

A guide to planning successful actions

Actions are a great way to spread awareness, build support, and mobilise people to join your cause. They are important to any campaigns, and can help you take the steps forward to winning your campaigns.

To help you plan your actions, we've put together this step by step guide on how to organize successful actions, along with a blank 'checklist' that you can fill out for your action, to make sure you have everything you need and planned.

Step 1: Action Preparation- The most important steps

First of all, as a group you need to sit down and brainstorm through the following five things, in order to come up with a concept idea for your action.

Remember- Be respectful of each other's ideas, and note them all down on a big piece of paper (every idea is worthwhile at this stage and should be recorded). Also, get one person to facilitate so that you can focus your discussion and stick to a reasonable time.

1. What is your theme?

What topic are you addressing with your action, or around what event are you mobilizing? The exact theme can vary broadly depending on what the situation or opportunity is for you locally or nationally to organise an action around. It could be climate justice, food and agriculture, over-consumption... Is there a political event that you want to mobilise around?

2. Who is your group?

If you want to run an action you should from the very beginning involve others in the planning-process, like your fellows in your local Young Friends of the Earth group, your friends or other groups and activists you want to work with.

3. What is the aim of your action?

There are lots of different kinds of actions, and you should consider hard what the **aim** of the action you're organising is. **So agree this first**, before deciding what kind of action will best achieve this aim.

For Example- you want to stop a coal power station from beginning operations. This is your aim. One example of an action to achieve this aim is to use direct action to block the coal from arriving at the power station.

4. Identify a location, an opportunity or a target

When you think of the location of your planned action, it might be useful to consider the following questions to make your action as successful as possible: what are the weak links in the system you are opposing? Where is the press? When are you strongest? Who are the key figures (the public, politicians, a company?) and how can we reach them?

For example, YFoEE activists at a UN Climate meeting in Bonn 2009 set up a street theatre action 50 meters in front of the main entrance to the UN conference venue. The location was on route between the main tram stop and the conference entrance, where almost all the conference delegates and press had to walk past, and could not ignore the action.

5. Which tactics can you use to achieve this aim at this location, to exploit this opportunity, and reach this target? Ask yourselves- is it within the competency of your group to carry it out, or do you need to look for support/allies? Street theatre is a good tactic for awareness raising, as is some kinds of lobbying, but taking 'direct action' is maybe not the first thing you would consider for a public awareness raising aimed action. An action doesn't always have to be holding a banner or running round in penguin costumes....

Remember to pay special attention to...

Resources: What skills do you have within your group? How much money do you have? How much time and energy can you put into the action? Have you got enough people to make it happen? If you lack any of these,

Democracy: Is everyone involved in the decision making process? Is this an action that everyone will enjoy taking part in or supporting? Does it need specialist skills that prevent most people taking part? How can you include as many people as possible in the action?

Many action groups suffer from small numbers in the group. Planning inclusive actions can attract people and encourage them to stay!

Legal risks: Are you aware and prepared for any potential legal risks associated with your action. Do you need police or landowners permission to carry it out?

Step 2: Concrete action planning

You should now have an action concept for what you want to do. The next step is to take this concept, and start making it into a real, concrete plan. A good method for doing this is to **use a framework, such as an empty action plan checklist that you need to fill in (next page).**

An action plan helps everybody who is involved in the planning of an action to get an overview of what needs to be done by whom, when and with which budget. If you fulfil your action plan you won't forget any important role (for example a media coordinator who has an overview of the action and can give interviews) or any action material (props, banners etc.).

Example: At an action at the European Social Forum in Sweden, YFoEE had prepared a 'The flood is coming' action with banners and choreography all to be enacted out during a big public rally. Where we were staying was an hour bus journey away from where the rally was taking place, but on arrival at the action location we suddenly realised we only had one of the banners that we had been up all the previous night painting, as the role of banner guardian had been forgotten.

There are also other techniques in planning actions- this is only one example on how to form a framework that will help you to ensure the action you plan will deliver the results you're looking for. How about asking yourself the 5 W's:

WHY are you planning this action?

What is your aim? What are you trying to achieve? How does this action fit into your wider campaign?

WHAT is the message of the action?

Keep it simple and clear and relevant to your target

WHO are you aiming the action at?

Who do you want to hear your message? Who is your target? Some actions might be aimed at the staff of a corporation or government office. Other might be aimed directly at members of the public. Still others might be aimed at the media. The way you phrase and communicate your message will vary depending on your chosen target.

WHERE will the action happen?

Is there a venue that will maximise its impact? This might be somewhere symbolic, or somewhere where your action will get the most attention. Maybe the locations dictated to you- if you want to pull up a genetically manipulated crop, you have to go to where it's growing, for example. We suggest you always consider the legal implications for your action whatever or wherever it is. Remember that you may need permission from the police or landowner if you plan to do your action in a particular spot.

