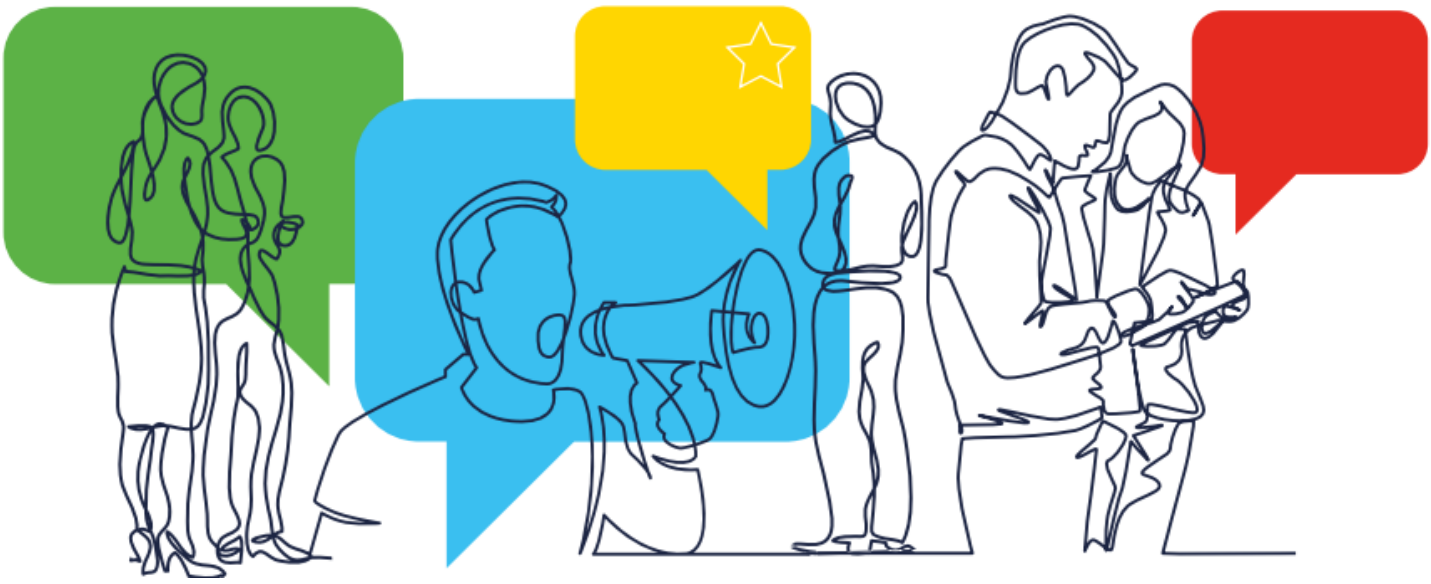
LEARN

FORUM DELL’INIZIATIVA DEI CITTADINI EUROPEI

Come organizzare la campagna: consigli dagli esperti su come promuovere un'iniziativa



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1. Overview

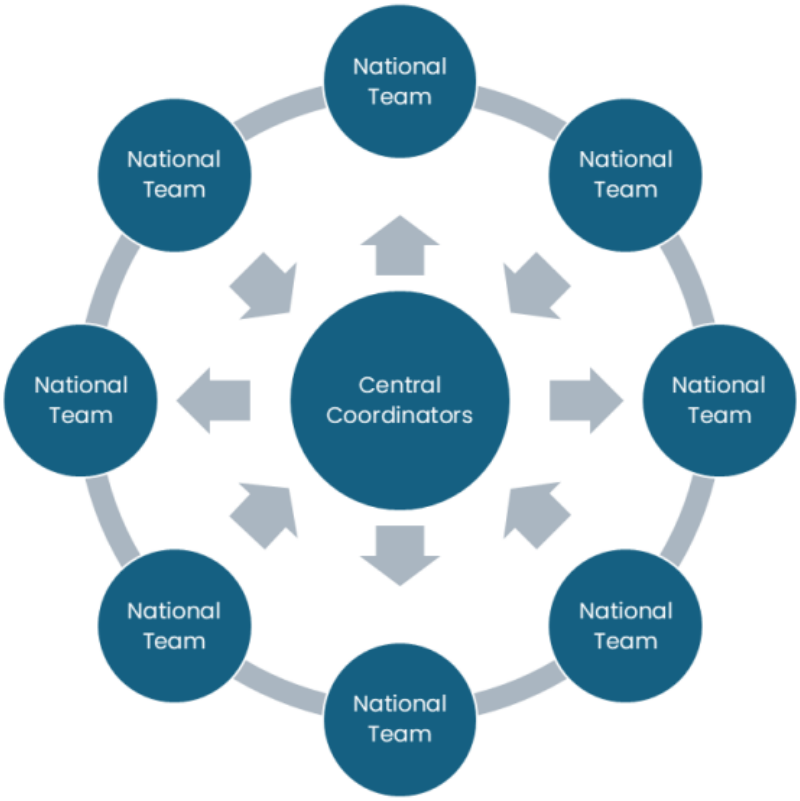
Per lanciare un'iniziativa dei cittadini europei che possa avere esito positivo non basta l'idea iniziale, ma serve anche una campagna promozionale ben pianificata. Questa *guida* può servire da punto di riferimento per la definizione e messa in atto di una strategia vincente da portare avanti a livello europeo.

