

European Citizens' Initiative



How to campaign

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1

OVERVIEW

Under the European Citizens' Initiative rules, the organising committee needs to collect statements of support signed by at least one million citizens from at least seven EU countries.

The committee must include at least seven EU citizens living in at least seven different EU countries. The committee has 12 months to collect the statements starting from the date the initiative is registered.

To run a successful campaign, you should use your energy, enthusiasm and creativity to:

- build a central coordination team and local campaign representatives in as many EU countries as possible.
- establish a campaign plan including the resources necessary to implement it (see the Guidance note on 'How to raise funds');
- create clear and coherent campaign messages to be easily tailored to local audiences;
- convince supporters to sign a statement of support.

2

DESIGNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

To launch your campaign you need to build a campaign team that will help you to reach people in all the countries you are targeting and to create a communication plan allowing you to collect supports for your initiative.

Building and coordinating a campaign team

If you are not already part of a strong EU-wide network, then you should first **forge links with citizens and organisations in other EU countries** who share your interests and concerns (see the Guidance note on 'How to look for partners').

If you already have such a network in place, here are some other preliminary steps to consider taking with your European partners:

- Map out your partner's missions and identify **shared objectives** that can be commonly agreed before launching a campaign.
- Carefully **select at least seven countries** where the topic is already widely supported and/or where there is a strong partner.
- Assess the different **resources** of each partner, in particular financial resources, staff/ volunteers and network. If necessary, you could help **your partners** build relations with other national stakeholders that may wish to join the campaign.
- Reach **agreement on financing** – will the campaign be funded locally in each country, or will resources be pooled and allocated as needed?
- Agree on the types of **internal communication** tools and languages to effectively communicate and coordinate among the campaign's partners
- Designate a **coordinating team at EU level and national teams** – if possible create an opportunity for members to meet together in person.

Tips

- **Start working together regularly** as soon as possible to develop campaign plans.
- **Quickly identify and solve any internal communication issues.** Efficient communication within your transnational team can help you to share ideas, methods and materials (texts, designs, etc.) and to avoid repeating mistakes.
- **Use the 'hub-spoke-rim' model** – the central coordinators should support and guide the national teams; but national teams can also talk easily to one another using a WhatsApp group, Slack and/or Skype, for example.

Creating a communication plan

A key part of your campaign plan is the plan itself. This needs to be coordinated but may proceed slightly differently in each country.

For every major action (during the public campaign) define as clearly as possible:

- the target group(s);
- the channel(s) to be used – this could be a social platform like Facebook and/or a media campaign;
- key messages;
- media formats;
- time/resources needed to create the communication products – are these realistic?
- start and finish dates for the action;
- targets – how many signatures should the action deliver?

In this phase, you should focus on a) establishing your target audiences, b) developing and testing campaign messages and c) developing campaign materials.

a) Establishing your key target audiences

- Try to define four or five types of groups who will support your initiative. Do not rely on intuition – use any available

research tool, such as surveys, social media etc. These can be called ‘personas’ – groups that have similar profiles. You can personalise them (give them a name, gender, age, profession, interests, affiliations, etc.) to better understand how to reach out to, and connect with them.

- Find out where these groups **tend to gather or communicate** among themselves. Do they communicate online and offline?
- **Assess the types of words** people in these groups use when talking among themselves. What appeals to them? What turns them off? Are these aspects the same for all of your personas, or are there important differences?

b) Formulating key messages

To develop or test your core campaign messages, try to answer the following questions:

- Can you explain the **purpose** of your initiative to your grandmother or your next-door neighbour in two or three sentences?
- How will changing EU law improve the situation?
- Can you distil your explanation into just **five words**? Be practical – don’t try to be clever.

