



Creating an Activism Campaign

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AIM OF ACTIVITY

In this activity, students work in groups over several weeks to design an activism campaign targeting an issue of their choice. This enables students to apply their theoretical learnings about different activism concepts and case studies and to experience for themselves some of the challenges encountered during activist work. This activity results in a campaign report that is part of the assessment.

I use this activity in an MA-level module on Activism for Social Change and Development, which brings together MA students from various social science and media related courses. Their campaign work is guided through five weekly 3-hour workshops during which I introduce students to various tools that they then apply to their campaign.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

1. Selecting Groups

Before the start of the group work, I ask students to write down their interests, campaign-related skills (organizing, project management, budgeting/fundraising, web/graphic design, communications, languages etc) and their personal, professional and academic backgrounds, which I use to put together the campaign groups. This ensures the equal distribution of knowledge and skills across all groups.

2. Brainstorming Campaign Topics

Campaign work begins with a design workshop during which groups get to know each other better and iterate ideas for the target of their campaigns, using techniques such as brainstorming, random association, mind mapping and collective idea generation (where each student writes their idea for the campaign on the top of the sheet of paper and then passes it to their neighbour, who must add to the idea in constructive ways and then pass on the sheet to the next person, until it comes back to the original writer with several positive comments).

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

3. Weekly Workshops

Campaign work happens through hands-on workshops that introduce students to various campaign tools:

- problem/solution tree to define their issue
- SMART goals
- stakeholder analysis and power mapping
- communication strategies
- budgeting and fundraising
- monitoring and evaluation

I explain to students that these are mainstream tools and that after experimenting with them in the full awareness of their origins and limitations, they can decide how useful they are, or not.

Each workshop starts with a 15 min introduction of the tool and then groups work for several hours applying the tool to their campaign, while I check in with each group individually. After the workshop, each group has to send me a short summary of their work, which feeds into the final campaign report.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

4. Campaign Report and Reflections

Groups write a campaign report as part of their assessment and receive a group mark for their collective effort. This is not a hypothetical exercise, as groups have to research their topic extensively, draw up realistic budgets and timelines and identify existing possible collaborators and funding sources. The extent to which the campaigns, which are not actually implemented, are properly contextualised and grounded is one of the assessment criteria.

Students also have to write an individual personal reflection for assessment, in which they must critically evaluate the pedagogical, methodological and interpersonal aspects of their campaign work experience. The latter includes a peer-evaluation component, where each group member grades their own and other group members' work. This allows me to adjust individual marks to take non-contributions to campaign work into account.

5. Presentation

During the final class of term, groups share their campaigns with each other and receive feedback from their peers. During non-COVID times, we often celebrate their achievements by sharing food.

Reading suggestions: for readings related to activism, download the module handbook from the website

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

4. Discussion

In order to draw out the activity's lessons, sufficient time needs to be allocated for students to discuss what they have learned from the role-play. This includes learning about transport issues, rickshaw drivers' livelihoods and development dynamics in Dhaka, but also students' own experiences with the role play. These can include possible (dis)comfort with embodying particular personas or assuming certain positions that might go against their own beliefs, discussing students' own ideas about particular subject positions and how they might have been disrupted by the role play. Sometimes, strong identifications with particular roles can lead to alienating experiences and it is important for students to be able to voice their insights and concerns.