

C4ni

Getting you involved in Policy making

BE PREPARED



Introduction

Successful campaigning is all about getting the right information and using it to your advantage, which is why good research is so important.

How to Start

You will probably need to trawl the web and conduct on-the-ground research to help get your views across to Government.

This might even be as simple as keeping a diary of events that you are concerned about in your area. For example, you may have noticed a continuing problem with anti-social behaviour or speeding cars may plague your housing estate.

Don't forget, under the Freedom of Information Act, public bodies, such as the Inland Revenue, Social Security Agency or even Councils have to make clear what information they publish and how that information is made available.

You can request this information by searching on the website of the public body to which your question refers or by calling them in the first instance.

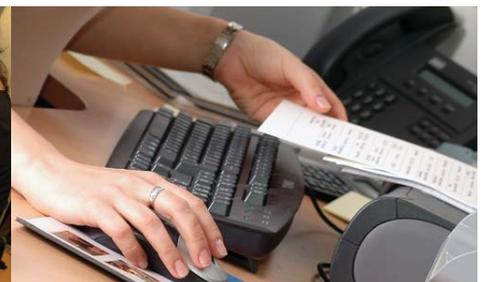
Remember, the whole point of research is finding out information which supports your claims or proves your point.

There are lots of places to find evidence:

- Expert knowledge from people who have experience of the situation, for example:
 - Doctors
 - Social workers
 - Police officers
 - Academics
 - Researchers

- Existing local, national and international research
- Existing statistics
- Evaluation of previous policies
- The Internet
- Any credible published reports, statistics, and data
- Talking to those on whom the policy will impact
- Firsthand experiences from all relevant frontline services, such as hospitals, schools, or charities

You can commission new research but just make sure that what you're looking for doesn't already exist because this is an expensive process.



Finding Info From Councils



If your campaign is locally based, your local Council is a great place to start your research, as it will be packed with information about your area such as planning applications, school performance tables or public reports.

The key to success is knowing exactly what information the Council holds and how to dig it all out.

You have a right to see these things so make sure you ask for them.

Some information, especially about individuals, will not be available to the public and, if information is filed away and needs to be dug out by a Council officer, you may need an appointment to go and view it.

<p>Council minutes and agendas:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Council will have a constitution which sets out how it operates. • The Council meeting diaries, agendas and minutes are also available for public view.
<p>Consultations and scrutiny panel results:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils hold local consultations and host scrutiny panels on issues such as road safety or even post office closures. • Scrutiny panels call Council staff, Councillors and other witnesses to give evidence about the issue under scrutiny. These panels are held in public so you can attend and hear the way services in your area are being run. Check with your Council for the date of the next meeting.
<p>Council departments:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most Councils are divided into departments that broadly cover education, housing, environmental services, leisure and community services, social services and the central executive. • Make sure you direct your questions to the right department.

Finding Info From Regulatory Bodies

If you are campaigning about a product or a service, it is a good idea to get in touch with the relevant regulatory body.

For example, if you are campaigning against an advertisement, you will need to get in touch with the Advertising Standards Authority to get help.

British Standards has information on the development of standards for all products and services from light bulbs to universities.

Their website also includes information on technical handbooks, codes of practice, specifications for products, dimensions, product performance and glossaries.

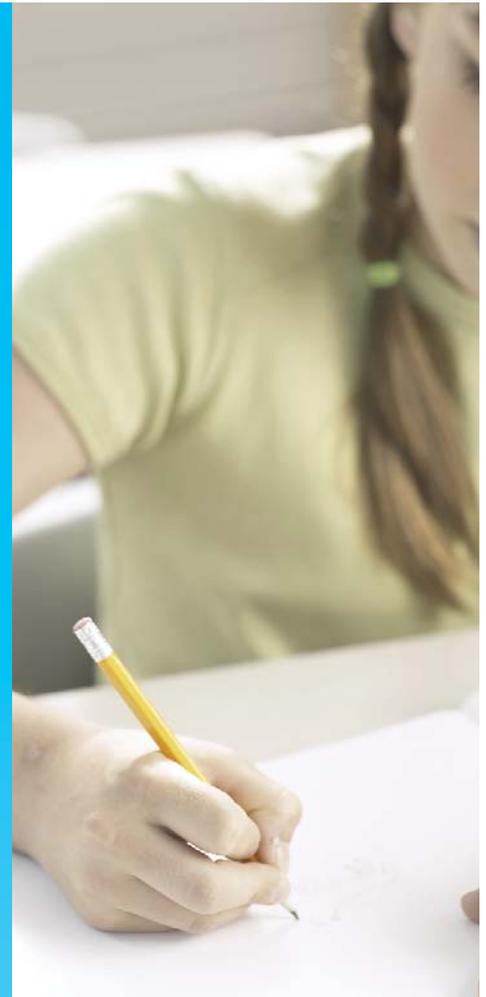
Write to:
BSI British Standards
389 Chiswick High Road
London
W4 4AL
United Kingdom

Tel: 020 8996 9001
cservices@bsi-global.com
www.bsigroup.com

If you want to find out how public money is being spent then contact the Audit Commission. Write to:

Audit Commission
1st Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212
www.audit-commission.gov.uk



Finding Info About Businesses

Companies House is Government's company registry and information source.

