# Roadmaps

## A Guide for Intellectual Entrepreneurs


***Organizing a Winning Policy Campaign: Lessons from the TaxPayers' Alliance***

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# Organizing a Winning Policy Campaign: Lessons from the TaxPayers' Alliance

**By Matthew Sinclair**

## What is a policy campaign and why should you run one?

A policy campaign is a planned and sustained attempt to change a specific law or an administrative decision. It is not a scholarly attempt to educate people about the broader principles that we hold dear. Indeed, your objective is to win.

**If a policy campaign is done well, it should feel a lot like a good election campaign.** Obviously your objective is different: you seek a change in policy rather than a change in a Parliament seat. Exactly like an election campaign, however, your policy campaign should convey the same sense of urgency. You should pay the same attention to how you communicate with people and use the same strategic thinking.

While the long term foundational change think tanks are working toward is hugely important, I do suggest that you consider short term; specific policy campaigns as a complement to these broader projects. Policy campaigns are a great way of growing your organisation, they can be a lot of fun, and many of the organisations in the Atlas Network have shown that they can be successful at achieving real change.

There are countless times that I have heard passionate people at brilliant think tanks tell me that it is hard to change things because the public is too apathetic. I hear the same complaint everywhere: from London and Paris to Sydney and Kathmandu. Are we really saying that people in these countries do not care about the high taxes or the onerous regulations that stop their children from finding jobs? Of course they do!

They are not apathetic because they are happy with how they are being governed. **They are apathetic because they do not think they can make a difference.** After all, what are the three most dangerous words in the English language? Nothing. Ever. Changes. If we want to encourage people – supporters, activists, journalists, politicians and donors – to get involved and stay active, then we need to show them concrete results that things can in fact change. The best way to do that is through a policy campaign.

## An Example – The MashBeerTax Campaign

I competed in the Think Tank Shark Tank competition at Atlas Network's 2012 Liberty Forum asking for a grant to print beer mats as part of a policy campaign. Governments of the main political parties had increased the beer tax by more than inflation with every budget since 2009. What's worse is that they planned to continue. The beer mats were designed to expose how much people were paying for the tax and to pressure the politicians to stop the tax hikes.

After I won the prize, the Taxpayers' Allaince (TPA) put our plan into action: we printed over 400,000 beer mats and distributed them to over 2,000 pubs across Britain. We also established a microsite (*MashBeerTax.org*) that allowed people to quickly and easily write to their MP demanding the cancellation of the planned tax hikes. As we began our campaign, support came from surprising places. We ended up receiving support from Britain's best-selling newspaper, *The Sun*, and its "Page Three girls." Even key Members of Parliament backed the campaign and brought it to Parliament. Additionally, we organized a series of grassroots events in cities around the country.

Our campaign--MashBeerTax--launched in February 2013. **In his Budget speech in March 2013, the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne announced a 1p cut in beer duty and the cancellation of all of planned increases.** This change in policy will save British families £200 million a year.

The MashBeerTax campaign was far from perfect–there are always lessons you can learn and ways to improve next time–but it was undeniably effective. This campaign is a good example of what a successful policy campaign needs: a clear objective, lots of activity, and lots of energy. If you follow these guidelines, then the same approach can work for your organization as well.

## You need the right target

Resources are limited. You will have more good ideas than money in the bank or time in the day. You must focus on reaching the right people and the activities that are most likely to get results. To use your resources effectively, the key is to set a clear objective and then work out whom you need to persuade and what it is that will persuade them.

## Setting your objective

The first step is to define what you aim to achieve. The best policy objectives include three elements:

1. **They are ambitious- yet practical.** If your organization has a budget of $500,000 per year you can achieve a lot, but you will probably not decide who will be the next President of the United States.
2. **They are precise.** The objective must describe a discrete change in policy rather than a vague change in direction. For example, "lower taxes" or "an improved understanding of classical liberal principles" might be a mission statement for your organisation, but it is not an objective for your campaign.
3. **They have a deadline.** There is a date by which you hope to get results, and when you will assess your progress.