- Make sure your messages are **positive**.
- Can you also explain the European Citizens’ Initiative **process** – Why should citizens need to fill in a statement of support form?
- Do you need to **adapt** your messages to any of the countries where you will be campaigning?
- **Test** your messages on members of your target audience. Do they react the way you hoped?

c) Developing campaign materials

Creating a promotional website

A promotional website can be a great campaign tool. However before you spend resources on creating new content and materials, you should visit [the Commission European Citizens Initiative website](#). You will find on this website several background information in all the EU languages that will help you to develop your website and promotional materials.

When building your website, make sure that it can do the basics. It should be:

- **Easy to find** – register a domain name that is short, relevant and memorable.
- **Multilingual** – if possible in the languages of each of your campaign countries.
- **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 timescale.

- **Motivating** – report in close-to-real time the number of signatures gathered in each country, and the running total. This will encourage other potential signatories and motivate coordinators and volunteers.
- **Useful** – provide links to other relevant information.
- **A call to action** – display a prominent button leading to the online collection system.

Creating promotional materials

Do not waste your money on designing and printing thousands of promotional leaflets. Instead, spend time training and supporting volunteers who will meet and **talk to people**.

Printed materials that may be useful include:

- **Postcards or business cards** with campaign slogan, URL and hashtag (in each language) for volunteers and supporters to distribute to potential signatories.
- **Simple photocopied sheets** to be given out with the statement of support forms (in each language), explaining difficult terms and why the personal data is necessary.

If your communication budget allows, prepare multimedia content especially for social media – infographics, animated GIFs, photographs, even a short video. Design these 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.

You can distribute them on different occasions with different calls to action. Preferably use a single international campaign hashtag.

3

RUNNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

Using social media

Social media is a very powerful way to gather support. Develop a strong **social media marketing strategy**.

Decide which social platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) and which accounts you will use.

Will you use partners' existing Facebook pages, for example, or will you create a dedicated campaign page? – just one central one (with content in several languages) or one in each campaign country?

Follow these steps:

- Identify **target communities**.
- Select one (or at most two) **social platforms** widely used by the target community – ideally, those where you or your partners already have a well-established presence.
- Identify **intermediaries and influencers** with big followings among the target audience.
- Develop (and test) **appropriate material and messaging** – each piece of content should have a strong appeal for the target audience.

→ Roll out the campaign in waves – if you can afford it, use small amounts of money to **promote posts** that work well organically.

→ Build your following by **bringing value to conversations and communities** relevant to the topic of your initiative.

→ **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?

As your following grows, start to talk about the initiative. Give people news about the drafting

Tips

- Be visible, be original, be true.
- Encourage intermediaries and influencers to share your key posts and your campaign content. Monitor the results.
- Amplify the amplification – 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 all the questions they could ask.
- 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**.
- Repeat and replicate what works best in each country and refine or drop what does not work so well.
- Use national events – relevant conferences or TV programmes, for example, and their associated hashtags – to get your message out to new groups.

Tips

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

and registration process. Ask for reactions. Ask for help. The feedback will help you to fine-tune and localise your messages. Respond to as many comments as you can. Be positive.

Participating in events

Events organised either at national or local level may help you to amplify your message and allow you to reach new supporters for your initiative. Do not hesitate to take part in these events. Contact

the organisers and ask them if they would be interested in including you in their panels of speakers. You may also propose them to be present at the event with a stand to promote your initiative or by promoting your campaign materials on their website and their social media accounts.

Press relations

Unless you and/or your partners have well-established (and well-resourced) PR teams, do

not waste your time with 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 office, central and national, should have one member who is articulate and relaxed on air (TV or radio).

Tips

- Cultivate journalists on social media, sharing their content when it is relevant to the initiative and explaining why you are interested.
- Collect contact details and follow up with direct messages, email and phone calls.
- Target a mix of national and local media. Media interest is often cumulative. For instance, a prominent piece in a local paper may well attract the attention of the regional press.
- 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.
- Do not just ask for coverage – think what you can bring them (an original human story, a political angle, a great photo...).