One of its main roles is to provide information to the public about a company's status, annual returns and accounts.

Write to:
Companies House
Executive Agency
21 Bloomsbury Street
London
WC1B 3XD

Tel: 0870 33 33 636
enquiries@companies-house.gov.uk

The Trade Association Forum has details on all the trade associations for the various business sectors in the UK from the Agricultural Industries Confederation to the Energy Industry Council.

Write to:
Trade Association Forum
Centre Point
103 New Oxford Street
London
WC1A 1DU

Tel: 020 7395 8283

Finding Info From Charities, Pressure Groups and Think Tanks

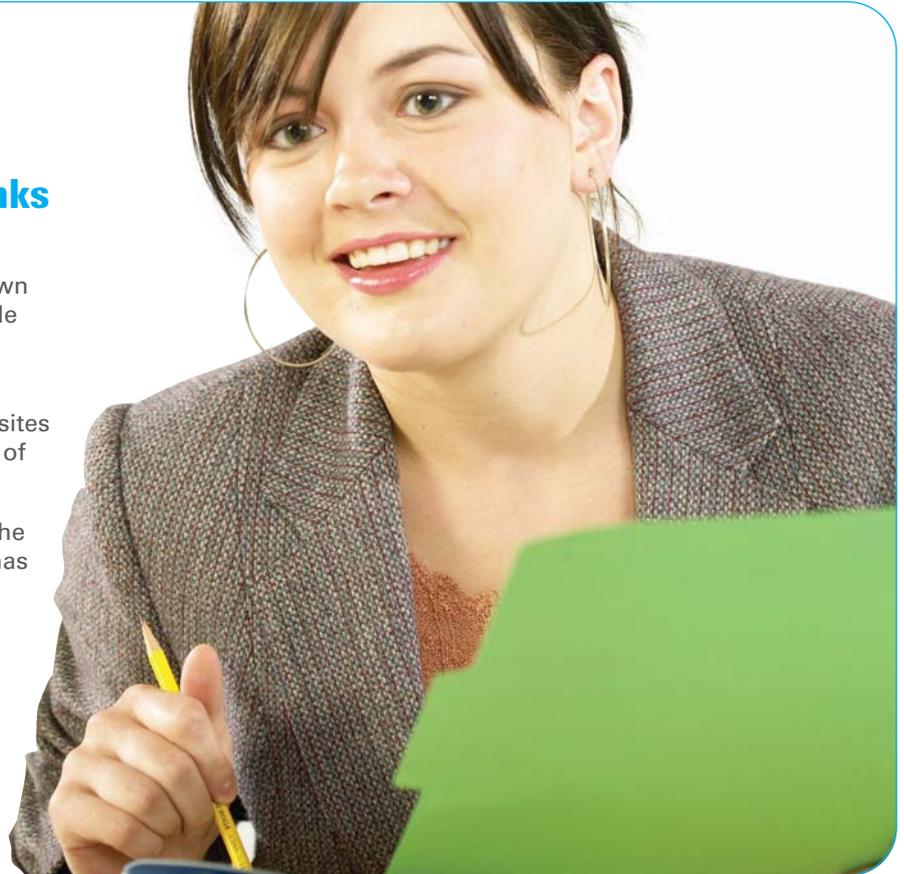
Charities, pressure groups and think tanks often conduct their own research, which you might be able to get hold of by approaching them direct.

You can also check out their websites to see if they've posted anything of relevance.

You might also need to contact The Charity Commission because it has details of all registered charities.

