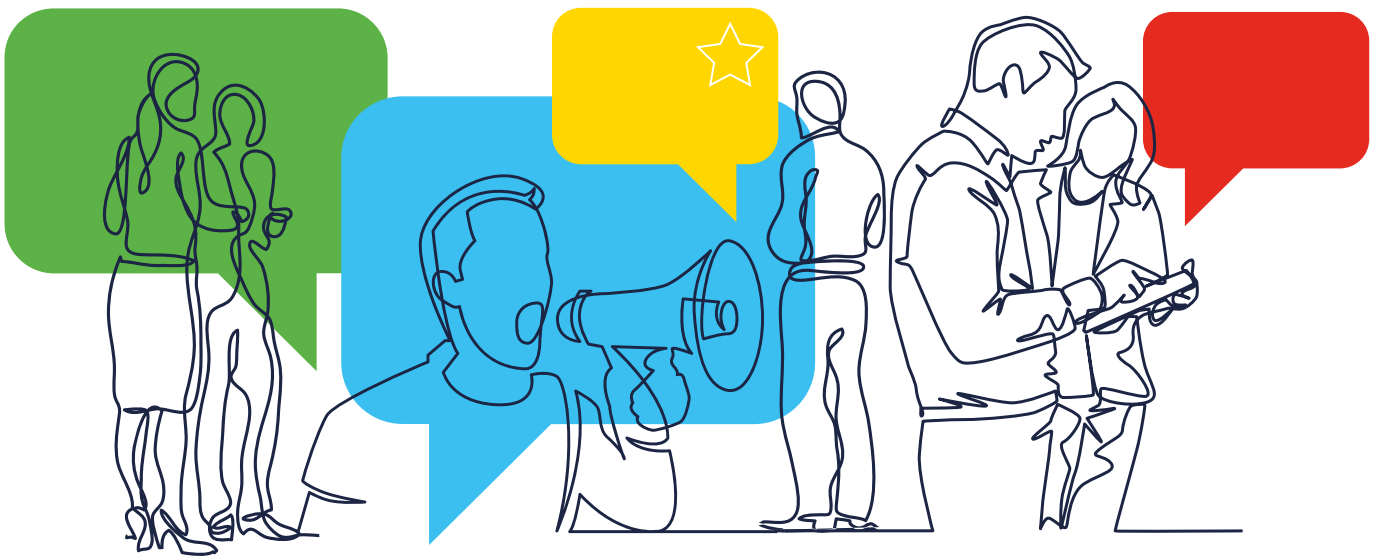


LEARN



EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

How to campaign



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1

Overview

The European Citizens' Initiative gives citizens of the EU the unique opportunity to shape European policy-making by asking the European Commission (the Commission) to propose legislation on a matter of its competence. In order to place an initiative on the agenda of the Commission, the organisers of an initiative need to collect statements of support from at least 1 million citizens in at least seven EU Member States. Organisers have 12 months to collect the statements of support and they can choose the start date within 6 months from the initiative's registration.

If you need to know more about how to register a European Citizens' Initiative, consult the Guidance note on **How to draft an initiative**. If you have an initiative in mind but you would like to receive independent advice, the SEEK ADVICE function of the European Citizens' Initiative Forum can provide you with tailor-made assistance during the preparation phase of an initiative.

Collecting more than one million statements of support from EU citizens in at least 7 different countries within 12 months is easier said than done. In order to overcome the challenges and succeed, you should prepare your campaign plan well in advance before the start date, and secure the resources necessary to implement it by:

- building and coordinating an effective campaign team across different countries, languages and partners;
- creating clear and coherent core campaign messages, while leaving room for adaptation to local circumstances;
- creating a visual identity;
- creating a strong campaign website for your initiative;
- identifying your key communication channels.



2

Creating an EU-wide support infrastructure

The most successful European citizens' initiative campaigns have been built on foundations that were laid down before the initiative's proposal itself was even drafted. 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; at least seven)** where the topic is already well known and widely supported and where there is 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 a second partner 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 together 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.



Tips

Efficient communication within your transnational campaign 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 support and guide the national teams, but national teams can also talk easily to one another using a WhatsApp group, Slack and/or Skype.

