

Educational Tactics

First, ask nicely and smile. If that doesn't work, don't hesitate to have sit-ins on the university president's home lawn the next day (unless they just sprayed some nasty pesticides...). This is a survey of possible tactics. Depending on your situation, some of these tactics might seem too radical and drastic, or too moderate and ineffective. Pick what seems right.

Canvassing

This means knocking on people's doors. If you want to build your organization, you should canvass on campus. If you want to build community ties or raise money, you should go off campus. You could ask people to write a letter or postcard, educate them about an upcoming election, tell them about a local fight against an incinerator or raise money. If you want to ask for money, you need a permit; contact the town clerk. Canvassing is a form of free speech, so they have to give you one; hopefully they'll be friendly.

To canvass, you need a Rap. This is structured, yet flexible and open, "speech" you give to the people you talk to. Every rap at every door is different, but they all include the basic same elements. These should probably include:

- ä Who you are
- ä What your group is
- ä Legitimization of your group (why should they care?)
- ä Discussion of an issue, or ask them what they're concerned about
- ä Here's a sample letter they can write (for instance)
- ä A request for a contribution (optional)

It might go like "Hi, I'm China and I'm with Chambana SEAC. We're in your neighborhood today seeking community input and support. We worked last year on improving the mass transit system, and now we're trying to clean up our water supply. Do you have any concerns about our water? Can you think of other issues that we should work on?"

This is the part that makes you unique—you're a local group that is actually interested in their input. It also sets up a very nice two-way communication.

"We're working to build a local network of groups to work on these issues. If you could make a contribution, that would be great." By that point they'll be falling over themselves (maybe) giving you money. You should also tell people about upcoming meetings.



Once you've got the rap down, you can ad-lib. Some canvassing tips:

- * Look decent—appeal to everybody.
- * A clipboard makes you look really good, gives you something to write on, and gives you something to put in their hands. This seems to be really effective, especially if it has a form on the top with the names of some of their neighbors, showing that they've been contributing. It might look like a "Statement of Support" with columns like Name, Address, Amount, and Comments.
- * Professional-looking background material on whatever issue you're working on, to impress them.
- * To train, you should "role-play." Take turns being the canvasser and canvasee. Play being friendly, skeptical, stony-faced, and downright hostile. Sure it'll feel embarrassing and awkward, but how much worse will it be with strangers in their bathrobes? Keep at it until you feel comfortable.
- * When you do finally go out, pair up. Two people feel more confident and can back each other up when one of them stumbles. (Apparently a woman and a man together get the best response.) Also, new people should go out with more experienced people, and should discuss what happened after each door. Canvassing is one of those things with a lot of little learned skills to pick up.
- * **KEEP GOOD RECORDS!** Just as with phone calling, you need to keep track of where you've been, what they said, if they were interested, and so on. Your records need to be good enough so that others can pick up where you left off, so don't rely on your memory and don't leave your friends scraps of paper to decipher.

Note a few good points about canvassing. A lot of big organizations hire students to canvass, pay them a cut, fire them unless they make \$100 a day and give them no involvement whatsoever in the group. This is hardly the way to run a democratic, cynicism-free organization. So if you want to canvass the SEAC way:

- * Have your own members, bona fide activists, do the canvassing.
- * Just collect as much as people feel comfortable with—don't set a quota.
- * Don't avoid low-income neighborhoods just because you can't raise money there. You can still petition, educate, and activate.
- * Take people's ideas on local projects seriously and get back to them. This is what makes you a lot more attractive than some big national group cruising through the town.

Dorm Education

You might want to go into dorms yourselves and give brief presentations on recycling, economic globalization, environmental racism, etc. Contact your RAs or the Housing Office and arrange to be at a floor meeting or a social event—they're always looking for programs.

Some groups have established “ambassadors” or “environmental representatives” in each dorm, to teach people about things like recycling and conservation, to make sure they’re going well. This can be very useful.

Leaflets

Leafllets might include any of the following: information on an issue, arguments for your position, suggestions for action, sources, references for further reading, announcement of a rally or event (especially emergency rallies) or information on when and where your group meets. Leafletting gets to people who would not stop at your information table.