Perché questa guida può interessarti

Come organizzatore, il tuo obiettivo è raccogliere più di un milione di firme in almeno 7 Stati membri dell'UE nell'arco di 12 mesi. La guida offre alcuni suggerimenti importanti per costruire una solida rete di sostegno, elaborare messaggi convincenti e sfruttare i canali di comunicazione giusti per massimizzare l'impatto. Che si tratti della tua prima campagna promozionale o che viceversa il tuo obiettivo sia quello di perfezionare il tuo approccio, la guida ti aiuterà a creare una campagna incisiva e coordinata a favore della tua iniziativa e in grado di coinvolgere cittadini di tutta Europa.

TIP

Efficient communication within your transnational campaign team can help you to share ideas, methods and materials (texts, designs, etc.), and to avoid repeating mistakes. The central coordinators can support and guide the national teams, but national teams can also talk easily to one another using different channels, such as WhatsApp groups, Slack, or Discord.



Tip from organisers

Stop Destroying Videogames initiative managed thousands of volunteers by using platforms like Discord and giving small, clear tasks to keep engagement manageable and productive. Read more about how they went viral here!

Creating a **communications plan** in three main phases:

- **Pre-launch** – in this phase, communication is focused on establishing your ecosystem of stakeholders, and developing and testing campaign messages and materials. Keep in mind that you can choose the start date of signature collection up to 6 months after the initiative registration.
- **Public campaign** – this is the intense 12-month period in which you collect statements of support, and everything will be focused on the objective of 1 million signatures.
- **Follow-up** – whatever the result of your initiative, you will probably want to continue to communicate with your network of stakeholders and supporters. Start by defining your key target audiences. These may be different in each of the countries where you are going to campaign.

Tips from organisers

Preparation was highlighted as a key factor by several successful initiatives, including *Save Cruelty-Free Cosmetics, Save Bees and Farmers!* and *End the Cage Age.* These ECIs used the preparation phase to build networks of partners and establish an online presence for their campaigns. Experience from previous ECIs, either from their own earlier campaigns or by learning from others, helped organisers navigate the process more effectively.

2. Creating an EU-wide support infrastructure

The most successful ECIs are usually built on groundwork that starts long before the proposal is even written. If you are not already part of a **strong Europe-wide network**, first focus on finding a core group of organisers that can support you. Ideally you should have an existing network before launching your initiative but as organisers you can also work on it (or consolidate it) between the registration and the start of the collection period. Try to forge links with **organised and active citizens** and **organisations** in other Member States that share your interests and concerns. If you do already have such a network in place, here are some **preliminary steps** that you should consider taking with your European partners (see also the guidance note on How to look for partners):

- Understand each partner's goals – their missions are unlikely to be identical. Define **core campaign objectives** that all partners can sign up to.
- Carefully **select a few Member States (suggestion: 8-10)** where the topic is already well known and widely supported, and you have a strong partner, in order to focus the campaign where it has the greatest chances of success.
- Understand the different financial, staff, network and volunteer resources of each partner and, where necessary, **reinforce weaker partners** by adding additional partners in the same country.
- Reach an **agreement on financial aspects** – will the campaign be funded locally in each country, or will resources be pooled and allocated as needed?
- Decide how the campaign will be **coordinated** – what internal communication tools will they use, and what languages?
- Designate **national and coordinating teams** and if possible, create an opportunity for them all to meet in person.
- As early as possible, start **working together regularly** (using the agreed tools and languages) to develop campaign plans. Quickly identify and solve any internal communication issues. Read more about how to structure your ECI team here.