Write to:
Charity Commission Direct
PO Box 1227
Liverpool
L69 3UG

Tel: 0845 3000218



Finding Info From Government Departments

Government departments are an excellent source of information. They will have news on the latest:

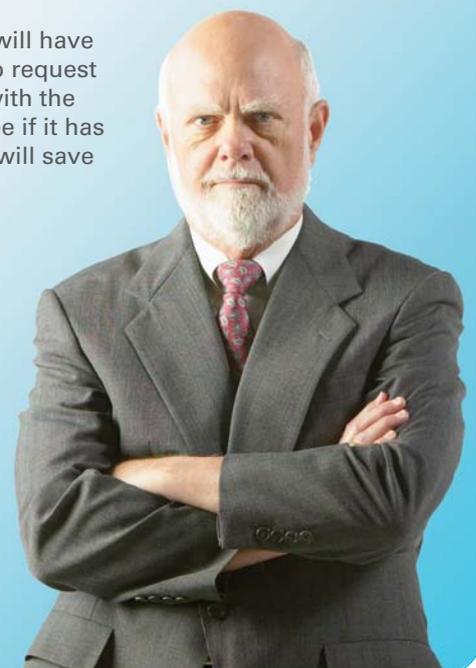
- Government initiatives
- Publications
- Policy documents
- Statistics
- And details of any upcoming consultations on issues within their area.

All this information should be available on each Government department's separate websites – so check them out.

Remember, most of the information you are looking for should be freely available but sometimes you might want to use the new Freedom of Information Act.

The Freedom of Information Act gives you power under law to request information from Government.

Each department's website will have more information on how to request this information but check with the actual department first to see if it has already been published – it will save time in the long run.



Finding Info in the Media



Keep a check on the local and national media because there is a good chance that something relating to your issue will be happening.

Local papers, TV and radio shows often include local opinions through letters pages, vox pops or phone-ins.

Check out magazines and features-based programmes, which are great for giving more in-depth accounts of events, or focusing on specific issues.

Don't be afraid to take relevant clippings from newspapers and magazines to use as evidence and highlight public opinion or fears.



Finding Info in Libraries



You can find all sorts of background information in libraries as well as more recent statistical compilations like the census.

If you need more help, librarians are usually trained researchers and can help you track down what you need to know.

Libraries also have newspapers and Internet facilities which you can use at no cost.

Many libraries act as community centres too and have notice boards where you can find out what's going on or even advertise your own activities.

Local History Archives

Most local libraries will have a local history archive, which should house:

- Local newspapers and journals
- Books relating to the history of the area
- Records of societies and businesses
- Old maps, photographs and sometimes letters
- The archive should have all the ordnance survey maps ever created for your area and perhaps bomb damage survey maps too

You will also be able to find parish records for clubs, societies, theatres and orphanages.

Some Council records (such as laws or public health and business records) will also be kept in the archive.

DOING YOUR OWN RESEARCH



If you do your own research then always remember that the credibility and quality of your research is of utmost importance. You need to make sure that your information is reliable and will stand up under scrutiny. Make sure to be critical of the research you gather and only use something if you trust it completely.

Collect your own data:

- Look at whether it's worth collecting your own data to help prove your campaign issue.
- For example, if you are campaigning about excess traffic speeds in a residential area, you'll probably need to measure each car's speed at certain points throughout the neighbourhood.
- These results can then be used to strengthen your arguments for a policy change or to give you a stronger case when you approach your Council.

Gather evidence:

- Photographs and witness statements are also excellent pieces of evidence and may prove useful at a later stage.
- You can even conduct your own survey or poll but be careful – it's worth reading up on the best way to do a survey and how to write questionnaires because you definitely want your results to hold up under scrutiny.

Talk to researchers:

- You're probably best contacting a qualified researcher, which can be found through universities or from a community body or voluntary organisation.

Contact universities and academics:

- Never underestimate the likelihood of finding a sympathetic academic who is willing to help your cause with expert knowledge or research.
- Some university departments (particularly those with post-graduate research programmes) run outreach programmes and if you can offer them a suitable topic then students will often carry out the research for free.
- You'll need to contact universities directly to find out if they're running any research programmes and remember to be persuasive because high quality research is usually very expensive.

Use Your Local Universities

You need to find people whose knowledge and expertise can help you in your cause.

Your local university should be a good source of experts with an interest in your area.

Don't be afraid to try every way possible to convince them to help you for free, which should be a lot easier if they're sympathetic to your cause.

People working on the frontline, such as doctors, social workers, and police officers, can also be useful for expert opinions on the areas you're interested in.

And don't be afraid to contact The Citizens Advice Bureau or solicitors to see what legal standpoint should be taken.

The best place to start is by checking out the phone book to find the contact details for people and organisations you need to speak to before convincing them to give you the information needed.

Think Tanks

Think tanks differ from pressure groups because they are organisations set up to undertake research and create policy proposals which, they hope, will then be used by Government.

They employ people to do the thinking that many decision makers simply do not have the time to do.

Political parties often rely on think tanks to come up with fresh, original ideas, which are then often made public knowledge in several ways:

- Holding seminars
- Publishing research in the media
- Drawing up policy recommendations

Keep an eye out for their findings in media articles or contact them direct. If they have research that proves your point then you are even more likely to get Government listening.