For the MashBeerTax, our objective was: "To stop the rise in tax on drinks planned for Budget 2013."

You should also outline additional goals. Even the best campaigns will not always result in the desired change in policy, or might take longer than expected to deliver. It is important that you are still able to show that all of the work was worthwhile, that levels of success were achieved and that the campaign has helped to strengthen your organization for future battles. You should be able to quantify progress on as many of those goals as possible.

In addition to stopping the planned tax increases, we also wanted to raise awareness about the amount of taxes British families are paying; build the TPA brand by reaching new audiences; and grow our supporter base by engaging new people in the campaign. The number of new supporters was something that we could measure by the number of names and email addresses we were able to add to our supporter database.

Other measurable objectives could include coverage in newspapers and on TV and the radio, measured by circulation, reach, or advertising equivalency. Furthermore, we were able to observe the extent that supporters engage with the campaign online by measuring comments, downloads, tweets, or "likes."

## Who makes the decision?

Once you have your objective, the next step is to determine **who** will make the ultimate decision on whether a campaign succeeds or fails. The following answers are all wrong: journalists; academics; students; advisors; and even voters (unless you are expecting to fight a referendum campaign).

The right answer is probably, a politician. In some cases it might be a bureaucrat or even a judge. In the case of the MashBeerTax, we knew exactly who would make the decision: George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

You may not always be able to identify an individual person who will make the policy decision. If your planned campaign is more long-term than the MashBeerTax, then the politician most likely to enact your proposed policy may not yet even be in office. Still, you should be as precise as possible about whom you aim to influence. Moreover, you should make sure you know as much about them as possible.

Of course, journalists, academics, other opinion formers, and voters are enormously important. But they are important in a different way...

## Who do they listen to?

No man is an island. Few policy victories result from simply meeting with a decision maker and convincing them. There are many competing demands on policymakers. Here are some of the different groups they listen to:

- **Other Politicians.** Including both politicians within their own party whose support they covet for internal battles, and politicians from other parties who they want to outwit, either by opposing one of their policies or by pre-empting it.
- **Aides.** Politicans spend their days working with aides who are often the first people they ask about the practicality of a particular proposal. Aides will also be the ones to whom politicians turn for options if they decide there is a problem but do not see a policy solution.
- **Journalists.** There are few politicians or officials who do not take how they are covered in the media very, very seriously- even if they like to pretend that they ignore it.
- **Voters.** If your decision maker is a politician, then they will be thinking about their voters' views- especially in their own district and in marginal constituencies.

- **Family and friends.** Of course, we are not suggesting that you should apply pressure to a politician's family. We should recognize, however, that a basic human desire is for their friends and family see them as a success, not a failure.

Convincing these people is vital to your success. Direct meetings with decision makers should only be a small part of your strategy to secure policy change. Even if you are able to secure such a meeting, you maximise your chance of getting a result--and not being politely ignored--if the decision maker sees your suasion over others whom he or she respects. For example, the decision maker must see that parliamentary colleagues and the media listen to you. It is also helpful if the decision maker's aides find your proposals to contain serious ideas that could help them win an election. This broader pressure is what makes a policy campaign very different from, and much more effective than, old fashioned lobbying.

## What motivates them?

Why will a policy maker approve, or reject a proposed policy reform?

This essentially comes down to their hopes and fears. The decision maker may hope for things such as:

- More votes at the next election
- A strong reputation
- Praise from their peers or from the media

At the same time, they may *fear* things such as:

- Fewer votes in the next election and losing office
- Embarrassment if things go wrong
- Criticism from their peers or from the media

Your job is to think about the decision maker's motivations and then craft a strategy that will convince them to undertake your policy proposal. On the one hand, they may be a natural supporter of your position, in which case your main job is to convince them that they can overcome any potential obstacles. On the other hand, they may be a natural opponent. This would require convincing them that the price of ignoring your proposal is too high, and they might as well concede now rather than drag the debate out.

