



“We need not accept the paradox that gives us more ways than ever to speak, and leaves the public with a wider feeling than ever before that their voices are not being heard.”

**Robin Cook**

# 4.1 Reaching the right people

**No matter how strong your argument is, it's important that it's seen by the right people.**

**This section is about the different types of people you might want to reach, what they can do and how to contact them. It covers:**

- your community
- politicians
- civil servants
- other influencers (like unions, campaign groups, business and the media).

Reaching the right people 4.1

*The Bristol Birth Centre group campaigning for the opening of a birth centre in Bristol has had to engage the NHS frequently throughout their campaign. Key to getting anywhere with these big organisation she says is to be well informed, go through the right channels, and most importantly don't give up – 'tell them 11 times, tell them 12 times, tell them a million times!'*

**Getting your message out there takes time, patience and persistence, but once the ball is rolling, word of mouth will help you build momentum.**

4.1 Reaching the right people

**In fact, your profile may take on a life of its own – as other people start to talk about you and your work.**

## **Your community**

If you're trying to persuade a decision-maker, popular support will always have a big impact.

It means you can point to a mandate for your point of view.

Think about how you can build public support and how you can ensure you are representing the views of your community. Think about how you

can communicate detailed, complex arguments in simple terms.

Look at events, petitions and publicity to draw people into your campaign. All of the communication tools in the next section can be used to make your case with the public.

Make sure you communicate with them – directly through newsletters and the internet, and indirectly through the media.

The rest of this section looks at decision-makers and influencers.

Whenever you communicate with these people, stress the public backing you have built up.

**The more support you can get from your community, the better. It will give your campaign momentum and make you feel part of something bigger, rather than a lone voice.**

### **Politicians: members of parliament**

Members of parliament are often the first port of call we think of when we have an issue. There are 659 MPs,

each representing their own constituency and elected once every four or five years.

You can find out who your MP is by going to [www.locata.co.uk/commons](http://www.locata.co.uk/commons) and [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)

A letter is often the best way to start a communication with your MP, as they have staff in their offices to deal with correspondence. Some will also accept email, though this is a bit hit-and-miss. MPs also run surgeries, which are meetings where they can

meet constituents and listen to their issues. Details of MPs' surgeries are normally held at public libraries.

In the first instance, you should contact your local MP, as some MPs are reluctant to take on cases that do not concern their constituents. However, some MPs are known for campaigning on specific issues and can be encouraged to support your campaign. The Register of Members' Interests shows what sort of things MPs are interested in. [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) also keeps

account of the things MP's vote in favour of and against. You could also look at the local press to see what position an MP has taken on an issue and try to work out what sort of things will interest them.

The best time to contact an MP is when the issue you are interested in is:

- being considered by parliament
- an issue that is the responsibility of central government

You can ask your MP to do a number of things:

- Offer you public support – by attending your events or taking part in your publicity.
- Offer advice on people you should contact.
- Write letters on behalf of your campaign.
- Go to see the relevant minister or department.

**On a local level, an MP can be an important ally. Although they don't have a formal relationship with local authorities, it will put a lot of**

Reaching the right people 4.1

**pressure on them if an MP decides to support your cause publicly.**

### **Politicians: local councillors**

Councillors, like MPs, are elected once every four years.

Their job is to represent their community and oversee the running of the local council. Local councillors are normally a good first contact for a community campaign, as local government can be complicated and councillors will normally have a good idea of how the system works.

4.1 Reaching the right people

Councillors are elected in wards, so you will have one for your area. You don't have to contact this particular councillor though, you can also contact councillors who have an interest in your issue, or who sit on the relevant committee. Some councils are organised in cabinets, so each main area of responsibility will be looked after by a specific councillor.

Councillors, like MPs, will often run surgeries where the public can meet them. Your local council and public library should have details of these.

## What sort of things do local authorities do?

Local authorities are responsible for handling local issues and services. If your campaign has anything to do with the following list of issues, chances are that your local authority will be involved at some stage.

- Social services.
- Education.
- Housing.
- Planning applications and development.

- Leisure, recreation and arts.
- Libraries.
- Environmental health.
- Trading standards.
- Highways and transport.
- Waste collection.
- Revenues and benefits (eg council tax and housing benefits).

