

TOOLKIT FOR ACTION



ORGANISING ACTIONS

Actions are things people do to raise awareness and express feelings about something they want to change. They are a way of sending a public message, attracting allies and supporters, and strengthening a group or movement. They are a way of challenging or encouraging those in power to make a necessary change. Actions are what people do to generate their own power. From a Quaker perspective, actions are an outward collective expression of inner promptings.



The People's March for Climate, Justice and Jobs on the eve of the UN summit on climate change in November 2015. Photo credit: Ruth Davey www.look-again.org

➔ Actions are usually pre-planned, and can be used to meet a broad range of objectives. An action might seek to dramatise or raise awareness about an issue, to publicly remove support for, or challenge, an unjust system, to disrupt or prevent something bad happening, or to demonstrate or demand an alternative.



This guide outlines key steps to consider when organising actions as part of a campaign or project for change. It also explores how we can increase the impact of our actions by working collaboratively, being creative, and sharing our stories.



- ➔ The activity itself might range from a demonstration to a protest, creative performance, symbolic stunt, strike, boycott or vigil. Quaker groups have, for example: held vigils to demonstrate opposition to, and raise awareness around, inequality; attended national climate, anti-Trident and other demonstrations; and removed their investments from fossil fuels, the arms trade and other industries.
- ➔ Because actions are public, they are an important way of gathering support and enthusiasm, gaining media coverage and other publicity, increasing pressure on decision-makers, and raising awareness around an issue more widely.

Planning an action

What kind of action do you want to take?

Actions are not an end in and of themselves, but steps in a movement for change. Holding banners at the entrance to a submarine base, for example, will not in itself achieve nuclear disarmament, but might help to shine light on the issue, demonstrate active resistance, shift public opinion and debate, and increase pressure for change.

Before shaping exactly what you're going to do, take some time to consider what kind of action will help you to achieve the change you're working towards. What issue are you addressing, and why? What do you hope will happen as a result of doing the action? Who or what are you trying to influence? Will it bring people with you, or might it alienate some groups in your community? Try to see it from all points of view, but do not be put off because someone might disapprove.

It's important also to share honestly within the group what you have experience in, what you're good at and what you actually want to do. Be careful, though, not to get stuck in a rut of always doing the same thing unless that is the point of doing it (for example a regular vigil). Actions should be enjoyable as well as meaningful.

Actions can range from creating a visually striking art installation to using your body to block the entrance to a building or space. Organising and taking part in an action will therefore be a very different experience depending on the type of action, as will the consequences afterwards. To explore this further, it might be helpful to consider some of the following questions:

- ★ Will it be more effective to demonstrate a positive vision for an alternative, or to directly oppose something? Or something that combines both? How do you want people to feel? Hopeful, angry, empathetic, inspired? Or a combination?
- ★ What degree of challenge are you seeking to create? Do you want to publicise a message on your own property, take action in a public space, or intervene in a private space? This will probably determine the extent to which you need to plan for consequences such as being questioned or confronted by a member of the public, or asked to move by security personnel or the police.
- ★ How much inconvenience do you wish to cause? Inconvenience can be an effective strategy for increasing publicity and pressure, but it can also have repercussions for those taking part. Do you know what the potential repercussions are, and do you feel comfortable with them?



★ How much risk are those involved in the action able and willing to take? Think about health and safety, legal risks and personal needs. This is particularly important for those who don't have British citizenship. While the associated risks vary, any protest or demonstration can carry the risk of arrest and your group should be clear on the risks you are collectively willing to take and potential consequences before you set out on an action. Green & Black Cross is an independent grassroots project that offers lots of useful advice on what to do before planning an action, and the risks involved with them. See greenandblackcross.org for more information.

If you'd like to explore strategy in more depth, take a look at the 'Planning and Strategy' section of this toolkit at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-action-training-and-tools/toolkit-for-action-1/planning-and-strategy.

The Quaker Turning the Tide programme can arrange workshops to support your group as it works on all of these questions. See www.turningtide.org or email turningtide@quaker.org.uk.