In the case of the MashBeerTax, it was clear that George Osborne wanted to have positive reports in the media after the presentation of Budget 2013 and to convince journalists it was not a repeat of the disastrous budget of 2012. He also wanted to win over Members of Parliament from his own party--the Conservatives--who were sceptical about the government's progress. Finally, Osborne wanted to convince voters that the government was doing something about the rising costs putting pressure on family finances. All of this provided enough justification for George Osborne to change his position, to cut the beer tax, and to scrap the planned increases. The result was winning a £200 million tax cut.

The same strategy also worked previously with a Prime Minister from the Labour Party. The TPA campaigned over a number of years for greater transparency in the amount paid to senior staff in local authorities. Before our campaign, the local authorities were not required to publish remuneration information even though the law required transparency from other public bodies and from firms in the private sector.

We conducted an investigation using the Freedom of Information Act and published the amount paid to senior staff at the vast majority of councils. It was not an ideal solution (the Freedom of Information Act requests are a lot of work and not all the councils replied) but it brought awareness to the issue and built pressure for transparency requirements. Eventually the Prime Minister decided that it was better to win plaudits for publishing the information -than to hold out while we printed the information anyway.

**Your role as a campaigner is to persuade a politician that the policy is right, the reform is in their interests, and that they should back your policy.**

By this stage you should know your objective, the various groups that you need to convince, and the target groups' motivations. The next step is to articulate a message that will speak to them.

## You need the right message

Your campaign should create increased opportunities to reach the public: comments or articles in the newspaper, interviews on the radio, and appearances on television. If all goes well, you may be engaging with millions of people. This is an enormous opportunity. It would be terrible if you squandered this opportunity by failing to be as persuasive as possible.

The kind of message that works varies depending on your audience. You might try to advance a more complicated line of argument in a broadsheet or a policy paper submitted to the government than you would when writing for a mass market tabloid.

However, there is less of a difference than you might think. Even the most intellectual audience will be more likely to embrace an argument presented in a simple way. Even the most sophisticated politicians and journalists will appreciate if you save them from the task of making your case relevant to their constituents', readers', and viewers' concerns.

Ideally, you would test your messages before a campaign using a combination of focus groups and opinion polls. Unfortunately, that is expensive and not normally possible for organisations like ours. The inexpensive substitute is to try out your arguments on your friends and family and see what they think.

Your objective is not to convince those who already hold passionate views for or against your proposal. These views will be very hard to shift. Instead, your objective is to persuade the vast majority of the public, who rationally spend their days thinking about things other than policy.

You are more likely to convince the public with an argument that is simple and relevant to their day-to-day concerns: their wages, their job, the prices they are paying at the shop, their holiday plans, their family life, their nights out. We should recognize and even celebrate that most people do not have to spend every waking moment thinking about politics. Furthermore, we should design our communications strategies to reflect that.

**Here are a few examples of messages that we found effective for various policy issues:**

*Public sector waste costs families three times the amount they spend heating and lighting their homes.*

*Low taxes would encourage people to work, to save, and to invest in Britain. Cuts in corporate taxes specifically would mean higher wages and more jobs.*

*Green taxes are not about saving the planet; they are just another excuse for politicians to take your money.*

*High speed rail is a vanity project that will cost well over a thousand pounds for every family in Britain.*

*You spend your money better than politicians will.*

### Easy to understand

In *Thinking: fast and slow*, the psychologist Daniel Kahneman argues that people are more likely to believe something if reading it does not induce cognitive strain and it is easy to understand. This has a direct implication for anyone trying to create effective messages for a policy campaign. **The first priority is to make your message as easy to understand as possible.**

Of course, some issues are more complex than others. High beer tax is a simpler problem than poorly designed water market regulations. Yet even if you are addressing a complex issue, you do not get a free pass. Instead, you must work even harder to simplify your argument for people who do not normally spend time trying to understand policy.

There are a few ways to keep your message simple:

- **Avoid jargon and use short words**. Terms like "incentivise" are foreign to most people who have not studied economics and there are always simpler substitutes ( "encourage," for example, is much better).
- **Avoid millions, billions and trillions.** Most people could not tell you whether or not a billion dollars in $20 notes would fill a suitcase, a room, or a skyscraper. They are even less likely to understand the meaning of one trillion. $1 trillion is not an amount of money that they encounter in their everyday lives. An easy way to avoid millions and billions is to talk about the amount of money "per family" or "per person."
- **Keep it short.** After more than a couple sentences, you have taken too long to develop your argument. You need to be able to state your key messages quickly and concisely because you will be using them often.