Tip from organisers

For *Fur Free Europe*, collaborating with organisations like FOUR PAWS and Eurogroup for Animals was essential. Their strong networks and active supporters helped spread the message to a much wider audience.

What are your key target audiences?

- Identify in **what groups** you will most easily find people willing to sign your initiative. Do not rely on intuition – try to get hold of proper research to support your analysis.
- Consult your partners in your focus group of countries on identifying key groups as they are most familiar with the local context.
- Try to define four or five target type of supporters in the form of '**personas**' – with name, gender, age, profession, interests, affiliations, etc. Paint a picture of each persona. Understand how to **approach** each persona regarding your initiative and draft a strategy accordingly. This blog explains more about how to create personas for a campaign.
- Find out where these groups **gather**, online and offline, including on social platforms.
- **Research what kind of language** they use, what appeals to them and what turns them off. These elements are not always the same for every persona so make sure you identify the important differences.

A key part of your campaign is the plan itself. **For every major action** (during the yearlong public campaign) define as clearly as possible:

- The target group(s)
- The channel(s) to be used – this could be a social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, X, Facebook and/or a media campaign
- Key messages
- Media formats
- Time/resources needed to create the communication assets – are these realistic?
- Start and finish dates for the action
- Targets – how many signatures should each action deliver

A smart communication strategy has a **cumulative impact**. Try to schedule actions in such a way that they build on one another. For example:

- Identify celebrities popular among the first wave of signatories in a country.
- Ask them to post content that will appeal to their followers, or, use Instagram's collaboration feature so that your post is shown to the collaborator's followers too.
- Use the story of their endorsement to attract media interest.

TIP

Timing is critical. Do not plan major campaign actions during summer or Christmas holidays, when people may have other things on their minds. On the other hand, seize local political momentum. Use relevant national and regional events and debates when people are already thinking about the subject of your initiative, as opportunities for the campaign to achieve a bigger impact. Read here how strategic timing turned the final ten days of *Ban on Conversion Practices* into a record-breaking finish.

Tips from organisers

Campaigning for an ECI is challenging, and at times you might find yourself facing an emergency. Plan for the unexpected – '*My Voice, My Choice*' underlines backup plans for key roles to help campaign stay agile even when personnel changes strike. Read more about ECI crisis tactics that work from the perspective of their organisers.

3. Marketing strategies

Social media

Not all European Citizens' Initiatives that have succeeded in collecting 1 million signatures have campaigned exclusively on social media. But all have acknowledged that social media is a very powerful way to gather support. Other strategies may be spectacularly successful because of specific national circumstances. However, every initiative should develop a strong social media marketing strategy using the following steps:

- Identify **target communities**.
- Select **social platforms** (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X, Reddit, Discord etc.) widely used by the target community – ideally, those where you or your partners already have a well-established presence. Decide if you will use partners' existing Facebook pages, for example, or create a dedicated campaign page – just one central one (with content in several languages), or one in each campaign country.
- Identify **intermediaries and influencers** with large followings among the target audience. Partner with trusted voices who already have credibility with large audiences – musicians, journalists, YouTubers, etc. For example, organisers of *Ban Conversion Practices'* reached out

to the famous Belgian singer Angèle, as they needed help gathering more signatures in this country. Organisers of *Stop Destroying Videogames* partnered with star gamer content creators and YouTubers, increasing the number from some 400.000 to over 1 milion signatures in one month.

- Be creative and select for your initiative **a short, punchy and easily understandable title** such as *My Voice My Choice, Fur Free Europe, Stop glyphosate, or Housing for all*. The title can be translated into other languages or left in English, with translation in brackets. Create catchy and attractive graphics and visuals.
- Develop (and test) appropriate material and messaging – each piece of content should have a strong appeal for the target audience and therefore should be clearly and concisely written to be used across all media channels.
- Roll out the campaign in waves – if you can afford it, use small amounts of money **to promote posts** that worked well organically.
- Monitor results very carefully, if possible, tracking the user path. Where do people drop out on the way to the online collection system? What is the blockage? Can you fix it? Collecting feedback and results will help to improve the messages and the campaigns.

