

A GUIDE TO

SIGNATURE DRIVES

2017

Organizing for Action

SIGNATURE DRIVES

Signature drives as an outreach tactic

Signature drives are a tactic we use to raise awareness and build support for an issue in our communities. A signature drive is where you—either alone or with a team of volunteers—ask people in your community to sign up to show their support or opposition on an issue that matters to you. Signature drives are in-person, public events that give you the opportunity to have face-to-face conversations with members of your community.

Signature drives are an effective outreach tactic because they:

- **Help you identify like-minded individuals.** If you're looking to organize around an issue but have no idea where to start, gathering signatures is a great place to identify members of your community who care as deeply as you do about an issue. This is a good way to begin building a network.
- **Raise awareness among your community.** Signature drives are an opportunity to discuss an issue face-to-face with other community members, and share your personal story of how this issue impacts you and the community. By doing this, you are raising awareness among individuals who may not have otherwise known the gravity and impact of the issue.
- **Build a network for you to communicate with.** Whether it's a local, state, or national initiative you are organizing around, signature drives give you a list of people you can update and ask to take action—such as calling their elected officials.
- **Can be used to persuade elected officials to side with your issue.** Some signature drives, such as petitions, can be used to officially express support or opposition to an issue and can be submitted to your local elected officials for review. Keep in mind, however, that each locality has its own laws and rules for this process that must be followed, so be sure to do your research beforehand.

I. PREPARING FOR YOUR SIGNATURE DRIVE

Use the checklist below to think about the logistics of your signature drive, including the issue you will focus on, the forms you will use, where you'll host your signature drive, and who you can recruit to help you out.

What issue will you focus on?

You can choose an issue that is very specific to your community, or focus on an pressing issue affecting the entire country. That is up to you, but you'll first want to think about these questions:

What is the primary goal for your signature drive? Is it to build a list of names of people who care about the issue? Or to educate the community on a specific issue topic?

What is your personal story and how does it relate to your issue? It is more effective to have face-to-face conversations about your issue that highlight how the issue personally affects you, family, friends, and your community. Take a moment to think about a quick, 30 second to two-minute story you'd like to share with members of the community in relation to your issue.

What additional research on your issue can you conduct? It is always helpful to have a fact or figure to tie your issue and personal story back into.

How many signatures do you want to collect? How many volunteers do you need to hit your goal?

What form will you use? You can create your own form, or use forms provided by other organizations (partners). Just remember to keep your form short enough for someone to fill out in a hurry. In addition, you can [download signature forms for a number of issues here](#).

Where will you go for your signature drive?

Part of executing a successful signature drive is being strategic about places where you're likely to talk to a large volume of people from your community. Here are some suggestions that may get you started in the right direction:

Do your research. Make sure you know the rules you need to obey at the location you choose.

Will you and your team need to stay within a certain area? Will you be on public property? Best of all, visit the location beforehand.

Look for spots with lots of foot traffic. You can maximize your efforts by talking to more people in the time you have to gather signatures. Public events are a great place to start!

Choose a time of the day when people are outside. Mornings, lunch hour, and early evenings are often the best time during weekdays.

Catch people in line or at an exit. Shopping centers, theatres, and bus stops can be a great place to talk to people as they wait.

Ask for advice. Your friends, coworkers, neighbors and fellow volunteers know their neighborhoods best and may have good advice on where to look for signatures.

Have a backup plan. Even the smoothest events have their surprises. Have a backup plan in case something comes up. What will you do if the weather is bad, or if there is low foot traffic?

Will you be recruiting a team of volunteers to help you, or will you be doing your signature drive alone?

You can be effective whether you're doing signature drives alone or with a team of volunteers.

If you are working on your own for a signature drive, you'll be recruiting potential supporters to join your mission as you gather support signatures. Be sure to follow up with events, meetings, or places for supporters to go if they sign on to get involved.

On this last point: One of the most important principles of organizing is to always have a future event for a supporter to sign up for and attend. As you are going out for your signature drive, make sure you think of opportunities for a potential supporter to get involved. This can be as simple as signing up for an email list or attending a meeting around your issue. You never want to miss a chance to activate a volunteer!