WHEN will your message be heard the loudest?

Is there a time that maximises the impact of your action? Do you want your action to coincide with a meeting or conference, with the visit of a politician or dignitary? Should it coincide with a public announcement or press release, with the start of a war or other act of injustice? Maybe you want it to happen at a time when the media will be available or when the area will be full of commuters or shoppers.

HOW will you get the message out?

What form will the action take? What tactic(s) will you use? Do you want to do a press stunt, or take direct action? Maybe you just want to raise awareness amongst the public and can use a street stall or leafleting to achieve that

Step 3: Celebrate, then evaluate!

Once you've done your action, make sure you all recognise the things that you did well and **congratulate yourselves**. If you've been working with volunteers to organise the action, make sure to say thank you to them!

A short period after the action make sure you get everyone who was involved together and reflect and evaluate the action. Give everyone the chance to share what they think **went well about the action**, as well as **what could have been done better**, and **what you learnt from doing it**. Did you achieve your objectives, and what do you still need to do as a result of the action to finish it off?

Evaluating will make sure you recognise the achievements of your action and know what it is you're going to do next in your campaign, and how to do even better!

TEMPLATE ACTION PLAN for filling out with your action planning group and keeping track of who is doing what

	Details	Who	Deadlines	Budget
Coordination and roles	Everyone should know their role in the action, but it can be handy if someone or a small group has an overview of the whole action and preparation			
Plan the choreography of the action	What will happen when, how is the action going to start, how will you end it? It can be useful to make a sketch and/or map of how the action will look like. You may need to check the location in advance For an action with many parts, a timeline can also be useful.			
Time and location	Where and when will the action take place			
Divide the tasks for the action, not all of the tasks will be used for every action	Police/security speaker			
	Press speaker			
	People to speak to public			
	People to hold banners			
	People to wear costumes/perform street theatre etc.			
	Logistic support: first-aid, driver, food, photographer, etc...			
Request permission from the relevant authorities	Police, owner of private property where the action will take place, etc...			
Risk assessment	What risks are involved in the action. How will you limit them? For large actions, the police may require a formal risk assessment			
Finances	What is the budget for the action, where is the money coming from, who can spend it?			
Briefing/debriefing	Will you organise a briefing or training for activists? How about a debriefing afterwards?			
Communication	How will you communicate and make decisions during the action?			
Media	The media is not your friend. It is not your enemy. Use them. They are using you.			
Co-ordinate media	Media co-ordinator has overview of the action and ensure implementation of media strategy			
Write, send and follow up media invitation	Invite your media contacts to attend the action, and follow up with a phone call. Invitation can be repeated the day before the action.			
Write the press release for after the action	Most actions are fairly predictable. You can often write 95% of a press release before the action. Doing this in advance will save time after the action when everyone is tired and busy.			
Press folder	Have a package ready for every journalist including a copy of the press release, and any flyers etc. that you are distributing			
Contact with media during the action	Meet the press before or during the action, give interviews and background information. Will you organize a separate press conference or briefing?			
Make photographs of the action	Photos for websites, press release, and your own publications.			

Media follow-up	Send press release during/after action. Follow up with a phone call. Post on indymedia			
Publicity/mobilisation	You may choose to keep your action secret, you may want 100,000 people there...			
Mobilisation of activists to help with the action	Increase the number of participants by contacting other NGOs or local groups. For large actions, you may be able to involve a media partner to help mobilize.			
Posters and flyers	For a large action, you may need to produce flyers and posters. This involves copywriting, layout, printing, distribution and financing.			
Virtual mobilization	Advertise the action on your website, email lists, facebook/myspace/hives, etc.			
Action Material	A simple action doesn't need to be boring. Use props, make sure you're noticed.			
The action material will depend on which type of action you are organising.	Posters, banners and other visual material, costumes, material for street theatre, flyers, petitions, other things to give to the public, or things to ask the public to fill in/take away, "gifts" for politicians or company directors, background information, merchandising, info-table, etc. Technical action material related to a specific type of action: climbing ropes, superglue, etc.			
Logistics	Look through your action scenario. Think about EVERYTHING you need to achieve this...			
Transport	How will you and the material get to the action? How will you get back?			
Shelter	In case it rains or gets cold, also for training and briefing/debriefing			
Food and drink	It is nice to provide food and drink for activists, especially if it's cold/wet/early/late			
Legal	Because even if getting arrested is part of the action, you need to be prepared.			
Legal risk assessment	What are the risks associated with the action, how can you reduce these risks? (maybe ask a lawyer to give you advice if you don't know the situation)			
Legal observers	In some countries, and for some types of action, it can be useful to have observers who do not participate in the action, and who can give evidence in court.			
Home base	For actions with a risk of arrest, make sure everyone has the phone number of someone who will not be risking arrest, but can follow up any arrests			
Legal support	Are there lawyers you can contact if necessary during the action?			