Read further how social media influencers can help build momentum for your ECI. *(https://citizens-initiative-forum.europa.eu/document/how-social-media-influencers-can-help-build-momentum-your-eci_en)*

TIPS

Respond to comments and questions – if you get trolled, be polite, but firm. Your community will protect you; block persistent haters.

Be patient – the ultimate goal is to drive people to your initiative's online collection system, but the most effective way may not be to ask them to do that straight away.

Encourage intermediaries and influencers to share your key posts. Influencer partnerships can turn supporting an initiative into a personal cause – driving real engagement and measurable results for your ECI.

Use national events, or relevant conferences or TV programmes, for example, and their associated hashtags – to get your message out to new groups

Tips from organisers

My Voice My Choice used pop stars and journalists to drive credibility and visibility, while *Ban on Conversion Practices* combined pop icons with political figures for a final push. *Stop Destroying Videogames* partnered with gaming YouTubers, and *Stop Finning – Stop the Trade* leveraged YouTubers, scientists, and Hollywood actors to succeed in the last 20 days of campaign.



If you are going to create one or more dedicated **campaign accounts**, do so as soon as possible, long before you launch the campaign, and make sure you build a core following of intermediaries and influencers. As your following grows, start to talk about the initiative, build extensive publicity and hype around the initiative, give people news about the drafting and registration process and ask for reactions and/or for help. The feedback will help you to fine tune and localise your messages. Respond to as many comments as you can in a positive way. When an important influencer shares your content, re-share their post. Make a lot of noise, and then be ready to talk directly to each person who comments. Be ready with answers to the questions they could ask. Make it easy for them to sign your initiative.

Prepare **multimedia content** especially for social media – infographics, animated GIFs, photos, short videos. Design these as multilingual assets so that they can be used in all target countries – a strong wordless video can be accompanied by a short text in the appropriate language in each target country. Such assets are also longer-lived – you can distribute them on different occasions with

different calls to action.

Preferably use a **single international campaign hashtag** and drive traffic to your website.

Tip from organisers

Encourage varied, authentic posts across different platforms, which can lead to an explosive increase in engagement, as in the case of *HouseEurope! i*nitiative. Their LinkedIn traffic rose by 350% simply because every team member began posting freely.

4. Formulating key messages

Answer the following questions in order to develop or test your core campaign messages:

- Think about how you would explain the **purpose** of your initiative to your grandmother or your next-door neighbour in two or three sentences.
- Think about how you explain it to a **10-year-old**.
- Aim to simplify your explanation to around **five words**. (Be practical – don't try to be clever.)
- Make sure your messages are **positive**.
- Develop a clear and simple **explanation of the ECI process** – e.g. Why should they fill in a signature form? How will changing EU law improve the situation? Do not hesitate to make use of the communication material available in all EU official languages on the European citizens' initiative website.
- **Localise** your messages for any of the countries where you will be campaigning – they should be available in the local language(s) of the countries you are targeting and adapted to the cultural background of these countries.
- **Test** your messages on members of your target audience. Do they react the way you hoped?

Tip from organisers

Cohesion policy organisers advise tailoring the message: aim at using authentic content which resonates with local audience and is delivered by respected voices, rather than relying on generic messaging.

5. Communication channels

A **promotional website** (for example, see *My Voice My Choice*) can be a great campaign tool as far as it is:

- **Easy to find** – register a domain name that is short, relevant and memorable.
- **Multilingual** – in the languages of each of your campaign countries.
- **A call to action** – display a prominent button leading to the online collection system
- **Explanatory** – people should be able to find a clear, short explanation of the problem your initiative addresses, the solution you hope for, and the European citizens' initiative process and timeline.
- **Captivating** – attractive and catchy visuals, such as graphics or videos, can also get your message across and appeal to your targets.
- **Motivating** – report in close-to-real time the number of signatures gathered in each country, and the running total to encourage other potential signatories and motivate coordinators and volunteers.
- **Useful** – provide links to other relevant information.

TIP

The built-in **mailing functionality** in the Organiser Account lets campaigns re-engage supporters who consented to be contacted when they signed your initiative. For example, you can use this function to invite them to additional call to actions, to donate, follow social media pages, or subscribe to your campaign's internal newsletter. Emails can be sent in all official EU languages!