If you'll have a team of volunteers going out for a signature drive, you should always make sure to have a mini-training beforehand. This is especially true if you have first-time volunteers attending with you. Grab some snacks and spend 20 minutes getting fueled up, energized, and aligned on exactly what goals you are trying to accomplish in the signature drive. Additionally, you'll want to do some role-play of simulated conversations to get volunteers comfortable with speaking with others about your issue.

If you'll have a team of volunteers and you will be hosting a signature drive, consider these questions:

How will you recruit volunteers? You can recruit volunteers using your friends, family, email, and social networks. Be sure to let them know the specific date, time, and location of your signature drive.

Who will be the point of contact for all volunteers? In most cases, this will be you.

Do you have all the materials you'll need? Do you have pens, clipboards, water, snacks, literature, one-pagers?

Where will volunteers be stationed during your signature drive? Depending on how many volunteers you have and your location, you'll want to make sure you're well spread-out at all of your location's high-traffic spots so that you're maximizing the number of people you'll talk to.

How will you host your pre-drive training? Generally, you'll only want to spend 20 minutes or so outlining the goals of the signature drive and role playing conversations.

What is your plan for collecting and managing the data you collect? You'll want a central place where all the forms are returned and a plan for how you'll use them.

In this section, we discussed what you should think about to prepare for your signature drive. If you've answered all of the questions and are ready to go, let's go over some tactics to make your signature drive more successful during the event!

II. DURING YOUR SIGNATURE DRIVE

Now that your signature drive logistics are set, let's discuss best practices for carrying it out.

If you have a team of volunteers joining you, you'll want to make sure you arrive early with all of your materials and are prepared to train them on what they will be doing. There are some helpful tips below that you can share with volunteers.

If you're getting out there by yourself, you may still need to arrive early, especially if you need to check in with a business you previously called. It is also helpful to get a lay of the land so that you can get an understanding of where your time will be best used.

Remember, once the signature drive begins, you're out there to get support from as many people as possible, so you'll want to make sure that all of the required fields on your form are being filled out.

These time-tested tactics have proven to be best practices for a successful signature drive:

Be approachable, but don't wait to be approached. Having a friendly demeanor goes a long way when it comes to gathering signatures. Even if it doesn't come naturally to you, smile and speak with confidence—it will make the difference between a successful outing and a disappointing one.

Make a clear ask. Research shows that people are more likely to respond when you phrase the question as “Have you signed on in support of ____?” rather than open-ended questions like “Do you support ____?”

Be sure to smile and make eye contact (don't wear sunglasses if you can avoid it), and be as engaging and friendly as you can.

There may be times, however, when the foot traffic is lower than you anticipated or you're not getting the response you hoped for. In this situation:

Keep a mental note of what is working/not working when asking people to sign on.

Every community is unique, and all organizing is learned through experience. Don't get too discouraged—instead, think of ways you can tailor your approach.

Make signature swings. Hit everyone in one location and then move on to the next. When foot traffic dies off, move on to a new spot.

Make multiple events each day. Even just a few signatures here and there add up over the course of the day.

Lastly, remember to take photos of your signature drive so that you can share it with others. Take pictures, tweet, and update your personal Facebook with fun anecdotes. If you're not sure what hashtag to use, you can always research if there are any hashtags trending by other organizations that are applicable to your issue and use that.

III. AFTER YOUR SIGNATURE DRIVE

Now that you're done, you can revel in the conversations you had and the support you built for your issue. But that shouldn't be the end of it—make sure you follow these steps to close out your event with the biggest impact:

Share news of your signature drive on Connect. Sharing your success and challenges is a good way to report back to a national movement of volunteers and share best practices. Give some background on the issue you're working on, where you're working, some photos from your event, your favorite anecdotes from the day, and what your next steps are. Don't forget to share photos! [Learn more about Connect.](#)

Be sure to thank anyone who helped. Thank anyone who helped with your event and be sure to confirm them for your next action.

Plan to follow up with your newly identified supporters. You got out there and have built support for your issue, so make sure you keep folks updated, invite them to any of your next events, and ask them to action around your issue.