The way that local authorities divide their responsibilities can be quite complicated and is different from area to area. As a rule of thumb there are two main types of setup.

In **areas run by unitary authorities** (typically larger towns and cities), there is one local council that is responsible for delivering all the services on the list.

In **two-tier areas** (typically the more rural areas), there are two authorities – a county council and a district council. From the list of services, county councils are normally responsible for education, social services and transport and leisure whilst districts are responsible for housing, benefits, planning and environmental health.

London, Bristol, Birmingham and other big cities are made up of unitary authorities. In Wiltshire for instance, there is a mixture, there is one unitary authority (Swindon), whilst the rest of the county is covered by a two-tier system with Wiltshire County Council and smaller district councils (Salisbury, West Wilts, North Wilts and Kennet).

There are exceptions and complications to these rules, especially in London, Scotland and Wales. In London, the mayor has powers over transport,

whilst in Scotland and Wales, the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have additional powers.

### **What is a public consultation?**

*A public consultation is when a government body – it could be your local authority or it could be a department in Whitehall – asks the public for their opinion on an issue.*

*They are a good opportunity for you to get your views across.*

*Check with your local authority to find*

*out what consultations they are currently running. Look at [www.consultations.gov.uk](http://www.consultations.gov.uk) for all the consultations being run by central government.*

*The government recommends that submissions to public consultations are concise, submitted as early as possible and refer to evidence you have collected. If they ask for specific issues, try and answer the questions.*

*In return, the code of practice on*

*consultations (<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm>) says that consultations will be conducted in a realistic timeframe, with a clear purpose and a wide distribution of documents. They also commit to “carefully and open-mindedly” analysing the responses and giving their reasons when they finally make a decision.*

Finding the right person or department in a local authority can be hard work, but council websites and customer

service staff are often good places to start. People who work for local authorities are called officers and will often be helpful if you try and contact them directly. If you get to know them, they will help you get access to public consultations, policy decisions and the right people in the council to talk to.

**Local government can be very complicated. Most campaigns will come across local government at some point, so it's worth learning about how yours is organised.**

## Politicians: members of the European Parliament

The role of the European Parliament is to look at new European laws. It has 732 members from all 25 member states.

The UK sends 78 members to the European Parliament. For European elections, the UK is divided into twelve regions. Each region has between three and 10 MEPs and each MEP in a region represents each person living there. For example, if you live in Bristol, all seven South West MEPs

represent you and you can contact any or all of them. Since all the MEPs in a region represent you, you are more likely to find one sympathetic to your cause.

Many political decisions, especially in trade, consumer rights, working conditions and environmental protection, now have a European element, so it's worth contacting your MEP to see if there are any decisions being made that could be helpful in your campaign.

Whilst the European Parliament meets in Brussels and Strasbourg, it's best to try and contact your MEP in Brussels. Visit [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) to find out who your MEPs are.

**MEPs, like MPs, can be useful if they decide to support your campaign publicly. Whilst they don't have lots of formal power, they have influence and credibility. Often MEPs are more independent than MPs and can be persuaded to make a statement in support of your campaign.**

## Other politicians

Scotland, Wales and London have additional layers of government.

They all have different areas of responsibility and influence. To find out more about them, visit their websites:

- **Scottish Parliament**  
[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)  
Responsibilities include education, health, agriculture, justice and prisons.
- **Welsh Assembly**  
[www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk) Responsibilities include economic development,

transport, finance, local government, health, housing and Welsh.

- **London Assembly and mayor**  
[www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk) Responsibilities include culture, sport and tourism, health, planning and transport.

Visit [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) to see who your representatives are.

**Like MEPs, politicians in these bodies tend to be more independent than MPs, so could be good targets for campaigns.**

## **Civil servants, government departments and agencies**

### **Central government civil servants**

Civil servants carry out the policy of a government and deliver public services.

The civil servants who work in central government – often known as “Whitehall” – are organised into departments (such as the Department of Health and Ministry of Defence) and if your campaign is a national issue, there will be someone dealing with it in central government.

Each department is organised in a different way. If you want to find the right person in the Civil Service, a good place to start is the DirectGov [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) website. Alternatively, phone the main switchboard of the department you are interested in and ask them who is dealing with your issue.