If you want a good example of simple and effective language, read *The Sun*, Britain's best-selling newspaper. Often, *The Sun*'s tabloid journalists have to explain complex situations to a broad readership under a strict word count. We can learn a lot from them.

## Relevant

Most people do not walk around worrying about the investment decisions of major corporations. They do, however, worry about whether they will get a raise next year or whether their kids will be able to find a job when they leave university.

With that in mind, you could argue for a lower Corporation Tax by arguing that it will encourage major corporations to invest in your country. That is not a bad argument, but you can reach more people by pointing out the tangible results of that investment: higher wages and more jobs.

**If you need to first convince people that there is a problem before even proposing your solution, then you have a lot of work to do.** It is much better to talk about the problems about which they are already concerned, and how your policy can help them.

Everyday concerns of the average person are more potent than remote ones. Telling someone in the UK that a certain policy is a small step down the road to a tyrannical dictatorship will cause most to shrug their shoulders. On the other hand, telling them that they will pay higher taxes and have less money in their pockets is an immediate concern.

Our job in a policy campaign is to be salesmen of economic liberty. The best way to make the sale is not to hector people about the "real issues" they should be worrying about. Instead, it is more effective to show how economic liberty is the best way to secure the happy and prosperous life that they want for themselves and their children.

## Emotive

> *All I know is that first you've got to get mad. You've got to say, "I'm a HUMAN BEING, God damn it! My life has VALUE!" So I want you to get up now. I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now and go to the window. Open it, and stick your head out, and yell, "I'M AS MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!" I want you to get up right now, sit up, go to your windows, open them and stick your head out and yell – "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!" Things have got to change. But first, you've gotta get mad! You've got to say, "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!" Then we'll figure out what to do about the depression and the inflation and the oil crisis. But first get up out of your chairs, open the window, stick your head out, and yell, and say it:*
>
> *"I'M AS MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!"*

That little monologue is from Howard Beale, the messianic news anchor in The Network – a classic movie about the raw power of television. We do not necessarily need our supporters to be as mad as hell but we do need them to care; our messages must be emotive.

One way to inspire emotion is by appealing to a sense that something is unfair. Socialists often employ this kind of language, and we should not shy away from doing the same. The power of the state often benefits insiders over outsiders and we should expose this injustice.

At the TaxPayers' Alliance, we adopted this very approach in our criticism of a proposed new high speed rail line. Mostly business passengers earning high incomes, who would be able to travel between London and Birmingham a little faster, would benefit if this proposal passed. Yet every taxpayer would be paying for it. In order to communicate this message better, we posed this question in the media and in online videos:

> *Why is the government taxing the poor to pay for a rich man's train?*

Although anger is often the easiest and most frequently used in political debates, other emotions can be just as powerful. For example, we can get people excited: free market reforms mean exciting new businesses, jobs and possibilities. Additionally, we can appeal to their love for their families and the resulting desire to give them the best possible opportunities in life.

Feeling strongly about the argument you are making does not make you less of an intellectual; we should not let the socialists monopolise emotion in the public debate.

## You need sustained pressure

Now you have strong messages and you need to communicate them to the public, but not just once. You must to make the same argument again and again until you are sick of it--then keep going. Over time you will reach more people and they will become increasingly familiar and comfortable with your arguments. Just as people are more likely to believe something if they understand it easily, they are also more likely to believe it if they have heard it before.

You should create a grid before you launch your campaign: a plan to keep up the pressure in the days and weeks-and possibly months and years-after the launch. If the media finds that their audience is interested in your case, then they will want more stories. You should be ready to supply them when this happens. It is much easier for politicians to ignore a campaign that starts and ends at the launch; they know that today's newspapers will be in the bin tomorrow. Thus, you will get better results with sustained pressure.