Leaflet tips:

- At a busy time, one person can hand out several hundred per hour. A lot will be thrown away immediately—you might be able to retrieve these and reuse them. You can have a box nearby with a sign for discards. Again, recycled paper helps avoid cynical comments.
- For mass distribution of a simple message, you could use smaller flyers, for instance ¼ or 1/6 size.
- Be friendly but aggressive—step forward and hand it to people, saying “here, can I give you one of these?” “important information,” “stop environmental destruction!” etc. Always smile and look people in the eyes as you’re handing them things.
- Have several people there, to catch people moving in all directions. Besides, single leafletters look lonely and insecure, and probably feel that way too.
- Don’t spend too much time debating people who have strong opposite opinions. It’s generally a waste of time, though it can alleviate the monotony of leafletting.

Posters

Text should be clear and concise. Use a contrast of fonts and typstyles (bold, italics, etc.) to draw the eye. Graphics and cartoons are great too, but don’t crowd it too much – you need some white space. Show it to someone clueless and see if they get it. If they don’t, make it simpler.



Try creating a shanty town.

Poster Tips:

- ✧ The lettering needs to be solid enough to be readable from 10-20 feet away. You might want to black it in with a marker by hand—hand-done posters can be catchier.
- ✧ Funky colors are good eye-catchers, but aren't that great for the environment. Recycled paper increases your credibility and solid black on unbleached cream color can stand out well.
- ✧ If you do a series of lectures, they need individual posters and don't make them in the same style—at a glance, people will think they saw them already.
- ✧ For letter or phone campaigns, you could make a poster cut into strips at the bottom that people can tear off and take home (like a "for rent" poster) giving the phone number or address and what to say. This worked for us on the Clean Air Act – at least a lot of them were torn off!
- ✧ Make a poster that can be used throughout the semester to advertise your weekly meetings.
- ✧ Be creative about where you post—insides of bathroom stalls, garbage cans, "alternative" hangouts, etc. Be inclusive too. Don't ignore an area because you think no one would be interested.
- ✧ Just handing posters out at a meeting and asking people to put them up doesn't work very well. Assign people to specific buildings or areas of town, and tell them when it needs to go up. As usual, the more specific the task, the more likely it will get done.
- ✧ People should carry about extras to replace those torn down.
- ✧ It is especially important for posters to be up the day of the event (especially for things like rallies), so you might consider doing a second round beforehand.
- ✧ If your posters are always torn down you might want to wheatpaste them. Mix: wall paper glue, flour, and water. Apply it with a brush. Note this should only be done outside and you may be risking arrest.
- ✧ Be sure to advertise your group as well as your event.
- ✧ ALWAYS have someone else proofread it.
- ✧ Be prepared to shrug off snide comments. Don't let them dampen your cheerful enthusiasm!
- ✧ If you give facts, cite your sources.

Orientation

This is your best chance to reach large numbers of students when they first arrive, and when they're especially receptive. Distribute information on recycling, energy conservation, local issues, and progressive courses. Some groups distribute "Dis-orientation Guides" that explain what campaigns are going on, some history of student action on campus, what progressive groups exist, cool things going on in the local community, and other information that a school administration won't include in their orientation.

Polls and Referendums

If you need to demonstrate how much support you have for a campaign, you can do a poll or a referendum. Develop a simple unbiased question (ex. Should the university spend \$50,000 to do an environmental audit of its practices?). Choosing random people from the telephone directory will work well for a poll (ex.: ask every 20th person). Polling 200 people will give you an accurate result. You should release the poll's results in a press release.

Most universities will let you put an issue to referendum by including it on the student government election ballot. Referendums have more credibility than polls, but they may be more work.

Speakers

Get a well-known professor or an outside speaker to give a talk. SEAC's Speakers' Bureau is an excellent source of grassroots activists (www.seac.org/speakers). Only the audience will be directly affected, but the press you'll get and the fact the talk occurred gives your group and the issue visibility and prestige, as well as a new contact in academia or elsewhere. Make sure that the speaker is on a topic that builds your group's campaigns.

If the atmosphere is right, do something with all the people there. Don't let "political capital" go to waste. Get them to write letters, sign up for an activity, or fundraise. Hold a small group meeting after the speaker to draw people into your group.

