



Advocacy Toolkit:

Petitions and gaining campaign momentum

What is a petition?

A petition is a formal written document, usually to a key decision maker within the Government or an organisation, which is signed by a significant number of people, demanding change. This could be at a local, national or international level.

A petition can be online, or a paper version. Either way, they are a useful vehicle to get a campaign message to a wider audience, engage new supporters and drive change for your cause. It is important to remember that your campaign is more likely to be successful if you use different methods of lobbying as well, such as directly contacting a MP or the media.

Writing and marketing a compelling petition can help you achieve your campaign aim. But to make sure it is a success, there are certain steps you need to take. Identifying your target, thorough research, clear communication and how you will promote your petition are just some of the things that you need to think about before embarking on this method of campaigning.

What do you want to change?

The most important aspect of starting a campaign petition is to make sure that the change you are asking for is a realistic. For example, petitioning the Government to Cure blood cancer is not a tangible ask, but suggesting that they invest in specific cancer patient services could be. Remember, there may be different solutions to your problem – it's worth exploring which is the most achievable one, to help ensure success.

You should have a memorable, understandable petition title that makes it clear what you hope to achieve. It is also important that you describe the campaign issue in a short but informative way and include what you hope to achieve with the petition from the word go.

This means you should have a straight forward, eye-catching title that demands attention.

Top Tip

Using command words is a good way to make your petition stand out. For example, "Stop unequal access to cancer treatment" sounds more authoritative and persuasive than "Everyone should have access to cancer treatment".



Top Tip

Sometimes it can be useful to pick two or three decision makers- adding pressure in different organisations or governmental departments could make a difference to your campaign and get more people talking about it.

Identify who can make the change

In order to achieve your campaign aim, you will need to direct your petition to the decision-maker who has the ability to solve the issue, or has influence over the person who can. When deciding who would be the best person to direct your petition to, it is worth considering whether public pressure could influence them - and if what you are asking of them is something they can actually achieve.

What should you say?

1. Research your issue. To command an audience and demand change, you should be knowledgeable about your campaign and its aims. Information that is incorrect or out of date means that your campaign could lose legitimacy and harm, rather than benefit, your cause.
2. Make it clear, to the point and compelling. Successful petitions ask for something very specific yet achievable.
3. Be sure to set out clear details of what the issue is, and what the decision maker can do to help. Your supporters must understand why they should take action.
4. Include more detailed information after your introductory explanation. Perhaps including examples of how the issue affects those you are campaigning for and why change is important.
5. Write a personal letter to the decision maker that you are targeting too. This should include who you are, why you have initiated the petition and how the issue can be addressed. Remember, it's important that the letter remains respectful, informative and persuasive!
6. Always get someone to check your petition for spelling or grammatical mistakes. Making sure that your petition is understandable, accurate and convincing will give your petition legitimacy.

Top Tip

If you use a relatable personal story as an example of the broader issue at hand this can add a human element to your campaign, making it more emotive, which could lead to more support.



Spread the word

For your petition to work, you need to get as many people as possible to sign it. This can create momentum for your campaign and will add validity to what you are asking for.

1. Social media is a good way to spread the word about your petition. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter mean that e-petitions can be easily shared between friends, family and wider networks. If the subject is emotive and the petition persuasive, people will want to help you spread the word.
2. Remember to venture outside of the digital world too – go out and talk to people. This could mean friends and colleagues, or you could hold an event to make people aware of the issue and why you are campaigning for change. If you show your passion and enthusiasm to make a difference – it could inspire others to do the same.
3. Persevere with the petition to keep your campaign topical and relevant. Find people who are also passionate about your campaign by attending events where you are likely to meet people who are interested in the issue.

Did you know?

"Petitions aren't what win campaigns; it's the people who sign them that do."
Your petition shouldn't be avoidable to be effective- the more that people know about it, the more people that will sign it.

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How many signatures do you need to make the difference?

You need 10,000 signatures for your petition to be acknowledged by the Government and for you to receive a response. For your petition to be considered for debate in Parliament, you need 100,000 signatures.

This may seem like a lot but whether the subject of your petition is suitable for debate or not, the more signatures it receives, the more pressure on the decision-maker, and the more likely you will be to see a positive result.

To see our petition and get some inspiration, visit:

<https://www.change.org/p/theresa-may-stop-unequal-access-to-cancer-treatment>