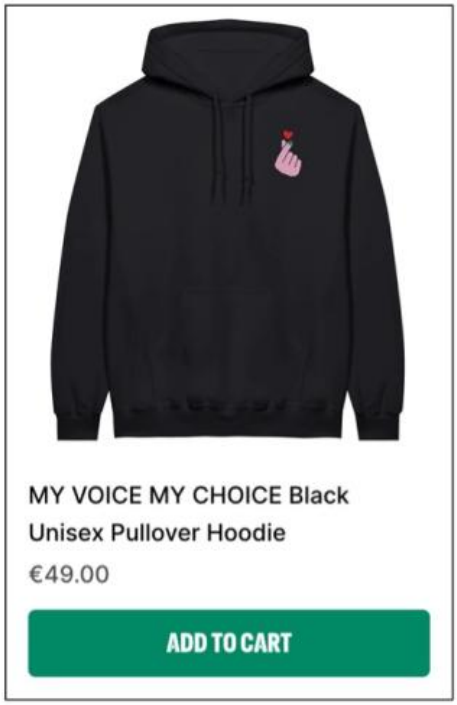
For the **use of social media**, see Chapter 3 – Marketing Strategies.

Promotional events

You need to focus limited resources where they are likely to have the biggest impact. The fact that a lot of people will be at an event does not guarantee that you will be able to get a lot of signatures. But if most of the people at a small event are likely to be interested in the initiative, it is probably worth going.

Promotional materials which may **be useful include**:

- **Postcards or business cards** (in each language) with campaign slogan, URL, hashtag and QR code for volunteers and supporters to distribute to potential signatories.
- **Simple photocopied sheets** to accompany the statement of support forms (in each language), explaining difficult terms and why the personal data is necessary.
- **Digital materials** showcasing your campaign to a wider audience – *HouseEurope!* made a series of documentary films available on their YouTube channel.
- **Newsletter** – *PsychedeliCare* created a newsletter for their supporters, providing the latest information and ways to support the initiative to those subscribed.
- **Merchandise:** from T-shirt, hoodies, tote bags to mugs – *My Voice My Choice* created an online shop, with profits going directly to their ECI. Find out more in this blog.



MY VOICE MY CHOICE Black Unisex Pullover Hoodie

€49.00

ADD TO CART



MY VOICE MY CHOICE White Enamel Mug

€20.00

ADD TO CART



GIRLS SUPPORTING GIRLS White Ceramic Mug

€17.00

ADD TO CART

Check-list

1. Build up followers by bringing value to conversations and communities relevant to the topic of your initiative.

2. Be visible, be original, be true.

3. Be timely and post regularly to be as interactive as possible. Make use of hashtags, tag other large key accounts, and utilise interactive features such as polls, live functions, or Q&As. Make your website fun, entertaining, and visually appealing.

4. Encourage supporters, volunteers, intermediaries and influencers to share your campaign content. Monitor the results.

5. Repeat and replicate what works best in each country and refine or drop what does not work so well.

TIP

Work hard to get opportunities to speak at the events you attend. Use a powerful, well-honed pitch, so even a five-minute slot can generate many signatures.

Press relations

Unless you and/or your partners have well-established (and well-resourced) PR teams, do not waste too much time on press releases. Instead, try to cultivate direct, personal links with individual journalists who have already written about topics close to the subject of your initiative. Each campaign team, central and national, should have one member who is articulate and relaxed on air (TV or radio). Do not only go for the journalists of the big national newspapers or the mainstream broadcasters. Media interest is often cumulative. A prominent piece in a local paper may well attract the attention of the regional press, and so on. Never turn down an opportunity to talk to a journalist. Bloggers, vloggers, podcasters and other social influencers often have great reach into specific issue-oriented communities.

TIP: Reputation and risk management

Campaigns must prepare for misinformation, trolling, and political framing.

For example, *My Voice My Choice* was attacked by far-right politicians in different countries; this generated visibility but required careful narrative control.

Recommendation: prepare pre-approved responses, identify "red flags," and set up a rapid response mechanism.

For further details on how successful initiatives campaigned, please refer to the success stories on the ECI Forum.

Need expert tips for your campaign? Head over to the **Ask an expert** section of the European Citizens' Initiative Forum and send us your question. You will receive personalised advice in just eight working days! *(https://citizens-initiative-forum.europa.eu/ask-expert_en)*