

Direct Action

Effective direct action can get publicity to build public support, encourage powerful institutions to be more responsive, and inspire supporters to increased activism. On the other hand, direct action that is not well thought out can alienate potential supporters or provide powerful opponents the opportunity to focus attention away from their own failure to meet their responsibilities to the public interest.

The following are a few examples that may help to stimulate thinking.

Fundraiser for wealthy institution or individual. Community groups can organize a highly publicized “walk,” bake sale, concert, or other event to raise money for an institution or individual that is claiming it needs higher prices, increased subsidies, lower labor costs, or other concessions from the public or workforce. A second publicity opportunity comes when it’s time to present the money to the target. If they happen to refuse to accept the help, a third opportunity can be created by donating the proceeds to those who will be hurt by the target’s policies.

Compare and contrast. Two or more people dress up and act out characters that contrast the situation of the privileged and the powerless. For example, at a public location where many people pass by, a worker in uniform has a sign that says I Clean 30 Offices for Poverty Wages while someone dressed as an executive has a sign that says I Sit in 1 Office and Make \$2.7 Million With Health Care and Pension.

Common concerns. This is the reverse of compare and contrast. For example, two characters portray a worker in China and a worker in a U.S. community. Each tells their story. Each wants a paycheck that supports their family, affordable health care, a retirement with dignity. Each is being hurt by the same big corporation(s).

Funeral. A procession or service is held for something that has died: a university’s or hospital’s commitment to the community, tax fairness in a state, etc.

Reverse protests. Pose as the other side in a dispute and use costumes, chants, songs, signs, and other devices to show how outrageous their position really is. Examples: a protest by “billionaires” opposed to increasing health care coverage for other people, a rally by “More Than Our Share” in which “corporate executives” demand new subsidies, or an action by “Polluters United” who dump colored water into a river.

Wrestling match. Superbarrio, a mock wrestling figure in Mexico, would show up in town squares for well publicized bouts with a corrupt local politician or corporate magnate, played by a colleague. It became clear that the powerful bad guy was exploiting unfair advantages that could only be overcome by intervention by the assembled public. Other forms of popular culture can be mined for action ideas.

Presentation ceremony. Give an opponent an award, a check, or an invoice.

“Wake up” your opponent. A big crowd sets cell phone alarms for the same moment.

Debate. Publicize a debate, and debate an empty chair if your opponent doesn’t show.

Silent protest. A march or candlelight vigil where signs do all the talking.

Holiday theme. Turkeys, Halloween trick or treat, Christmas scrooge, etc.