**Remember, the civil service is politically neutral, so if you want to persuade them to support your cause, you will have to do so with facts, figures and research.**

### **Public bodies and government agencies**

As well as the Civil Service, there are many semi-independent government organisations (often called quangos) that have responsibility for public services and spending public money, but aren’t officially part of the Civil Service. There are 839 “public bodies” ranging in size from the Environment Agency and the BBC down to temporary committees and task forces looking at specific issues.

In total, the 839 public bodies in the UK spend £139bn a year!

Often, it will be these agencies that are taking the decisions, or running the public consultations before making recommendations to politicians. They will be the focus of lots of community campaigns because they are responsible for regulation, new developments and carrying out new policies.

**For some campaigns, getting the attention of the right public agency will be more important than the attention of elected politicians.**

*These are the sorts of agency out there that community campaigns might come across:*

**Highways Agency** – operates and maintains all motorways and trunk roads

**Environment Agency** – responsible for environmental protection and regulation

**Primary Care Trusts** – plan and buy health services for a local area

**Regional Development Agencies** – these are involved in regional economic development.

Reaching the right people 4.1

It's sometimes difficult to know where to start with public bodies, but councillors, MPs and council officers will often be able to help. Also, there is now a searchable database of the public bodies online (<http://tinyurl.com/axy5e>). This will help you find out if there are groups that you can get in touch with.

## Other influencers

### Trade unions

Trade unions have historically been members' organisations interested

in negotiating and representing their members. However, increasingly they are experienced campaigning organisations. They will be able to offer you advice on how to run your campaign and may be able to offer your group support. They tend to be especially interested in issues about workers' rights, free trade, training, employment and public services, but they have been known to get involved in a wide range of campaigning activity.

To find out more about unions, go to [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

4.1 Reaching the right people

## Business

Many large businesses now have teams dedicated to community relations.

Businesses can be an influential voice in your campaign. You can also ask businesses to support your work financially, maybe by sponsoring an event or printing costs.

Large businesses talk about “corporate social responsibility” which includes working in the community. If a business is a large local employer ask to talk to the person who deals

with community relations. If they don't have such a person ask to speak to their press office.

## Pressure groups

Pressure groups are campaigning organisations, so they can be very useful for the first-time campaigner. Not only will they have the skills to make a campaign work, but established groups (like Friends of the Earth) may be able to help you work your way through the complicated bureaucracy of the political system.

The larger pressure groups have teams of people who might be able to support you in your campaign. Check that they have a compatible point of view with your group and that you can agree to their way of doing things.

Look at section 3.3 for more ideas on working with campaign groups.

**You might be surprised at who else is interested in your campaign, but you'll never know unless you ask them. Businesses, unions and campaign groups can all be useful allies.**

## The media

Getting the media interested in your campaign can have a big impact. It can draw more supporters to your campaign, as well as raise the profile of your issue with decision makers.

Above all, be clear. A journalist will take you more seriously if they know that you are always able to give a good clear quote that you can back up with evidence.

Local radio is a useful outlet. They can often be encouraged to cover local events and demonstrations.

There are thousands of magazines in the UK, covering every subject of interest. Chances are that there is a magazine that covers your industry. *Willings Press Guide*, available in most reference libraries, is a directory of all the newspapers and magazines in the country. It's not available online, but it does have a thematic index. Call or write to the editors of the relevant magazines and try and get them interested in your story.

Finally, look on the internet for

websites that cover your issue and send them details of your campaign. Small websites on a specialist topic, often written by enthusiastic amateurs, can get you access to a passionate community of people who can offer support to your work.

**The key with the media is to target them with specific stories and interesting “hooks”. Think about what part of your campaign would be most interesting. Don't flood them with every little thing you do.**

Reaching the right people 4.1

## Section Summary

Getting to the right people is vital. So is building support in your community. Think about all the different types of decision makers and influencers:

### Politicians:

- MPs.
- Councillors and local government officers.
- MEPs.
- Other politicians: Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly.

4.1 Reaching the right people

### Civil Servants:

- Central government.
- Public bodies.

### Other influencers:

- Trades unions.
- Businesses.
- Campaign groups.
- The media.

You might be surprised at who's interested in your campaign, but you'll never know until you ask!