



# Campus Publicity Techniques

Effective publicity is essential to the success of any event or campaign. Since the power student groups have relies on *people*, getting the word out is one of the most important things you will do. It requires a well-thought-out strategy and plan.

## Strategic Considerations

**VISIBILITY:** People should know about your event or campaign even if they're completely oblivious to everything else going on at your school.

**SIMPLICITY:** Keep your message short, understandable, and simple. People should get a good idea of what you're doing with just a brief description.

**LANGUAGE:** Don't use jargon, slogans, or acronyms without defining them. A complex issue can be explained in ways that even the most apathetic can understand.

**POSITIVITY:** Progressive groups are often criticized for over-emphasizing the negative. In your publicity (as well as your activism in general), balance critique with positive alternatives.

**CREATIVITY:** Much publicity on campuses is dull, dull, dull. Be creative! One group put messages about their campaign in fortune cookies and handed them out. Colorful, visual, irreverent, interactive, 3-dimensional, eye-catching publicity is more effective. But don't let creativity obscure your message.

**REPETITION:** People should hear or read about your event at least **seven times**. No kidding. After the first few times, people who might not otherwise come or participate will become interested.

**REPUTATION:** You do publicity both for your event *and* for your group in general. There is nothing wrong or shameful about promoting your group by clearly listing your group's name, a contact person the time of your next meeting, how people can get involved, etc.

## Publicity Ideas

**Personal Contact/Word of Mouth**— Personal contact is one of the best (and cheapest) means of publicity. Each of your members can bring at least a half

dozen people. Ask professors to announce events in class or to let you do so.

**Knowing the Regulations** — Most schools have designated areas where you can post things and procedures for tabling. Know the regulations and the penalties. Some schools impose heavy fines for violations and may even rescind funding or official recognition. If you post off-campus, the local community's laws apply. This is not to say that you must always accept such rules. If the rules are so draconian that they infringe on your freedom of speech you may want to start a campaign to challenge them. If you are challenging your school's administration, you may find yourself the target of politically-motivated selective enforcement of such rules.

**Poster Design** — Keep it short, simple, loud, and eye-catching. Make your main message **BIG**— people should be able to see it from 20 feet away. Make the rest of your text **SHORT**— people should be able to read it in one minute. Keep it visually consistent— more than one font or more than two colors is distracting. Don't make it too **CROWDED**— by filling every space on the page. In fact, leaving blank space calls attention to the text. Pictures and graphics can really add to a poster if they are clear and powerful. Don't forget to clearly lay out the time, date, and place of the event.

**Where and when to poster** — High-traffic areas such as dining halls, campus centers, etc. are good places. You will be competing for space and attention with every other group on campus. Don't limit your posting to one area of campus or just high traffic areas. There are many good spots to poster where you have a "captive audience" which has nothing to do but read your poster. Bathroom stalls, cafeteria lines, and bus stops are a few such places. On most campuses, bulletin boards are cleared of posters regularly. Put your posters up in remote areas several weeks in advance. Re-poster high-traffic areas several times leading up to the event, with a final blitz a day or two before. (see "How to do Leaflets..." in the Bibliography).

**Leafletting** — Leafletting a busy intersection, mail room or dining hall gets informa-

tion to a large number of people. Leaflets are good for publicizing an immediate and urgent event, like an emergency rally, and for distributing info to passersby at demonstrations, or actions. One person can distribute several hundred leaflets in an hour. You will need quite a few and should probably make them 1/2, 1/3 or 1/4-page size to save money and paper. In the leaflet itself, ask people to pass it on to someone else or post it. Have more than one person leafletting at once. Be ready for rejections, as many people will ignore you, and even make snide remarks.

**Newspapers** — You can put ads in your school newspaper, but the price is usually high, and such ads are usually not as effective as posters. There are other ways to use your school newspaper for publicity. Many school papers sell much cheaper classified ads. Many also have calendars of what's going on around campus, which list events for free or cheaply. Letters to the editor and even guest editorials are a good way to publicize, if you don't make it a completely apparent self-promotion. One group ran classified ads that pretended to be a dialogue between two lovelorn people flirting with each other. Everyone read and followed the saga. Some school papers are so starved for news that they will even do an article about your upcoming event.

**Radio**— Many radio stations, especially college stations, run free public service announcements. Send them an event notice or find out how to do a PSA tape yourself. Encourage DJs to play them during their shows.