Getting a group together

The size and nature of the group that does an action will usually depend on the type of action. Do you require a small group of well-prepared people, or a big crowd? Some actions, such as those that will be more challenging to the public, or may attract attention from security personnel or the police, are sometimes best undertaken by a group in which trust has already been built, or where people have been able to prepare and train together. Other actions, such as public demonstrations, will have more impact if they involve lots of people.

Working collaboratively

Which groups could you connect with locally? This might be those working on similar issues, other faith groups, or people directly affected by the issue you're addressing. Do you need to consult with people who are more informed or affected than your group before you start planning the action?



As people join, be open-minded to new ideas and ways of doing things – this will make the process, and the event itself, more creative, as well as helping to build a sense of collective action.

If you involve new groups and people, consider how you might work in a way that helps to build collaboration. Can you, for example, include other groups in the planning and creation of the action, rather than just asking them to turn up on the day?

Remember, the way you are used to holding meetings might not be appealing to others, so it's important to decide as a group from the outset how your meetings will be conducted. For example, should we have shared or rotating chairing? Should we decide by consensus? How can we encourage everyone to participate?

Getting creative

Actions are often most effective when we present a message in a symbolic, creative or fun way. This can help people see an issue in a new way, or bring home its truth.

Some ways of doing this include:



using banners, placards, props, costumes, installations or other forms of art



- ✿ dramatising issues through street performances or symbolic gestures
- ✿ singing and music
- ✿ designing a creative activity for passers-by to get involved with.

Being creative will also make the planning process more fun, and help to involve new people and groups. You could, for example, bring people together before the action to create banners and props, make costumes, design a performance, or something else.

Creative ideas list

Stroud Quakers organised a ‘foodless dinner party’ to raise awareness of increased levels of hunger in Britain.

Photo credit: Monica Jones



Quakers took part in a ‘fuel poverty die-in’ to protest the number of winter fuel poverty deaths in 2014.

Photo credit: Sunniva Taylor

On Global Divestment Day, Oxford Quakers joined other local groups at a demonstration in the town centre, which included banners, singing, a giant dinosaur, and a ‘wedding’ for Oxford University and the fossil fuel industry to illustrate the relationship between the two.

Photo credit: Alan Allport





At the national 'Stop Trident' march in 2016, Leeds Quakers carried a giant Trident prop with their banners.
Photo credit: Ellis Brooks

At a commemoration service for International Conscientious Objectors' Day 2016 in Tavistock Square, London, descendants of World War I conscientious objectors brought photos of their family members and laid flowers at the granite memorial to conscientious objectors.

Photo credit: Ruth Davey www.look-again.org



Quakers have held regular meetings for witness at the British Museum to oppose the oil-company BP's sponsorship of the museum.
Photo credit: Sam Walton

You can find more stories about action being taken by Quakers on the 'Our Stories' blog at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories.



Location

Which location will most enable you to achieve your intended impact? You might, for example, choose a local town centre on a busy day to reach as many people as possible. Or, you might want to gather outside a strategic location, such as a local institution you are seeking to persuade, or the offices of a private company whose business practices you oppose or want to influence.

Logistics and timing

Now you've come up with some ideas, create a plan for making the action happen. Who will do what, when? In what order do things need to happen? This might also be a good time to do a reality check as a group – do you have enough people involved to make everything happen?

If you're seeking media coverage, make sure you plan for the action to happen before your local media's print deadlines, otherwise press releases will have to wait until the following week and might be less likely to be published.

If your action involves a public demonstration, you might also want to consider notifying the police. You may have a legal obligation to inform the police, depending on if the demonstration involves a march or if it will take place in certain places, such as Parliament Square. Sometimes people choose not to notify the police in order to try to minimise any police presence, but it's certainly worth considering with your group. Green and Black Cross (greenandblackcross.org) offers some useful information.

Promotion

If you're organising a public action, how can you promote it to get people there on the day? You might:

- ➔ invite Friends after meeting for worship
- ➔ add it to your meeting's newsletter
- ➔ use a blog or social media
- ➔ put flyers and posters up in your meeting house and local community
- ➔ work with other local groups to promote the action through their networks
- ➔ if appropriate, invite local people particularly relevant to the issue you're addressing, including decision-makers such as your MP or local councillors.