Of course, you need to be flexible with your plan and know that things may change. Yet with a planned grid, you will always have potential stories on hand to build attention for your campaign.

There are many different ways to get into the media...

### Produce quantitative research

If you are addressing a complex area of policy like corporate taxation or utility regulation, then you might need to start with a piece of research that explains the issue and your proposed policy reform. The best way to write a document like that is to learn from the Pyramid Principle that many management consultants use. The Pyramid Principle recommends that you start from a single argument (for example: "Britain needs reformed capital taxes in order to secure economic growth and new jobs"), then break it down. This can look like a series of sections with headers stating your policy recommendations (such as "abolish Capital Gains Tax" or "cut Corporation Tax to 10%"). Finally, you must outline your evidence supporting each of those proposals. We used that approach when we wrote the final report of the 2020 Tax Commission.

Research of this kind is important if you need to convince politicians or officials that you have a clear plan.

Research can provide the basis for some of the best media coverage for your campaigns. **Most of your research should focus on exposing new and relevant facts. Ideally it should boil down to a single headline figure.**

Here are a few examples from recent TaxPayers' Alliance reports, all recent press release titles:

*TaxPayers' Alliance reveals the 2,525 council staff earning more than £100,000*

*TaxPayers' Alliance exposes £1.1 billion tax bombshell of Empty Property Rates*

*Budget 2013 takes total number of Coalition tax rises to over 400*

*New Bumper Book of Government Waste exposes £120 billion of wasteful spending – that's £4,500 for every household in the UK*

*28,754 town hall middle managers cost us nearly £2 billion a year*

It is easy to convince a newspaper to cover stories like these. They do not need to agree with everything the TaxPayers' Alliance's stands for in order to understand that their readers will find this story interesting. You can produce similar research by looking at the annual reports and accounts of public bodies, analysing existing official statistics to present them in new ways, or using Freedom of Information laws.

The Freedom of Information Act in Britain has been critical to the success of the TaxPayers' Alliance, similar laws are being adopted in many countries thanks to emerging jurisprudence in the European courts and pressure from campaigners.

### Hijack an existing event

Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) are particularly good at using existing events as a hook for the media to report about high taxes. Recently, there have been two brilliant examples. ATR released research about the amount of tax that athletes would pay on their incomes for winning medals at the Olympic Games. In another release, they compared how the *Sports Illustrated* list of the best paid athletes would change if you applied different state income taxes to their salaries. It does not have to be research though. You could organize some kind of event or stunt and achieve a similar result. Always look out for the right external event that you can use as an opportunity to raise your campaign in the media.

Be careful, though; many companies have hurt their reputations by trying to exploit a solemn occasion. It is a classic PR disaster. Watch for the right opportunities and if in doubt, ask a few friends or relatives whether they think your idea sounds reasonable.

## Organize a stunt

Newspaper editors want good photographs to accompany a prominent story and television producers need good footage for their reports. You can make that easy for them with a compelling visual stunt.

Left-wing activists are often very good at visual stunts. They scale power plants, dress up in fancy costumes, and organize small demonstrations with punchy slogans. Both the TaxPayers' Alliance and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation have managed to secure prominent coverage with large vehicle-mounted electronic debt clocks. The clocks show the debt rising rapidly and provide a visual means for the media to explain the growing problem of public sector debt. Other organizations have accomplished a similar effect by publishing such clocks on their websites.

Stunts should be organized where they will gain maximum media impact. This will mean near Parliament or accompanying a major event that is likely to draw the cameras such as a political party's annual conference.

## Organize a grassroots event

Stunts are typically organized whenever the political debate is at its most fierce. Grassroots events, on the other hand, introduce a campaign to new audiences in towns and in cities outside "the Beltway", the "Westminster bubble," or the equivalent in your country.

Grassroots events will strengthen your campaign in two ways. First, you can reach many people directly. People might see your event, pick up a leaflet, or talk to one of your activists. Second, you can reach many more people through the regional and local media.

Just as national newspapers and television programs need pictures, so do local newspapers and regional television programs. Also, local radio might want to interview you. Politicians tend to be particularly interested in the local media since the public often trusts it more than the national media.