**Phone Trees** — When you want to mobilize your supporters, a phone tree is an extremely useful and efficient tool. You can start a phone tree committee by passing out a sign-up sheet at a general meeting. From this list, elect a phone tree coordinator (usually an officer or a steering committee member, because they will most likely be aware of what is going on) who is in responsible for triggering the phone tree. The phone tree coordinator organizes the information to be disseminated, then calls phone tree committee members, who each have a list of people to call with information about the next meeting or

event. For meetings, you only notify members of your group; for large public events, you could assign each core member to notify 5-10 additional supporters to turn out a really large crowd. The phone tree coordinator should be sure to check with committee members to see if they made their calls, and be prepared to take up the slack.

**Chalking** — Chalking on the sidewalks is as visible as spray painting, and it washes right off. Groups have used chalked body outlines to publicize human rights abuses or oppose military action. Chalking doesn't require any paper and the words can be as big as you like. Rules differ from campus to campus on whether chalking is allowed. Campus police may harass you if they see you in the act. Try to keep your

chalking on the ground, as it doesn't wash off as readily on walls and the chalk can cause damage if it stays on a long time.

**“Midnight Redecorating”** — Midnight redecorating is a term for activities done late at night because they may prove unpopular with some authorities, such as spray-painting, rubber stamps, Cow chalk (semi permanent) or wheat pasting posters. Spray-painting can be done with heavy poster board cut stencils of a slogan or graphic, or it can be done freehand. Stickers placed on phone booths, elevator ceilings, water fountains, stairwells, and “University Property” decals are difficult to remove. Note: we do not advocate indoor wheat-pasting, which can seriously damage your group's reputation; outdoor

wheatpasting is far less destructive, but still may put you at risk of arrest.

- To make stickers, you can purchase 100 sheets of 8 1/2 x 11” sticker paper for about \$20. Then, using a heavy-duty copy machine and paper cutter, you can make stickers — usually 3 or 4 per page.
- To make wheat paste, mix: wallpaper glue + flour + water; apply with a paint brush or wallpaper brush.
- To make “spray glue,” mix: 1/3 parts Elmers glue + 2/3 parts water in a plant spray bottle; apply with rubber gloves.

## Information Tables

Most campuses designate an area where student organizations can set up tables to distribute literature and recruit members. Many activists think that tabling is a boring ritual consisting of a stack of literature on a table with a person sitting behind it doing homework or staring into space. Nothing could be further from the truth. Tabling must be active and dynamic in order to yield results.

- Table when you have something for people to do, and not just for the sake of tabling. At the activities midway, it's O.K. to just ask for new members, but the rest of the time, try to get people to do something specific like sign a petition, buy a ticket for a fundraiser, write a letter, or sign up to work on a specific campaign. Always be sure to have a sign-up sheet available (see Sustaining your Membership and Support Base) to build membership.
- Keep a schedule of who is to table, and have a tabling coordinator reconfirm them the night before! Make sure people know where to pick up the tabling box in the morning, and where to drop it off (a secure place if you collect money) in the afternoon.
- Try to table where there will be a large concentration of people. Dining halls near meal time, Student Unions or Centers, and films and events attract a lot of people in a short time.
- It's best to have two or more people tabling together, preferably pairing less experienced people with veteran activists. Have one of them work the flow of people and draw people to other activists sitting at the table.
- Training is invaluable. Write and distribute sample raps and practice with role plays. This gives people confidence and prepares them to deal with tough situations.
- Display a banner with your organization's name to develop recognition, a sign and flyers advertising your next meeting and upcoming events.
- If you are collecting letters, be prepared with paper, pens, envelopes, a box for donations to help with mailing costs. Depending on your focus, have a list of US and state legislators

or of appropriate university trustees and administrators (check with a librarian). Collect letters there to ensure that they get written and sent.

- Be friendly and make eye contact. Entice passersby by asking a brief question to involve the person a dialogue, such as “Do you want to help stop ROTC discrimination?”
- Know when to call it quits. Don't get caught up with a reactionary or someone who just wants to talk. Give them literature, set a future meeting, invite them to an event, but don't waste your time while other potential activists pass you by.
- Clipboards are your friends. They allow you to get out from behind the table and ask people to sign up to do something, whether it be making a phone call, going to a rally, or joining your campus coalition.
- Having a VCR and a TV showing an appropriate documentary (at low volume!) at your table is a good way to attract people.
- Giving away pins or stickers is a terrific way to build visibility and boost morale.
- Do not limit tabling to campus. Tabling in the community will: put you in touch with a wide range of people and views, and expose people in the community to ideas they won't normally hear in the mainstream media. By meeting progressive people and activists who might attend some of your meetings and events, you build essential links between your campus and the community.

*[Tabling tips adapted from Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador Campus Organizing Guide.]*