Coming up with your message

What do you want the action to say, and how? It might be helpful to consider some of the following questions as a group:

- ★ What do you want people to learn about what you're doing, the issue you're working on, or what you're asking for?
- ★ Who does the message need to reach? Is it the public, a specific group, a decision-maker or someone else? How will this happen?
- ★ How can you present the message in an eye-catching or powerful way?



It's also a good idea to make a media plan in advance of the action. Do you want to send a press release? Could you tell your local media about it beforehand so they can send a photographer? You can find more information on reaching the media at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-action-training-and-tools/toolkit-for-action-1/media-and-social-media.

Publicity during the action

Think beforehand about how you will share your message with the public during the action, as it's a key opportunity for raising awareness and gathering support.

You could:

- ➡ hand out flyers to explain what you're doing and why, and designate a few people from the group to engage passers-by in conversation and answer questions
- ➡ ask people to sign a petition, or share their message or opinion
- ➡ give a talk about why you're taking action, or invite different people from the community to speak about the issue
- ➡ use music, singing and chanting to attract attention
- ➡ hold banners and placards that clearly display your message
- ➡ wear eye-catching or symbolic colours
- ➡ post updates, photos and videos on social media as the action happens – see www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-action-training-and-tools/toolkit-for-action-1/media-and-social-media.

You might also want to consider how you can engage directly with the people you are seeking to influence or persuade, such as delivering a letter, petition, or messages from your meeting or local community to a decision-maker or relevant representative.

Remember to take lots of photos and videos during the action so you can continue to share your message afterwards!

Roles during the action

Think together beforehand about who will do what as the action happens. Do you, for example, need someone to answer questions from the public? Do you need to assign someone to liaise with security personnel?

After the action

First of all, take some time to celebrate what you've achieved! This could be as simple as sharing a meal or drink afterwards.

Sharing your story

Once the action is over, it's a good idea to spend as much time sharing what happened as you did planning it. When lots of time and energy has gone into planning, it's easy to miss this stage. But actions are unlikely



to create change in the world if we don't tell anyone about them. Every time you share the story, you make the action more powerful.

Some ways to do this include:

- ❁ telling your local media about it by sending a press release with eye-catching photos
- ❁ sharing photos, videos and updates on social media through your meeting's social media account, or set up a Twitter and/or Facebook profile for the group
- ❁ writing to your MP or another local decision-maker to tell them what you did and why, and – if relevant – to ask them to make or support a change (www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-action-training-and-tools/toolkit-for-action-1/engaging-elected-representatives-1)
- ❁ writing an article in your meeting's newsletter
- ❁ writing about it on the 'Our Stories' blog – an online space for sharing action being taken by Friends around Britain – at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories.

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Anti-fracking camp and occupation – Pendle Hill Area Meeting

In August 2014 a group of mothers and grandmothers in Lancashire occupied a field at Preston New Road, where Cuadrilla, a shale gas and oil exploration company, was hoping to get planning permission to begin fracking operations. These 'anti-fracking nanas' worked with many local and national groups to get their voices heard – not least Pendle Hill Meeting, who supplied and supported a nana!

Occupying the field required a vast amount of planning and surveying the area beforehand, and was done before sunrise in order to be able to occupy the field before the security guards woke up. Understanding the legalities of the actions was also crucial to the success, with the nanas putting laminated signs asserting section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 (or squatters' rights) and pitching a tent as soon as they began the occupation. The spectacle of a field full of peaceful Lancastrian matriarchs with feather dusters and cake challenged ideas of the stereotypical 'protester', catching Cuadrilla off guard and galvanising the local community. Crucially, it also provided striking visuals, which the media picked up on and gave the group local and national press coverage.



Anti-fracking nanas at the Occupy Democracy protest. Photo credit: Hilary Whitehead

As Hilary Whitehead, a Quaker anti-fracking nana, says: “We were inspired by the Knitting Nanas of Australia and took our craft work with us. We had a tea tent for entertaining guests, and the image of the nanas took off. Sitting there at sunrise that first morning is something we'll never forget. All I can say is that it felt right that a group of mainly women were going to play Cuadrilla at their own game and surprise their security. It was a great way to draw attention to the site and what was happening and to bring the community together with it. We had a great time and humour was very much part of it.”

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