Of course, you need to actually have local activists in order to organize events like these. It doesn't take too much, though; even just three people can set up a fun stall in a shopping centre. There are a few ways to make your grassroots events more successful and help your grassroots network grow:

1. **Make the events fun.** Try to think about the right kind of event for a campaign. For the MashBeerTax campaign, we organized grassroots events in pubs and supporters used their smartphones to e-mail their MP while they had a drink.
2. **Make sure they have all of the necessary materials.** A little money spent on colorful balloons or table cloths with your organization's logo goes a long way.
3. **Try to get decent geographical information about the supporters you sign up through your campaigns.** In Britain that means a postcode and in the United States it means a zip code. If you have location information then you can let your supporters know about future events in their area.
4. **Make sure your grassroots activists feel they are a part of the national team.** We organize a weekly conference call with our grassroots activists. This is a cheap and easy way to ensure that the activists are not cut off from the work of the team in London.

Few free market groups have a strong grassroots network, but building one can strengthen your campaigns. It can be a frustrating, daunting task to get started but it is extremely rewarding.

## Arrange an endorsement

Many campaigns have found receiving endorsements from major figures to be very useful. The more credible or surprising an endorsement is, the better.

We were able to secure useful endorsements twice in our campaign against a new high speed rail line. First, we organized a letter from business leaders and economic commentators. There was incredible coverage of the letter for a few reasons. Two of our signatories in particular--Simon Wolfson from the clothing retailer Next and former Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson--were prominent and credible since the governing party had turned to them for advice on economic policy in the past. Second, the letter itself was full of punchy phrases that journalists could use to create an interesting story.

An effective letter does not need hundreds of signatories. Supporters of the high speed rail line lamented that a similar letter they organized with more signatories received far less coverage. Yet they should not have been surprised; an interesting letter with a few great signatories will always beat a dull letter with nothing new to say and unremarkable signatories.

Letters are not the only way to secure an endorsement for your campaign. In fact, you can also arrange a column in a newspaper or organize an event.

For example, we arranged an event about the high speed rail line that showcased the broad range of groups in opposition. We even included the Green Party's candidate for Mayor of London. We might disagree with her on almost every other issue, but we could still present a united front on this particular topic. It was counterintuitive for the TaxPayers' Alliance and the Green Party to work together, and this captured the media's attention.

## Reach consumers directly

Having a centrepiece for a campaign on display is a great way to reach consumers directly. Good examples include the beer mats we placed in bars or the fuel tax stands that we sent to petrol stations. These centrepieces are inexpensive to print, which means you can get large numbers of them at a low cost while still being effective.

The main challenge is distribution. We have found the best technique is to use existing distribution channels. In the MashBeerTax, for example, we followed the same distribution channels as beer companies or pub chains. So, for your campaign's centrepiece, discover who is already sending regular mailings to your target group of people and follow their lead.


Of course, you do not just want to send these things out; you want them to be used.

The needs of different shops with whom you work will vary. For example, we found that some pubs did not like to use beer mats since they made it harder to clean up. Yet, these pubs would offer to hang a poster for us. There is no substitute for asking sympathetic shopkeepers, publicans, and other independent business people what they might be able to use to get the message out.

## You need to follow-up effectively

I've listed several ways to maintain the pressure for policy change. Other ways can include online videos, viral graphics, and parliamentary briefings. The best campaigns pressure politicians from multiple angles. If you keep it up, you will see results. You may not see victories right away or on every issue, but over time your campaigns will start to bear fruit.

Once you achieve your goal, you must claim victory--shout your achievement from the rooftops and thank your supporters early and often.

Once you have positive results, you have a real opportunity to build the strength of your organization in order to prepare for the next fight. It is important to seize that opportunity and let your supporters know that their hard work has paid off.

Many think tanks engage with lots of supporters through campaigns, seminars, or training programs. Sometimes, however, they do not keep in touch with them properly.