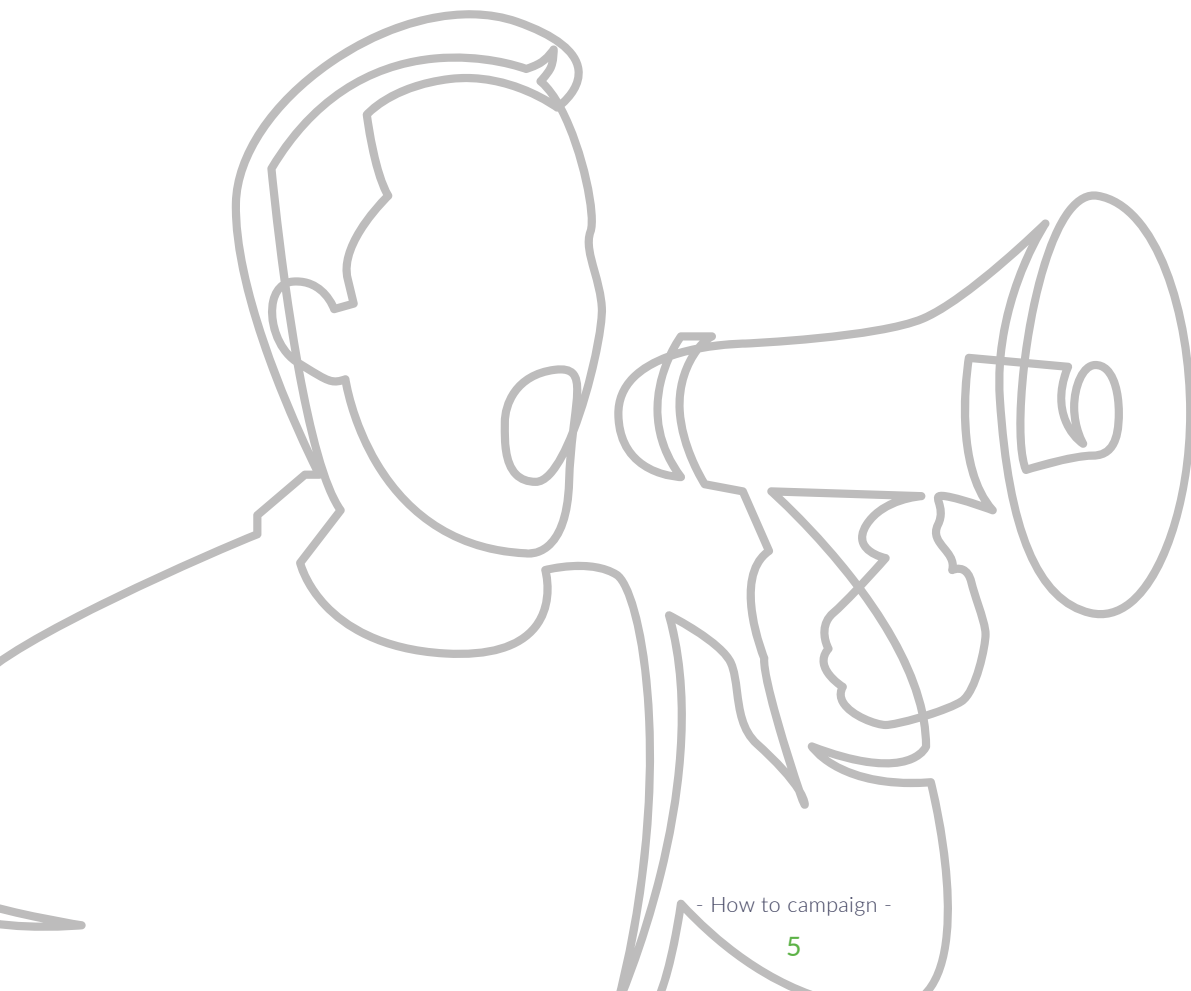
Creating a communications plan in three main phases:

- **Pre-launch** – in this phase, communication is focused on establishing your ecosystem of stakeholders, and developing and testing campaign messages and materials.
- **Public campaign** – this is the intense 12-month period in which you can 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.



What are your key target audiences?

- Identify in **what groups** you will most easily find people willing to sign the statements of support for 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 typical 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.
- Find out where these groups **gather**, online and offline. It will be important to select one or two social platforms on which to campaign, although physical meeting places may also be important.
- **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 plan 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 platform like 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 a 'celebrity' popular among the first wave of signatories in a country.
- Try to recruit the influencer by tweeting that many of his/her followers have already signed. Ask if s/he will sign, too.
- Post content that will appeal to his/her other followers (especially if s/he does sign).
- Use the story to attract media interest.
- Rinse and repeat.



Tips

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.

3

Marketing strategies

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 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.
- Be creative and select for your initiative a **short, punchy and easily understandable title** that will be easy to translate into other languages such as 'Stop glyphosate', "'End the cage age' or 'Housing for all'. 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 work 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.



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

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**.
- Try to distil your explanation into just **five words**. (Be practical – don't try to be clever.)
- Make sure your messages are **positive**.
- Develop a clear and simple explanation of the European Citizens' Initiative **process** – e.g. Why should they fill in a statement of support 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?



5

Communication channels

A **promotional website** 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **A call to action** – display a prominent button leading to the online collection system.

Use of social media

As early as possible, 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?

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 all the questions they could ask. Make it easy for them to sign the statement of support.



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

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** 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.



Tips

- Build up followers by bringing value to conversations and communities relevant to the topic of your initiative.
- Be visible, be original, be true.
- 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 pages fun, entertaining, and visually appealing.
- Encourage supporters, volunteers, intermediaries and influencers to share your campaign content. Monitor the results.
- 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 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 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.

For further details on how successful initiatives campaigned, please refer to the success story fiches:

- **One of us**
- **Right2Water**
- **Stop glyphosate**
- **Stop vivisection**
- **Minority SafePack** (not yet available)

If you need tailor-made and independent advice on how to organise your campaign, go to the SEEK ADVICE section of the European Citizens' Initiative Forum and submit an enquiry. You will receive personalised advice within a maximum of eight working days.



Tips

- Cultivate journalists on social media, sharing their content when it is relevant to the initiative and explaining why you are interested.
- Follow up with direct messages, email and phone calls.
- Do not just ask for coverage – think what you can bring them (an original human story, a political angle, a great photo...).

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