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Demonstration guide

Key advantages of demonstrations

Holding a demonstration is a fun, effective and easy way to grab people’s attention to the issue being highlighted. It is also a great platform to let your creative juices run wild, there are thousands of different and innovative ways to try and grab your audience’s attention.

The key advantage of a well-planned demonstration, is that it automatically generates interest amongst passer-by’s about the issue being discussed. Once a person’s curiosity has been ignited, there are much more open and keen to learn about the issue at hand.

If the demonstration is interesting enough, it can also generate interest from the media. If covered by the media, a single well planned demonstration can effectively spread the message to tens of thousands to many million people.

Planning your demonstrations

A demonstration can be as simple as a single person holding a sign, to more elaborate demonstrations involving groups of volunteers with props, signs, costumes and other visual aids. Whatever the scale, proper planning can ensure greater outreach & success for your demonstration.

The following are some of the key things to keep in mind while planning your demonstration.

Identify an appropriate location & time

While leafleting can be carried out at almost any place, for a demonstration to be effective you need a location which has:

- a large group of people
- a space where you can hold your demonstration, which allows for high visibility without disrupting the flow of traffic
- a time period where people are not rushed and are free to stop to examine your demonstration.

The following are some examples of effective demonstration locations:

- Schools & colleges are amongst the best locations for demonstrations. Try and focus on lunch hours, college events and towards the end of the college day. Students and the youth are amongst the most open to new ideas and accordingly make an ideal target group.
- Other effective locations include malls, theatres and cinema halls where people are likely to be at leisure and accordingly more open to sparing time to pay attention to the issue you are trying to communicate.
- Demonstrations around events involving social causes (including events not related in any way to vegan issues) has also proved to be effective, as people are more inclined towards learning about socially relevant issues.
- Tourist locations are also effective demonstration locations, as people are at leisure and are looking for a source of entertainment.

Do you need to apply for permissions?

At some level, this depends on the scale of your demonstration. For smaller demonstrations involving a few volunteers, the rule is fairly similar to that of leafleting. You can often arrange demonstrations without permissions in most public locations without too much of an issue. As a small group of individuals, we have conducted multiple demonstrations and leafleting events without prior permissions and have never got into trouble till date.

However, if you are planning a more elaborate demonstration involving multiple volunteers, visual props & aids, and especially if you are inviting the media or other participants, it is advisable to seek permission beforehand. Try and ensure at least a few weeks to secure the required permissions.

For demonstrations in public locations, you simply need to contact the local police station of that area, giving details about yourself and the demonstration that you plan to hold. For private locations such as schools, colleges, office complexes, malls, theatres etc. you will need to seek permissions from the appropriate authorities.

The freedom of speech and the freedom to hold demonstrations are intrinsic rights of the citizen of any democracy. If you ensure that you choose a location which does not inconvenience others and that you are not spreading an inflammatory message, you will find that permissions are not that hard to get or not really needed in the first place.

Often, if the authority does not give you permission for a demonstration for a particular time & place, they may offer you an alternative themselves. If not, simply choose a new time & location and try again.

Plan ahead for volunteers

If you are a group of people, keep the following in mind. Ensure everyone is informed in advance of the location & time, and confirm participation one day prior to the event. Try and distribute roles across the volunteers - the most knowledgeable volunteer can act as the focal point for people interested in learning more as well as being the spokesperson for contact with authorities. The more outgoing volunteers could be in charge of handing out leaflets & interacting with people, while volunteers less exposed to leafleting could carry placards, hold up props or wear costumes. Ensure all volunteers have been briefed with relation to how they should interact with people and address queries.

Carry volunteer signup sheets

During demonstrations, you are likely to come across people who are interested in the cause and would like to help out in the same. Carry volunteer sign up forms, where you can take down contact and other details of any potential volunteers.

Try and ensure that you touch base with these volunteers within a short period of having conducted the demonstration. A simple email (can be preformatted) thanking the person for their interest, directing them to online resources to learn more and asking for more details helps greatly in keeping interested people involved with the cause.

Tips on effective demonstrations

The following are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Don't overlook holidays. People are more at leisure to stop and look at your demonstration, pick up your leaflets and discuss the issue. Also, holidays tend to be light news days, increasing the chances of your demonstration being picked up by the media as a public interest story.
- Be creative. The larger and more interesting the visual impact, the better. Try focussing on new and innovative ways of highlighting the issue at hand. Apart from signs, consider the use of costumes, props, cages or even arrange for a street play.

- Carry leaflets to hand out, so that people can read more about the message that you are trying to spread. Leaflet acceptance rates around interesting demonstrations shoot up significantly, and there is also a greater chance of the leaflet being read.
- Having all volunteers periodically sing out an easy to understand chant, is also a great way of attracting passer-by interest.
- Keep the demonstration short. A typical demonstration should ideally last about an hour, to ensure that volunteers retain their enthusiasm.
- Prior to the demonstration, spread the word through online and other channels to increase participation. Always carry a camera to capture images of your demonstration, which you can then post on social media & other online platforms for greater outreach.

Examples of effective demonstrations

To help get your mind working around the kind of demonstration you would like to hold, see below examples of some of the more successful demonstrations carried out internationally.

White rabbit dance demo (Issue: Animal testing)



Activists dressed as white rabbits dance with flags as they stage a protest in front of the European Commission in Brussels June 20, 2012. Demonstrators delivered a 350,000-signature petition to European Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner John Dalli to ban animal tested cosmetics.

Body painted bull fighting demo (Issue: Bull fighting)



Animal rights protesters lie covered in fake blood and black paint as they form the shape of a bull during a demonstration calling for the abolition of bull runs, three days before the start of the famous running of the bulls San Fermin festival in Pamplona July 3, 2011.

Dead animal carrying demo (Issue: Animal Rights)



Animal rights activists gather at Puerta del Sol to protest the unkind treatment of animals. The protesters carry about 400 animal carcasses as they mark International Animal Rights Day. Spain. 10th December 2011.

Meat packaging demo (Issue: Animal Rights)



Animal rights activists from the group 'Animal Equality' lie wrapped in meat packaging as they stage a protest during "Day Without Meat" event in Barcelona, Spain, Wednesday, March 20, 2013.

Raining cats & dogs demo (Issue: India Animal Welfare Act)



Dozens of PETA volunteers wearing cat, dog, goat, cow and other animal masks held placards urging the government to pass the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) 2011. This demonstration was organised by one of the ourfoodprint.com's founder's Himani Shetty, while she was working at PETA India.