Yet you can keep in touch with supporters in a simple, sophisticated way. Large campaigns often email certain groups in their database about specific, relevant issues. The simplest way to begin is to gather the e-mail addresses and postal codes for each supporter who attends one of your events and then send them a weekly email bulletin. A cordial, concise, and personal email each week will help you build trust with your supporters and encourage them to become more involved or to make a financial contribution.

The software is affordable and easy to use. There are many options available, but we use a system called MailChimp and have found it effective.

Maintaining a proper database is vital when it comes to your relationship with donors. You need to know who is interested in what issues, so you can update them on your work in that area. As your organization grows and your donor base broadens, that will become harder if you do not have the right systems in place. We use affordable and effective software called Little Green Light that can help you do this.

Keep in mind, no e-mail outreach is a substitute for meeting your supporters and donors. It is only a complement to traditional face-to-face meetings--you will still need to keep travelling.

Effective campaigns are key to maintaining a loyal and active base of supporters. If you are able to secure concrete results, to learn from each campaign whether successful or not, and to keep in touch, then you will build an effective team and a loyal base of supporters. It will give your organization a strong foundation for the future fights.

Once you start to break down the stifling, pessimistic attitude that nothing ever changes, you can really inspire people. After that, the opportunities become very exciting.

## *ADDENDUM*
### *TaxPayersAlliance.com/Press-Releases*

### Key Skill: writing a good press release

Good press releases make it easy for journalists to understand why their readers will find your story interesting. Journalists have limited time and they appreciate when you make their lives a little easier.

There are several features that make up a good press release. To illustrate how we write them, I will use an example from a report that we released about the number of flights being taken by the government's Department of Energy and Climate Change.

There is a lot of pressure on journalists to meet tough deadlines and cover more stories. Thus, the basic foundational rule is that you should make it as easy as possible for a journalist to turn your press release into a story. You should do the job of identifying the story whenever possible.

### Strong subject line and title

*Jet Set DECC: Department of Energy and Climate Change spends £1.5 million on 3,496 flights*

Often, the subject line of an email will be all a journalist reads before deciding whether to hit delete or continue reading. This is why you need to get the subject line right: it should be clear that there is a story to come.

### Embargo

*Embargoed 00:01 Friday 09 November 2012*

An embargo tells a journalist when they are allowed to report a story. There is no legal force behind an embargo but it is rare for a journalist to break one. This is because the embargo system is designed to make their life easier by giving them time to prepare a story and talk to the right people before going to the press.

Normal practice may vary in different countries and not every press release should have an embargo. If you are responding to an announcement from a Minister, for example, you probably want to mark your press release "for immediate release" instead. You may also want to note "for immediate release" if the report is exclusively for a particular newspaper. So that other newspapers and broadcasters can follow up. An embargo makes the most sense if you are releasing a story of your own and you are not briefing it as an exclusive.

If you are unsure about what would be best in your country, ask a friendly journalist about what they find most helpful.

### Key facts

*The TaxPayers' Alliance (TPA) can today reveal that the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has spent over £1.5 million on 3,496 flights over the last two and half years. Of these trips, 362 were business class at a cost of nearly £600,000. The destinations of these flights include far-flung locations from Johannesburg to Jakarta while DECC staff have even flown business class on flights within the UK. Given that flights produce greenhouse gases, as well as being expensive, it is difficult to reconcile DECC's rhetoric* *on climate change with the number of flights the department has taken.*

*The key findings of this research are:*

- *The Department of Energy and Climate Change has spent over £1.5 million on 3,496 flights over the last two and half years. This includes the 2010-11 and 2011-12 financial years, and up to the end of August of the 2012-13 financial year.*
- *362 flights were taken in business class over that period at a total cost of nearly £600,000.*
- *3,017 flights were taken in economy class over that period at a total cost of over £835,000.*
- *DECC spent just over £250,000 on domestic flights over the period. 39 of these flights were taken in business class. This includes a £460 flight from Aberdeen to London, and two flights between Manchester and London that cost £188 each.*
- *Business class flights were booked between London other cities in the UK such as Glasgow and Edinburgh.*
- *The most expensive individual flight taken was a business class booking from Cancun to London, costing £5,792. Two business class flights from London to Cape Town cost £5,396 each, while two flights to Santiago cost £5,190 each.*
- *One flight from London to Lisbon was taken on first class at a cost of £500.*
- *Other destinations for DECC flights that cost over £4,000 included: Auckland, Cape Town, Nairobi, Jakarta, Washington, New York, Tokyo and Hong Kong.*
- *Business class flights were booked between London and other cities in Europe such as Budapest (£699), Madrid (£271), Cologne (£370), and Berlin (£474).*

This is the main body of the press release. It should be the largest section especially when you release new research.