Tabling

This means setting up a table in a central location, sitting there or standing in front of it, and enticing people to come have a look. This gives you a chance to talk to passers-by, tell them about your group, get them to write letters (try to get them to write it there or they won't do it), sell buttons and T-shirts, sign petitions, and whatever else. Ideally get them to join the group. Always have a sign up sheet for your group mailing list! Put up a colorful banner to attract them, and spread literature over the table so that the titles show. Dining halls, student unions, outside on warm days, and events are good places to get a crowd.

Don't just sit behind a table with literature on it (juggle, breathe fire, sing, shout revolutionary slogans); tabling should be dynamic and interpersonal. Ask passersby a question: "Should our school invest in corporations that kill indigenous people?" As with canvassing it's good to work in pairs, with a more experienced person training someone new. You can train by doing some role-playing with each other—coming up to the table, acting bored, interested, antagonistic, whatever. One effective method is to have one person catching the flow of people and directing them to the table, while the other person talks to them in detail, signs them up, etc.

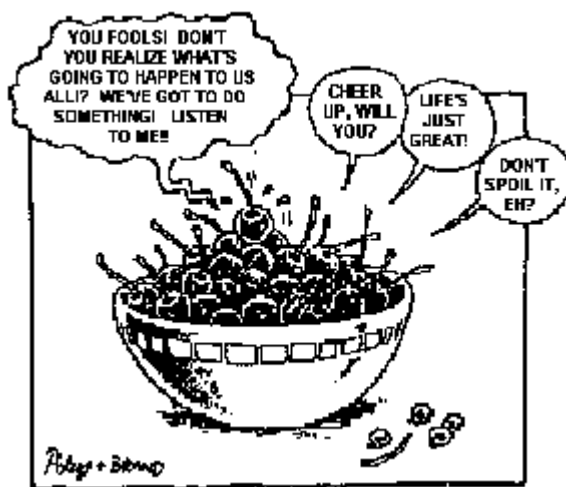


Tabling is a good way to involve new people and build a sense of group identity; do it weekly, if you can. As with leafleting, make sure that people who are signed up are sure they'll come, and that the first batch knows where to pick up the materials and where to leave them when done.

- A few tabling tips:
- If you're signing people up for something, put a name or two at the top. Nobody likes to be the first.
 - If you do collect money, put it in a visible jar—and put a few dollars in to start it out.
 - Have a stack of your group pamphlets.
 - Don't spend too long talking to kooks or shooting the breeze with one of the converted.
 - Never (or almost never, especially in heavy traffic areas) petition for two things at once. It's very confusing.
 - Clipboards are very useful for collecting signatures and working the crowd (free of the table).
 - FREE CANDY does wonders in attracting people

Teach-ins

Teach-ins are useful for providing an array of opinions about a timely issue. They can be as short as having a single speaker, but are often an afternoon or daylong. They are most useful if organized swiftly in reaction to an event (wars, racist incident, environmental disaster). You can also use it build momentum around your campaign. To ensure good attendance, you need to choose an issue which a lot of people have heard about (either through the mainstream media or because your group has made a lot of noise), but want to know more about. A possible format is to break up your time into 30 minute segments, giving each speaker fifteen minutes to talk and fifteen minutes to take questions and for the audience to debate (both the speaker and amongst itself). Have drinks and snacks to encourage people to stay and talk.



Voter Registration, Education, and Third Parties

One way for students to exercise power is to vote for progressive candidates. However, most students don't vote because they haven't registered. So a useful tactic can be to register students to vote, and then educate them about the different candidates' stances on environmental and social issues. Even better, run your own candidates!



A major shortcoming of our political system is that corporations control both the Democrats and Republicans. Corporations put profit before the environment and people, and so do both major parties. For instance, Clinton supported cutting welfare benefits, the North American Free Trade Agreement (which allows corporations to challenge government environmental regulations as 'barriers to free trade'), so called 'salvage' logging (a disguised successful attempt to double logging on our national forests), and tax cuts for the rich (Ex.: a capital gains cut). If you don't want to compromise your beliefs working for the Republicrats, then you should consider supporting one of the small, but growing, progressive alternatives. The Greens are most closely linked to the environmental movement, and have an international network of parties. Several SEACers have run as Greens Party candidates. One currently sits on the Santa Fe city council as a Green, and another SEACer was elected in Chapel Hill, NC. Other important progressive parties are the New Party (they often work to support progressive Democrats), or the NDP and New Politics Initiative if you live in Canada.



Flying activist protests Bush's inauguration.