise to debate an issue if it gets over a certain number of signatures (100,000 in the UK) though these “debates” are often a token gesture. Others have a “petitions committee” which will investigate and report on issues which have gained enough support. You can also do a Thunderclap, allowing a third party site to use your social media accounts to put out the same message thousands of times simultaneously for maximum reach. Petitions can be useful if you think you can get a good number of supporters to sign, or if you use them as part of a wider strategy to increase understanding of your issue. You may not want to spend a large part of your energy on something that can just have “thank you, but no” said to it, though.

Whose attention do you want?

Who you want to take notice of you, and why, will dictate your media strategy. This may differ as you progress. Do you want more volunteers and supporters? Target groups of people most likely to support you via social media or speaking engagements? Do you want understanding from the general public? Target the most popular newspapers and radio talk shows. Do you want the involvement or endorsement of specialists? Talk to their specialist press and events. Do you want the politicians and top level bureaucrats to make a decision? Find out what they read, listen to or watch and try to get your issue on there.

If you need help identifying these, talk to a friendly press officer/media manager or do some online research into audience or sales figures as these will differ for every country. Make sure you have short, clear messages that are easily understood. And if you can't afford media training for your spokespeople, at least search online for free advice from sites like mediafirst.co.uk about how to handle interviews well.

How will you know when you've won?

Having a clear goal is important, but sometimes that goal can seem a long way off. Keep momentum going by having milestones, or mini-goals, along the way of your campaign – getting a meeting with a Parliamentarian, producing your first leaflet, getting a motion of support at a clinician conference. Plan these, but don't be rigid because you will also need to seize opportunities such as a chance meeting with the right official or a legal loophole that appears in Government legislation. Celebrate your achievements regularly to encourage people to keep going.

Ultimately, winning what you need from a Government or a health system almost always boils down to two things: they have to understand how it will benefit them and they have to recognise that it will be less trouble for them to do what you want than to keep turning you down.

How to Cite:

Power, L. (2017). *OptTEST Tip sheet 1 – Simple principles for effective campaigning on legislative or regulatory change*. Retrieved from: www.opttest.eu