After reviewing the example above, you will notice that there is little hint of our opinion in most of the text. We report the facts without embellishment so that they can be dropped straight into a newspaper article.

The idea is to highlight the most interesting facts from your research that will make a good story. Journalists should be able to do a decent job even without reading the full report.

## Punchy quote

*Matthew Sinclair, Chief Executive of the TaxPayers' Alliance said:*

> *"Despite being one of the departments making air travel more expensive for people paying their own way, the Department of Energy and Climate has spent an astonishing amount of taxpayers' money on flights. This looks like breathtaking hypocrisy and extravagant waste from a department which can't be trusted with more and more of our money, while others work hard to make savings. Officials urgently need to explain why they spend so much money on so many business class flights in particular. If Ministers can't provide a satisfactory explanation for the number and cost of the air fares their department is racking up, then there have to be serious sanctions for officials who have left taxpayers with such an unfair bill."*

Keep it nice and short. The example above is even a bit longer than I would recommend, but it is still much shorter than many quotes that I have seen on think tank press releases. There are two reasons why a short quote is normally best. First, journalists appreciate if you save them time on editing the length of quotes. Second, a short quote makes it harder for people to take your words out of context by quoting from it selectively.

A good quote has three components:

- **Introduction.** At most, the introduction should be a sentence or two that simply states the story as you see it. In this case, the introduction is: "Despite being one of the departments making air travel more expensive for people paying their own way, the Department of Energy and Climate has spent an astonishing amount of taxpayers' money on flights."
- **Explanation.** Explain why people should agree with your interpretation. In this case, the explanation is short since the story is simple. In other cases, this component might be longer and the recommendation might be shorter: "This looks like breathtaking hypocrisy and extravagant waste from a department which can't be trusted with more and more of our money, while others work hard to make savings."
- **Recommendation.** This answers the question: What needs to be done? This can be very simple ("The Government should cut Corporation Tax", for example) or it can be more complicated. In this press release, it is more complex since we have a recommendation for officials and Ministers: "Officials urgently need to explain why they spend so much money on so many business class flights in particular. If Ministers can't

provide a satisfactory explanation for the number and cost of the air fares their department is racking up, then there have to be serious sanctions for officials who have left taxpayers with such an unfair bill."

While the rest of the press release should be nothing but facts, the quote should be nothing but opinion. There is no need to restate facts and figures which should have already been included in the body of your press release. If you want to talk about the scale of a problem, use general terms like "an astonishing amount of money" rather than restating the empirical findings.

## Media contacts and notes to editors

Most of your press release is written so that a journalist could drop it straight into a newspaper article. The media contacts and notes to editors sections are there for anything that might help a journalist report a story but is not necessarily newsworthy.

In the media contacts section we give the names, email addresses, and phone numbers of team members who can answer a journalist's questions about the research or arrange broadcast interviews. In the notes to editors section we include facts about the TaxPayers' Alliance and the relevant sources for the report.

You can view more examples of our press releases on our website, *TaxPayersAlliance.com/Press-Releases*.

*Matthew Sinclair joined the TaxPayers' Alliance in May 2007 as a Policy Analyst. At the beginning of December 2008 he became Research Director, in November 2010 he became its first Director, and then in August 2012 he became the new Chief Executive. He has produced pioneering studies on public spending, the dynamic effects of tax cuts, the National Health Service, trade unions, crime, big government projects, financial services regulation, taxpayer funded politics and environmental policy. His reports have seen extensive coverage, including numerous front page stories and broadcast reports. Matthew studied economics and economic history at the London School of Economics at undergraduate and Master's level.*