

How to

campaign effectively in your local community

Cuts to public services will affect everyone in the community. Your child's teaching assistant could go, an elderly neighbour's day care centre may close, or your grandfather's hospital transport could be cut. If cleaners' posts are lost, hospitals will become less safe; cuts to council budgets could mean dirty streets, less back up for the police and closed libraries.

Why campaign together

The loss of UNISON members' jobs is only one effect of cuts to public service. But the whole community will suffer if these jobs go as the work our members do are vital for making society a better, safer, fairer place – for everyone.

UNISON has a long tradition of campaigning in the workplace on work issues. But an effective campaign against the biggest cuts ever seen needs to involve the whole community.

Working together with other groups creates a stronger voice in opposition to cuts.

Identify your campaign

Building relationships within a community can be a short or long-term process and may involve formal or informal structures and alliances.

We often don't realise just how many "allies" we already have: mums at the school gates are all affected by the loss of teaching assistants, caretakers, lollipop ladies. One closed library affects thousands – young and old, employed and unemployed. Every tenant will be affected by cuts to repairs of social housing.

The key is to identify the common ground you share with other people and organisations and can campaign together on.

- Listen to what people are saying in your community and identify the most significant problem people are facing
- Identify one small, achievable change that would make a real difference to them
- Get to know someone first before you “sell” them any campaign ideas
- Frame your ideas constructively and positively. This will help build people’s confidence that they can change things
- decide who or what has the power to give you what you want
- decide who are your allies
- plan your campaign to tackle that issue.

Building alliances

Different people and organisations will have different interests and concerns. One organisation’s loss may be another organisation’s gain. With short-term campaigns (a few weeks or months at most) it is crucial to focus on the common ground, not what divides you. Those who want to stop you achieving your goal will use your community’s differences to divide you.

It is therefore important that you are realistic about what you can achieve together – and what you can’t. You don’t have to have all the answers but make sure you get your facts straight so you can’t be undermined. Keep it impersonal – personal attacks usually backfire.

Plan your campaign so that each “ally” plays to their strengths – let others excel where you can’t. UNISON does not have to lead every campaign: *never do for people what they can do for themselves.*

Plan your campaign

Once you have identified your common goal, ask:

- Who could be helpful?
- Who could be a barrier?
- Who do we need to win over?
- Whose arguments do we need to neutralise?
- What financial and practical resources and skills does the group have – who can do what?
- What are the interests of those who have the power to give you what you want, and what you need to do for them to get them onside?
- Recognise your limitations.

Communication

Keeping people informed is a really important part of keeping their interest and engagement.

Meetings

Make sure any open meetings are accessible to as many people as possible: consider timing, location, is it children-friendly and remember most people are *not* in a trade union, won't understand union jargon and may not share your political views. Keep notes of what's agreed [see planning a successful meeting].

Emails, twitter, blogs, google docs

Modern technology can be a great way to quickly share information.

If you're not confident of the technologies find someone who is.

Gather contact information so you can keep people up-to-date (let people know how you will use their information).

Keep communications short, to the point, regular (but not too often for people to keep up with things).

Accountability

If you are campaigning in the community in UNISON's name, keep your branch and region in the loop. UNISON can also help you get the training and support you need.

Ensure that your campaign partners broadly share UNISON's values of equality and fairness.

Think about events that all your campaign partners can take part in with you, including stalls in public places, public meetings, marches and demonstrations or media stunts, handing out leaflets and stickers, getting people to sign petitions or lobbying local politicians. It's also worth thinking about letter writing campaigns and events that tie into the seasons ie carol singing at Christmas, Easter egg hunts or a cut or no cut version of trick or treat for Halloween.

Share your learning with your branch, region and the campaigns team at head office – others can benefit from what you learn – both your achievements and what doesn't work.

And remember, the broadest campaigns are the ones that politicians and decision-makers can't ignore. That's why it's so important to work with others on the issues that matter to you.